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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CAREER ASSESSMENT METHODS IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Increased attention to career diagnostics issues in social work practice is caused by labour market changes that include the popularization of non-standard labour forms, growing professional mobility of workers, and an increasing number of clients who require assistance with professional self-determination and individualised career counselling. The article presents a comparison of modern career diagnostics approaches implemented in social work practice and particularizations of their application depending on a social worker's professional activities and category of clients served. The research employed comparison, systematisation, and generalisation of modern approaches to career diagnostics and allowed compare their strengths and weaknesses, application scope and highlighted difficulties social workers experience when implementing these approaches. Career diagnostics approaches vary greatly in their diagnostic potential and scope. Some are more useful when working with specific groups of clients: young people, unemployed persons, veterans, and persons relocated from conflict regions. However, one approach on its own is not enough to build an effective career counselling program. Employment interviews, skills testing, analysis of professional biography, and assessment of cross occupational skills should be used in various combinations to get as complete a picture of a client's professional capabilities as possible. Each of these methods has its challenges as well. Standardised tests are not always adapted to different categories of clients. Approaches were not initially designed with some of these populations in mind so they require individualised interpretation and extra attention while administering. The fast changing labour market also requires constant updates of the instruments themselves. No method is intrinsically better than the others. The key is to choose one that matches the client's needs, which is why flexibility and multi-method work is key.

Key words: vocational guidance, career counselling, professional competencies, psychometric assessment, vocational orientation, career potential.

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КОМПАРАТИВНИЙ АНАЛІЗ МЕТОДІВ КАР'ЄРНОЇ ДІАГНОСТИКИ В ПРАКТИЦІ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ РОБОТИ

Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням ролі кар'єрної діагностики в практиці соціальної роботи, що пов'язано з трансформацією ринку праці, поширенням нестандартних форм зайнятості, зростанням професійної мобільності населення, а також збільшенням кількості клієнтів, яким потрібна професійна переорієнтація та індивідуалізований кар'єрний супровід. Метою статті є компаратив-

ний аналіз сучасних методів кар'єрної діагностики, що застосовуються в практиці соціальної роботи, та обґрунтування особливостей їх використання залежно від професійних завдань соціального працівника і категорії клієнтів. У дослідженні застосовано порівняльний аналіз, систематизацію та узагальнення. Це дало змогу зіставити сучасні методи кар'єрної діагностики між собою, з'ясувати особливості їх застосування та виявити проблеми, з якими стикаються фахівці під час їх використання в практиці соціальної роботи. Розглянуто сучасні методи кар'єрної діагностики, їхні діагностичні можливості та сфери практичного застосування, а також особливості добору діагностичного інструментарію під час роботи з молоддю, безробітними, ветеранами, внутрішньо переміщеними особами, особами з інвалідністю, людьми старшого віку й іншими особами. Найбільш обґрунтованим у практиці кар'єрного консультування є не використання окремого діагностичного методу, а комплексне поєднання психометричних методик, компетентнісного інтерв'ю, аналізу професійної біографії та оцінювання трансферних компетентностей. Водночас застосування кар'єрної діагностики супроводжується низкою методичних і практичних труднощів, а саме: обмеженою універсальністю стандартизованих методик, складністю комплексної інтерпретації результатів і необхідністю постійно адаптувати інструментарій до змін на ринку праці. Таким чином, ефективність кар'єрної діагностики в соціальній роботі визначається не застосуванням окремих емпіричних методів, а обґрунтованістю їх добору відповідно до конкретної професійної ситуації клієнта. Перспективи подальших досліджень пов'язані з розробленням моделей комплексної інтерпретації результатів кар'єрної діагностики, адаптацією міжнародних практик до української системи соціальної роботи й оцінюванням ефективності цифрових інструментів кар'єрного консультування для різних категорій клієнтів.

Ключові слова: професійне консультування, кар'єрне консультування, професійні компетентності, психометричне оцінювання, професійна орієнтація, кар'єрний потенціал.

