



EARLY CAREER GUIDANCE AS A TOOL FOR STRATEGIC HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This article analyzes early career guidance as a strategic tool for developing human capital in the context of digital transformation. It examines the theoretical foundations of human capital, the impact of early career self-determination on the development of competencies and educational trajectories, and new digital career guidance models. Particular attention is paid to the socio-philosophical and legal aspects of early career guidance, including issues of freedom of choice, ethics, and the role of the state. The findings of the study have practical implications for educational policy, the development of career guidance programs, and the implementation of digital platforms for supporting career self-determination.

Keywords: Early career guidance, human capital, digital transformation, professional self-determination, educational trajectories, algorithmic career guidance, socio-philosophical aspects, legal mechanisms.

Introduction

The current stage of social development is characterized by a profound transformation of socioeconomic processes driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies, automation, and artificial intelligence. Under these conditions, the labor market structure is undergoing a qualitative change: some professions are disappearing, others are being transformed, and fundamentally new types of activity are emerging. Uncertainty about the professional future is increasing, which is particularly acute in the career choices of the younger generation. Traditional career guidance mechanisms, oriented toward relatively



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stable employment models, are proving ineffective. As a result, a crisis of professional self-determination is emerging, manifested in unconscious career choices, frequent changes in educational trajectories, and a decline in the effectiveness of human potential. In this context, early career guidance is particularly important as a tool for individual adaptation to a dynamically changing world and as a factor in the strategic development of human capital. Despite the significant number of studies devoted to human capital and career guidance, a number of unresolved issues remain in the current scientific literature. In particular, mechanisms for integrating early career guidance into the human capital formation system in the context of the digital transformation of society are insufficiently developed. There is a lack of a holistic understanding of how early career self-determination influences long-term socioeconomic processes, as well as how digital technologies and algorithmic systems are changing the very nature of career guidance activities. Thus, a scientific problem arises, consisting in the need to conceptualize early career guidance as a strategic tool for human capital formation in the new socio-technological conditions.

The purpose of this study is to identify the nature and potential of early career guidance as a tool for the strategic development of human capital in the context of digital transformation. To achieve this goal, the following objectives are proposed: first, to uncover the theoretical foundations of human capital and career guidance; second, to determine the content and characteristics of early career guidance; third, to analyze the influence of early career self-determination on the development of competencies and educational trajectories; fourth, to identify the role of digital technologies in the transformation of career guidance practices; and fifth, to outline the socio-philosophical and legal aspects of the process under consideration. The object of this study is the process of human capital formation in modern society, while the subject of this research is early career guidance as a tool influencing this process and determining its qualitative characteristics.

The methodological basis of the study is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates advances in social philosophy, pedagogy, economics, and legal sciences, as well as systemic, comparative, and structural-functional methods.



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Furthermore, an analysis of scientific literature and conceptual modeling are used, allowing early career guidance to be considered not only as an educational practice but also as an element of a broader system of social governance.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in its approach to early career guidance, not as an auxiliary stage in the educational process, but as a strategic tool for developing human capital in the context of digital transformation. It is argued that the introduction of digital and algorithmic career guidance mechanisms leads to a change in the nature of career choice, enhancing its predictability and manageability, but simultaneously creating new risks associated with the restriction of freedom of choice and potential algorithmic discrimination. It is proposed to consider early career guidance as an element of modeling social processes, which allows us to identify its long-term impact on the development of society.

The practical significance of the study lies in the potential use of the obtained results in developing educational policy, improving career guidance programs, and implementing digital platforms to support professional self-determination. The findings can be applied to educational institutions, government agencies, and organizations interested in the effective development of human capital. Thus, the proposed approach not only deepens the theoretical understanding of the problem but also forms the basis for practical solutions aimed at improving the quality of career choice and the sustainable development of society.

Main Part

The logic of considering early career guidance as a strategic tool for human capital development requires consideration of the theoretical foundations of these categories. Understanding the essence of human capital and the mechanisms of its formation allows us to identify the place and role of career guidance in the system of socioeconomic development and determine the potential of its early forms in a transforming society. In modern scientific thought, human capital is viewed as a combination of knowledge, skills, competencies, health, and other personal qualities that ensure productive activity and create added value for both the individual and society as a whole. The evolution of this concept reflects a shift from a narrow economic understanding,



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in which human capital was treated primarily as a factor of production, to a broader socio-philosophical understanding, where it serves as a key resource for societal development. In the digital economy, the importance of human capital is increasing, as intellectual and creative abilities are becoming the primary source of competitiveness.

