Planning future careers: Making informed choices

It is not uncommon to hear students, especially school-leavers, discussing their future in terms of occupations like lawyers, doctors, engineers or even ICT experts, and while there is certainly nothing wrong with that, it is interesting to note that many of them do not actually have a clear idea of what they should plan for in the long run.

At that age, many of them are reacting to what is being said by their peers and their relatives; they are identifying careers based on what they have heard from the mouths of others. Of course, opinions are incredibly subjective, and many of these youths would be opting for a programme and a career that they hardly know or understand the prospects of.

What is disheartening is that many students who follow this path do not end up where they planned in their earlier days. The path they chose seemed so simple and straightforward when other people were describing it, but when it comes to actual practice, the reality of the field, the industry demand and the potential for a healthy career are rarely considered until it is too late.

Before sending in their application forms to institutions of higher education, these youths should do their research and talk to actual practitioners so that they understand not only the potential for their chosen fields immediately after graduating, but also the future potential for enhancing their careers with further education.

We rarely hear students wanting to pursue a bachelor’s degree in mathematics, physics, chemistry, philosophy or the like. These are considered dark horse subjects, but they can provide you with interesting career prospects if you know how to use it. For example, someone with a degree in mathematics can utilise it fully if they pair it with a postgraduate education in actuarial science, economics or statistics. These combinations are effective because in pursuing advanced studies, you apply what you have learned in your bachelor’s to form a new way of looking at a different subject, a more complex perspective so to speak. And the fact is that employers do appreciate this variety in educational training, as it gives them a value for money employee who has that something extra.

A friend of mine once had a bachelor’s degree in archaeology, but was employed by a multinational corporation as a marketing executive and later became a country manager in a multinational corporation as a marketing executive and later became a country manager in marketing. He was employed because of his analytical skills and competence, which is valuable in the area of marketing research. This is not unusual, as diversity gives oneself a different perspective in handling issues.

Yet, the benefits of a multidisciplinary education are rarely addressed in many institutions. In the health industry, public and private hospitals need effective administration. What would constitute an effective administrator? It should be someone who has a medical degree as well as business knowledge. But how many non-specialist doctors that would want to pursue a postgraduate business degree in business, for example an MBA in Health Management? So you often have hospital administrators with no medical background, and this is the basis for a lot of difficulties for health providers in managing their institutions.

These days, students should not have the mindset that there is only one way to achieve what they want in their careers. Instead they should carry out research whether through the Internet or other reliable sources, and find out more when plotting out their life plan. The younger generation must be careful about what they want to pursue versus what society wants for and from them; and they have to strike a balance between the competencies they are able to deliver and the expectations of future employers. There is a saying that ‘variety is the spice of life’ and this may be the choice that can make your career a lot more interesting.

Professor Datuk Dr Zabid can be reached for any feedback
pv@unirazak.edu.my