Formulation of the problem. Career diagnostics is gaining increasing importance in social work, since professional self-determination now unfolds under conditions of an unstable labor market, the social vulnerability of certain population groups, and growing demands for human adaptability. Under these circumstances, the choice of diagnostic tools is no longer a purely methodological matter – it directly affects the quality of career potential assessment, the accuracy with which a client's individual needs are identified, and the validity of any subsequent social intervention. Comparing different approaches to career diagnostics in terms of their capabilities, scope of application, limitations, and their fit with the current demands of social practice makes it possible to determine more precisely which methods are best suited to working with particular categories of the population. It is precisely this kind of comparative analysis of existing methods that provides a solid basis for improving career counseling, strengthening social support, and arriving at professionally sound decisions.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Career diagnostics is traditionally associated with career guidance, professional counselling, and personnel management. Career diagnostics is a process of evaluating a person's interests, abilities, strengths, values, motivation, personality traits, and professional potential to help them make informed career choices, plan their career path, and develop professionally [10]. Social work, however, despite dealing with an exceptionally broad range of clients and social situations, has made comparatively limited use of career diagnostics tools. Social workers work with clients whose needs, requests, and social circumstances vary considerably, which requires a correspondingly diverse set of diagnostic instruments to be applied effectively.

A review of recent research reveals a gradual broadening of approaches to career diagnostics, which is increasingly treated not merely as a tool of professional selection but as an integral part of social work, psychological support, and career counseling more broadly. O. Popadynets [9], examining gender-oriented social work, makes the case for gender-sensitive diagnostic approaches when working with women returning to the labor market after a prolonged career break. K. Volkova and O. Beloliptseva [14], by contrast, explore the prospects of applying artificial intelligence technologies to individualize career diagnostics and career guidance support, illustrating the broader digitalization trend now reshaping social work practice.

The development of these problems is also linked to research on diagnostic tools as such. I. Tsurkan and T. Serha [11], systematize contemporary methods of psychological research into students' career orientations, comparing them in terms of their practical applicability. O. Protas and V. Stynska [10] argue for the appropriateness of an integrated approach to assessing these career orientations by combining testing, self-assessment, and expert evaluation. O. Morin [5], treats the results of career diagnostics as the foundation for building career guidance technology aimed at shaping students' career orientation throughout the process of professional education.

Researchers from other countries are working on creating new ideas and improving methods for career counseling. For example, R. Lent and S. Brown [3] came up with a model that combines two ways of making career choices: one that's based on feelings and another that's based on analysis. J. Maree [4], for his part, argues for the feasibility of integrating psychometric and narrative methods within career counseling, while S. Wong [15] provides an overview of current approaches to defining and assessing professional competencies as a key component of career diagnostics.

At the same time, existing research rarely compares different career diagnostics methods with one another, examines their limitations for different client groups, or considers how such methods might be combined in a coherent way. Addressing this gap makes it possible to better understand where contemporary diagnostic approaches prove effective, and to refine the tools used in career counselling, particularly within social work practice. This, in turn, provides a firmer basis for deciding which methods to apply, and when, in order to support clients more effectively.

Setting objectives. This article sets out to compare modern methods of career diagnostics as they are used in social work practice, paying particular attention to how their application should be adjusted depending on the specific tasks a social worker faces.

Presentation of the main research material. Career diagnostics occupies a central place among the tools social workers use to support a person's professional development. At its core, it offers a systematic way of assessing individual resources, interests, abilities, motivation, and the broader set of factors that shape professional self-determination and career building. What sets it apart from ordinary psychological testing is that it does not stop at the individual – it draws together psychodiagnostic, social, and advisory procedures in a single picture, so that a client's personal characteristics are considered alongside their social environment, educational background, work history, and present-day circumstances. This is precisely why career diagnostics in social work carries a prognostic weight, not just an evaluative one: its results become the basis on which a professional development trajectory is chosen, social support measures are planned, and a client's competitiveness in the labor market is ultimately strengthened (Table 1).

Career diagnostics in social work should not be confused with a matching game where clients are matched to occupations. Rather, it serves an analytical purpose, regarding the relationships between personal resources, professional requirements, and social environment, with the personal one being the most numerous. The results of a diagnostic test are only one aspect of a multifaceted assessment, and test results seldom dictate what one ought to do because personal characteristics intertwine with situational variables too closely for an isolated indicator to override them. Therefore, a score is only a starting point for consultation since combined personal, professional, social, and market factors shape labor force outcomes more comprehensively than an individual assessment.