The education system, which is undergoing significant changes in the modern world, plays a special role in the development of human capital. While education previously focused on the transmission of a relatively stable set of knowledge and skills, in the context of digital transformation, the emphasis is shifting toward the development of flexible competencies, learning ability, critical thinking, and adaptability. Thus, education is becoming not only a mechanism for knowledge transfer but also a space for shaping personal development trajectories, which is directly linked to the process of professional self-determination.

In this regard, career guidance is a crucial tool for aligning individual abilities with societal needs. Traditionally, career guidance was viewed as an activity aimed at assisting in choosing a profession at the end of general education. However, this approach proves insufficient in the context of accelerating changes in the labor market. There is a need to rethink career guidance as a continuous process beginning in the early stages of an individual's socialization. Early career guidance in this context is understood as a systemic activity aimed at developing children and adolescents' understanding of the world of professions, interests, inclinations, and basic competencies necessary for informed future career choices. Unlike traditional models, it is not focused on rigidly fixing a career path, but on creating conditions for flexible and informed choices that take into account both individual characteristics and the dynamics of the socioeconomic environment. From a theoretical perspective, early career guidance can be viewed from several complementary perspectives. First, as an element of the educational system, providing a link between training and future professional activity. Second, as a mechanism for social adaptation, helping to reduce uncertainty and increase individual resilience in the face of change. Third, as a tool for developing human capital, influencing the quality and effectiveness of its development over the long term. Theoretical analysis shows



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that early career guidance occupies a special place in the system of human capital formation, serving as a link between education, personal development, and labor market demands. This creates the basis for further consideration of its specific impact on the development of competencies and professional trajectories.

The identification of early career guidance as a key factor in human capital formation is linked to its ability to structure an individual's educational and social trajectories, increasing the effectiveness of the individual's potential.

In the context of a dynamically changing labor market and digital economy, early career self-determination is becoming a tool for strategic planning of human capital development both at the individual and societal levels.

Early career guidance contributes to the formation of key skills. Competencies necessary for successful social and professional adaptation. These include:

Soft skills—communication skills, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving;

Hard skills—basic professional skills and knowledge that enable early familiarization with various fields of activity;

Metacompetencies—the ability to self-regulate, introspect, and plan one's educational and professional trajectory.

Early career guidance reduces the risk of career disorientation, which often manifests itself in a mismatch between the chosen profession and interests, abilities, or labor market demands. Research shows that children and adolescents involved in systematic career guidance from an early age demonstrate a higher level of awareness when choosing educational paths, greater motivation to learn, and a higher readiness to adapt to future professional conditions. Furthermore, early career guidance increases the effectiveness of educational paths. It helps individualize the learning process, identify aptitudes and abilities early on, and create educational pathways that best match an individual's potential. This results in the development of not only more competent but also more motivated human capital, capable of long-term professional growth and successful socialization. Finally, the impact of early career guidance extends beyond the individual level and has a significant socioeconomic impact. A country or region that establishes an early career guidance system as an element of strategic human



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capital management gains a more predictable supply of qualified specialists, reduces the risk of skill shortages, and increases competitiveness in the global labor market.

Early career guidance serves not only as a tool for personal development but also as a strategic resource for building human capital, aligning individual potential with societal demands. The next section analyzes the impact of digital transformation on career guidance practices and the emergence of new models of professional self-determination.