This is not only true for tests but professional assessments in general. Rather than being based solely on psychological assessments, the trends in career counseling now reflect the combination of test results with an evaluation of professional skills and competencies, which is recommended by various national professional bodies. For instance, the OECD highlights the importance of linking

Table 1

Main components of career diagnostics in social work practice

Component	Content	Practical significance
Diagnosing professional interests	Identifying the client's professional preferences and the fields of activity that match them	Supports an informed choice of profession or direction of professional reorientation
Assessing abilities and competencies	Determining how well-developed the client's professionally relevant abilities, knowledge, and skills	Helps pinpoint the client's strengths as well as areas where competencies still need to be developed
Analyzing career motivation	Exploring the client's motives for professional activity, along with their values and career orientations	Helps set realistic career goals and builds motivation for further professional development
Identifying social factors	Assessing how family, economic, educational, and other social conditions influence professional choice	Ensures that external factors are properly accounted for when planning a career path
Formulating recommendations	Bringing diagnostic results together to determine the direction of further counseling and social support	Supports well-grounded decisions on employment, training, or professional adaptation

Source: developed by the authors based on research [3; 4, p. 231; 5, p. 86; 11, p. 581; 15, p. 95].

career guidance interventions to labor market information to arrive at an understanding of what a person actually needs based on the intersection between their talents, interests, and skills and the realities of the labor market (OECD, 2021) [7]. One can see this approach reflected in the ONET OnLine database, where occupations are grouped according to required knowledge, skills, abilities, and associated technologies, as well as considering personal attributes and work values (National Center for ONET Development, 2026) [6]. This allows a career consultant to offer the client recommendations that consider both their needs and the practical aspects of the working environment.

The field of career diagnostics consists of several approaches, which vary drastically in the scope of their application, level of detail, and degree of consolidation. Given the diversity of the needs and priorities of clients, it is important to determine what assessments are relevant for a given case and whether multiple tools can be combined for a more comprehensive evaluation. These variations are displayed in Table 2 below.

The main differences between contemporary approaches to career diagnostics are manifested in the depth of professional potential assessment and the extent of subsequent interpretative use of results. Whereas standardized psychometric methodologies secure the reliability and comparability of outcome measures, competency-based interviews, professional experience analysis, and portfolio assessments enable a more personalized perspective by taking into account the respondent's professional biography, informal competencies, and unique career prospects.

The CareersNet network, created by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), is a union of independent career counseling professionals who developed a common strategy for data collection and analysis. As a result, the Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices was produced, which includes the benchmarking of 57 countries of the EU, EEA, EFTA, and candidate states in terms of specific indicators in 2026. The comparative analysis covers legal, organizational, digital, diagnostic, training-related, and quality assessment areas, thus providing an opportunity to identify similarities and differences between national systems (Cedefop, 2025) [1].

The career diagnostics system of Germany is one of the most comprehensive as it is integrated into the local public employment service. According to the Sozialgesetzbuch III, the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) is mandated to provide vocational counseling services to all employment-related stakeholders, including young people, students, the unemployed, and businesses. The system uses standardized competence profiling, interviews, and ProfilPASS® for the assessment of professional skills, which were introduced in 2006. This tool was designed to recognize competencies outside the framework of formal education, including professional, volunteer, and family experience, which is particularly relevant to unemployed individuals, migrants, and people returning to work (Cedefop, 2025; Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung, 2026) [1; 2].

The closest analog in Ukraine is the electronic Platform for Career Guidance and Career Development, managed by the State Employment Service. It is used to organize psychodiagnostic testing, identify personal interests, skills, and entrepreneurial potential, and provide individual career counseling. The most similar solutions to the German ProfilPASS® include remote assessment with subsequent

Table 2

Comparative characteristics of modern career diagnostics methods in social work practice

Career diagnostics method	Main object of assessment	Advantages	Most appropriate area of application
Vocational interest inventories (RIASEC)	Professional interests and inclinations	Easy to administer, with highly standardized results	Vocational guidance for youth, initial career counseling
Psychometric ability tests	Cognitive and professionally relevant abilities	Offer an objective measure of a person's potential to master a given profession	Selection for training programs, professional selection, retraining
Career orientation inventories	Career values, motivation, and professional priorities	Help reveal the internal drivers behind a person's professional choices	Career counseling for adults, career development planning
Competency-based interviews	Behavioral manifestations of professional competencies	Allow for an in-depth analysis of a person's professional experience	Employment placement, assessing readiness for professional activity
Portfolio and professional experience analysis	Achievements, learning outcomes, and results of professional activity	Take into account actual performance results rather than test scores alone	Professional reorientation, qualification assessment, social support

Source: developed by the authors based on the studies of [10, p. 1192; 11, p. 581].

one-on-one consultation, which is also available in Ukraine. Thus, the system meets the requirements of the European Union to integrate diagnostic outcomes into the analysis of training and professional development needs [8].