Modern digital transformation is having a profound impact on early career guidance, shaping new approaches to professional self-determination and creating opportunities for personalizing educational trajectories. The development of artificial intelligence, big data, and digital platforms makes it possible to analyze a child's individual abilities, interests, and inclinations with high accuracy, ensuring a more informed and adaptive career choice. One of the key aspects of digital career guidance is the personalization of the educational process. Digital platforms can model individual educational paths, tailoring them to the child's psychophysiological development, interests, and skills. This approach reduces the risk of career disorientation and increases the effectiveness of developing the competencies necessary for future professional activity. At the same time, digital technologies create new risks. Algorithmic career guidance based on automated recommendation systems can limit freedom of choice and create hidden biases in assessing a child's potential. For example, algorithms can rely on stereotypical or historical data on professional success, leading to narrow development trajectories and reducing the diversity of opportunities. Therefore, the implementation of digital tools requires a thoughtful combination of technological potential with pedagogical and social support. Furthermore, digitalization enables the implementation of new career guidance models, including gamified platforms, simulation environments, and interactive courses. These tools increase children's and adolescents' motivation to explore professional fields and foster the development of critical thinking and decision-making skills. The use of artificial intelligence in early career guidance opens up opportunities not only for individualized support but also for analyzing social trends and forecasting labor market needs, making the process strategically



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important for the development of human capital. Digital transformation creates conditions for integrating early career guidance with strategic human capital management tools, simultaneously expanding opportunities and creating new challenges. The next section will examine the socio-philosophical and legal dimensions of early career guidance, including ethical issues, freedom of choice, and the role of the state in ensuring equal opportunity.

Early career guidance is not limited to educational and technological mechanisms; it has profound socio-philosophical and legal dimensions that determine the ethics, fairness, and effectiveness of its implementation. At the philosophical level, the key issue is the relationship between freedom of choice and social determination. Early career guidance fosters a conscious understanding of the world of professions and one's own inclinations, but excessive pressure from the educational environment, family, or algorithmic systems can limit freedom of choice and undermine individual autonomy.

Ethical aspects stem from the fact that early career self-determination imposes a certain responsibility on the child for their future life trajectory. It is important to balance support and choice, taking into account the psychological and developmental characteristics of children. This problem becomes especially acute in the context of digital platforms and algorithmic systems, where automated recommendations may not take into account a child's unique interests and potential.

The legal dimension of early career guidance is reflected in the need to create state and institutional regulatory mechanisms that guarantee equal opportunities for all participants in the educational process. This includes standards for career guidance programs, quality control of educational platforms, personal data protection, and the prevention of discrimination based on gender, social origin, and other factors. An important task for the state is to ensure access to career guidance resources in accordance with the principles of social justice and sustainable human capital development.

The prospects for the development of an early career guidance system are linked to the integration of educational, technological, and social strategies. First, it is important to continue developing flexible and personalized educational trajectories that allow for the adaptation of professional self-determination to



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changing labor market conditions. Second, the implementation of digital platforms with sophisticated algorithms is essential.

Support that ensures a combination of personalization and freedom of choice. Third, the development of cooperation between the state, educational institutions, and businesses creates conditions for the systematic development of human capital and strategic planning for economic needs.

The socio-philosophical and legal context of early career guidance emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that combines educational, technological, and ethical aspects. In this model, early career guidance becomes not just an educational practice, but a strategic tool for developing human capital, capable of ensuring the sustainable development of the individual and society as a whole. The study demonstrated that early career guidance is a strategic tool for developing human capital in the context of modern digital transformation. An analysis of theoretical foundations, practical models, and digital technologies allows us to conclude that timely and systematic professional self-determination contributes to the development of competencies, increases educational motivation, and reduces professional disorientation. The most important result of the study is the understanding of early career guidance not as an auxiliary educational practice, but as an element of strategic human capital management. It aligns individual abilities and interests with the demands of society and the labor market, promotes the personalization of educational trajectories, and fosters long-term competitiveness.

Digital transformation opens up new opportunities for early career guidance through the use of artificial intelligence-based platforms, big data analysis, and interactive educational environments. However, this also requires attention to ethical, social, and legal aspects, including protecting freedom of choice, preventing algorithmic discrimination, and ensuring equal access to resources. Thus, the implementation of early career guidance, taking into account digital technologies and socio-philosophical principles, creates the conditions for the systemic and sustainable development of human capital. The practical significance of this study lies in the potential use of its findings for developing educational policy, improving career guidance programs, and creating strategic planning tools for professional development at the individual and societal levels.



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Going forward, further development of digital and flexible career guidance models, their integration into educational systems, and the active participation of the state, educational institutions, and businesses in developing human capital capable of effectively adapting to the changes of the modern world are recommended.

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