The choice of a diagnostic procedure is made on an individual basis, considering the client's professional status, the length of unemployment, the presence of functional limitations, and the clarity of career goals. There are four groups of stakeholders who differ in their needs: young people, students, the unemployed, and individuals with low professional readiness. Therefore, the initial assessment is intended to clarify the client's understanding of their professional skills and the scope of their application (Table 3).

What role career diagnostics plays depends above all on the task at hand and on why the client has come for support in the first place. A school graduate needs help choosing a professional direction; someone who has just lost a job after decades of employment needs something else entirely – an assessment of whether their competencies still hold up, whether those competencies could transfer to a different field, and whether retraining is now unavoidable. The diagnostic toolkit shifts accordingly, and the same method can end up serving quite different functions depending on who sits across the table and why.

Veterans present a different case altogether. Under the Veteran Readiness and Employment program run by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, professional experience, functional status, and educational needs are all assessed together before any decision is made about what comes next. Depending on the outcome, a participant may be steered toward returning to their previous job, fast-tracked employment, vocational training, starting a business, or independent living. The diagnosis here

Table 3

Features of applying career diagnostics methods when working with different categories of clients

Client category	Diagnostic focus	Methodological configuration	Decisions based on assessment results
School and university students	The extent to which professional interests have taken shape, educational intentions, readiness to make a choice	Interest inventories, ability tests, biographical interview, analysis of academic achievements	Choosing an educational program, clarifying a professional direction, identifying the need for additional training
Young professionals	How well acquired competencies match the requirements of a first job	Competency-based interview, portfolio analysis, situational tasks, assessment of interpersonal skills	Adjusting the professional profile, selecting entry-level positions, planning the development of missing competencies
Unemployed persons and those with a long employment gap	Risk of prolonged unemployment, relevance of qualifications, motivation to return to the labor market	Profiling, structured interview, analysis of work history, assessment of digital and professional skills	Determining the intensity of support needed, referral to training, retraining, or employment
Internally displaced persons	Transferability of prior experience to a new regional labor market, loss of professional networks and documents	Analysis of transferable competencies, reconstruction of professional biography, motivational interview, assessment of entrepreneurial potential	Adapting qualifications to local demand, seeking related employment, engagement in training or business programs
Veterans and service members completing military service	Translating military experience into civilian professional terms, work capacity, professional identity after service	Functional-professional assessment, competency-based interview, analysis of military experience, career counseling	Return to previous employment, acquiring a new qualification, self-employment, or long-term professional rehabilitation
Persons with disabilities	The fit between professional capabilities and workplace requirements, need for accommodation	Functional assessment, analysis of work tasks, competency-based interview, assessment of reasonable accommodation needs	Selecting an accessible professional role, adapting working conditions, identifying the need for assistive tools or training
Persons aged 50+	Relevance of experience, digital skills, capacity for professional transition	Analysis of professional biography, competency profiling, assessment of digital literacy, individual interview	Updating qualifications, transitioning to a related field of activity, continuing employment in an adapted format

Source: developed by the authors based on the studies of [1; 2; 8; 9, p. 51; 12; 13; 14, p. 8].

is not deciding on a profession at all – it is deciding on the shape of rehabilitation and professional adaptation that follows (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2026) [13].

For internally displaced persons, the problem rarely comes down to a lack of professional knowledge. More often, it is that qualifications people already have can no longer be put to use. According to a 2024 UNHCR report, support programs operating in Ukraine combined career counseling with job fairs, vocational training, and business workshops for forcibly displaced people. Diagnostics in this setting serve one main purpose: identifying which competencies can transfer directly into the local labor market without requiring a person to retrain from scratch (UNHCR, 2024) [12].

Taken together, these practices point to a different function for career diagnostics depending on the client group involved. Among the unemployed, it works as a tool for predicting the risk of long-term unemployment and allocating employment service resources; for veterans, it serves as the basis for choosing a vocational rehabilitation route; for internally displaced persons, it becomes a means of identifying which competencies can still be put to use under new socio-economic conditions. What actually drives the composition of a diagnostic procedure, then, is not so much which social group a client belongs to as the kind of managerial or social decision that assessment is meant to inform.

How career diagnostic methods get used also depends heavily on how career counseling itself is organized and on the role state employment services play within it. Two things in particular shape practical models of career support and the selection of diagnostic tools for different client groups: how often the population turns to counseling services in the first place, and how widely digital services are used once they do. Comparative data on both are presented in the OECD's study Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work (OECD, 2021) (Fig. 1).

The data evidence significant inconsistencies in the utilization of services on the part of the adult population. Therefore, such countries differ significantly in terms of institutional provision of career guidance services. It is also evident that the sources of information are distributed differently. In particular, in Denmark, Portugal, Switzerland, and Estonia, the number of individuals using online resources exceeds or is comparable to the number of those who use career guidance services. At the same time, in France, Germany, Belgium, and the Czech Republic, individual counseling remains predominant, which allows exploring the professional competence structure in detail, evaluating professional biography, and identifying transferable competencies. Thus, it is possible to single out two broad profiles of career guidance services: technology-based and consultative. Consequently, each of them has its own set of strategies and tools for consulting, assessing educational and professional competence, and analyzing professional biography (OECD, 2021) [7].

It is hard to identify universal tools for social workers when working with different categories of clients. At the same time, individual assessment tools are essential for clients with non-linear career trajectories. A veteran, an internally displaced person, a worker returning to the job after a layoff, and a self-employed person who has been unemployed for a long time are examples of this type of clients. The professional experience of such people is either partially lost or lacks structure, and therefore, the initial assessment of their professional competence is complicated by inconsistencies. The standardized test results, which are currently widespread, are not

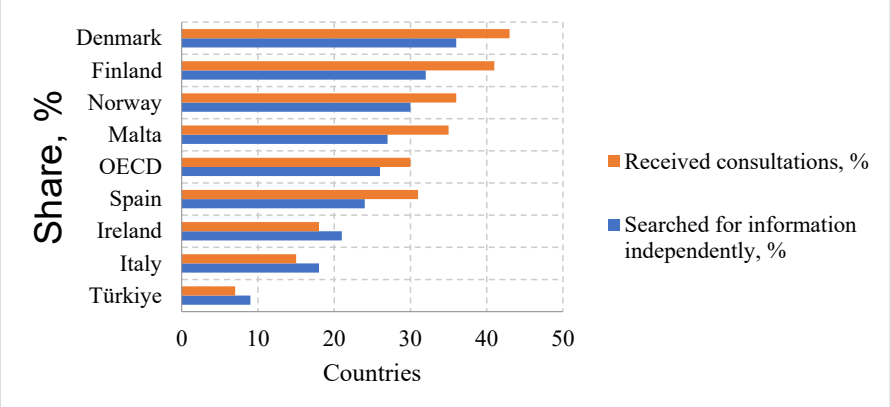


Fig. 1. Use of career guidance services and search for information about learning opportunities among the adult population of OECD countries, %

Source: develpoed by the authors based on (OECD, 2021) [7]

always decisive, requiring an additional interview to explore social and professional history, and therefore an extended set of assessment tools.

Overall, improving career diagnostics in social work requires a differentiated and systemic approach when working with different categories of clients. It is essential to consider the peculiarities of the client's work history and professional experience, the level of their qualifications, and the social barriers they may face. Particular attention should be paid to a non-linear career path, as well as to the current professional and social problems associated with it. It is necessary to combine various methods, including standardized testing, professional competence interview, and assessment of social history, and apply new tools. At the same time, this process cannot be exhaustive since the tools for assessing career competence must be adapted to changing working conditions. Finally, such diagnostics must necessarily be part of the social worker's professional development, and a qualified assessment of career competence requires developing social work practice in this area and establishing standardized procedures for obtaining individual assessments.

Conclusions. Career diagnostics is one of the essential strategies in social work, the effectiveness of which depends on the relevance of methods to the client's professional activities. The most promising and practically viable approach is represented by comprehensive assessment models that include psychometric tests, professional competence interviews, and analysis of the client's professional experience. The study has revealed that changing the category of clients who need career diagnostics services leads to changes in the set of applied methods and their interpretation since these categories differ significantly in their professional environment, competencies, and professional activities.

The most pressing issues identified in the research are the lack of informative methods for people with a non-linear career trajectory, the low consistency of results from different diagnostic methods, and the need for regular updates to the methodology due to the constant evolution of the job market. Further research should be focused on developing approaches to interpret the results of career diagnostics comprehensively and consistently, adapting foreign experience to local working conditions in Ukraine, and validating the effectiveness of digital career counseling methods for different categories of clients.

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