



Preface: This is an extract of a career guideline being prepared for the HKE department. The first part reflects general career considerations, the second section is focused on HKE specific issues.

General career considerations

Taking the risk or going the safe way?

Education is a capital and thus, career decisions do have similarities to investment decisions: The perspective of top interest rates requires someone to take a risk, and, the other way around, the safe way does not promise too much yield. One can't have both at the same time.

If you opt for an established field with safe career perspectives you will rather go with the mass, and, if you outperform the competition to get in, you may hope for an average remuneration. However, it is unlikely to rocket to sky, as you have many competitors who will try to do the job quicker, better and cheaper.

If you want to make money, you have to leave the mass and find your own way. This is ultimately the gap where only few other experts are available and where your knowledge is needed. Obviously you take the risk that you may succeed with that strategy (and earning the big bucks) or you may not succeed and have wasted some effort. However, in most of those cases there is still the experience left, and this experience most helps for coming back and often succeeding at a later stage. Now, should one take the risk? This depends, alike all investments, very much on the individual values and preferences. Thus no general advice can be given. One could ask why not taking a bit of a risk while being young? Or: if not now, when then? Proper planning at least allows to take the chances and to keep the risk minimal by considering different options in terms of a plan B or even a plan C. This is, for example, one reason why the HKE degree is organised quite broad with different options based on the same education.

Hypes are coming and going

Many professions have their up and down with time. Often it develops a hype at a certain point of time and all are enthusiastic about the new thing before. This has been the case for computer sciences in the past and is actually the case for bio- and energy technologies as well as for economics in the local context. After a few years time things are getting normal and fascination turns to routine: The highly sought expert becomes a normal office or laboratory guy who is simply needed to get the job done. Sometimes even professions are getting outdated with time. This happens actually with bank tellers in first world countries where bank services are now provided via internet as the normal way and more than 80% of the past front desk services are closed down.



For your career planning you need to be aware about those up's and down's as you might face a complete turn around within ten of fifteen years, but your career will last much longer!

Basically, studying HKE is quite robust against such fluctuations as there are no revolutions on the one side but humans and their health and performance are important issues all the times, whatever may come. However, this is only valid if one keeps updated and flexible for change.

The leadership myth

Many students strive to become leaders and train leadership skills early. However, there is no leadership without solid expertise. Leaders who just know how to lead but fail to do the basic job are useless. Reason for this is that nobody will accept a leader who has not a profound idea of what his fellows or inferiors are concerned with. So leadership qualities are only valid in addition to a solid education.

Further, the soft skills that are often associated with leadership are, no doubt, important. However, such skills are rather considered as a basic requirement than as a distinction, not having them is a deficit.

Do not underestimate and do not overestimate the degree for the sake of the title

Twenty years ago a bachelor's degree opened all the doors for a fantastic professional future, and continuing for postgraduate degrees was considered rather for academic careers only. This has changed dramatically and will continue to change in future. As, with time, our world gets more and more complex the requirements of education increase steadily and thus more education is needed to face those challenges. For example, nowadays many companies in the local automotive sector do ask for any application a minimum grade 12 Matric, even for the simplest manual work that did not even require literacy in the past. For academic education Master's degrees or even a PhD's are getting more and more common requirements even for higher positions in any type of business. For this point, South Africa is catching up to developed countries that have by far higher percentages of postgraduates and PhD's in their population and in their workforce.

However, one should not overestimate an academic degree as well. It does not guarantee a superb career without any more effort. A degree is rather a kind of entry ticket: Without having it you can't enter (get the job), but once you are in it does count nothing else than your performance for the next thirty or forty years. Your performance again depends on your education that refers to your capabilities, your knowledge and your skills, but not so much on your degree. At the bottom line it is most important what can, and the degree is only the access ticket to the job.

Although academic degrees get more and more important this is not the only key for a successful career. If one is lucky and hard working one can make it without,



however this happens less and less likely. Further, persons in leading positions who do not have the according academic degree often get under indirect pressure from their colleagues (or even inferiors) who have such degrees. In order to avoid the psychological stress of being forced to justify an inferior degree all the time it makes very much sense to go for the degree (if one can) and have peace.

Find your niche to match the increasing competition on the job market

Although there will be an increased need for academics in the years to come, this does not promise fantastic opportunities for everybody (as it happened sometimes in the past). You will have to make your way to success. Reason for this upcoming competition is the still very low percentage of learners who are passing tertiary education. Due to the long lasting deficits of the local education system many bright learners are in fact still excluded from tertiary education. This will (and has to) change. In the next six years about the South African Universities will create opportunities for another 100.000 students. This equals to build about three universities of the size of Rhodes University every year! Catching up to developed countries the percentage of academics will increase to a multiple of today's number, flooding the job market with applicants. Although the number of job opportunities will grow with the countries' economy, the number of applicants for each post will increase.

In order to succeed for this development it becomes increasingly important to develop a particular competence profile that makes you as unique as possible against competitors. In case you prepare for an overseas activity you will face this type of competition already nowadays.

Do not generalise from outstanding examples

When arguing about an occupation often outstanding individuals are considered as role models. However, neither Noble price winners nor Olympic athletes represent the thousands of others in their domain.

Indeed, there are Biokineticists that may charge their clients many hundred Rand per hour, and there are Ergonomists who earn salaries of more than R30k per month just with an Honours degree and one or two years of experience. But there are as well Biokineticists who earn their bread as personal trainers in a gym, and there are Ergonomists who do marketing or brokering jobs.

For your career perspectives, always consider the both cases, the optimistic scenario and the other case. Of course one may hope and strive for the best, but there is no guarantee, and in very competitive fields even being the best does not always push you to the top. It needs a bit of luck too. Be prepared for the case that this does not happen and you may strive for a happy life as well.



Going for your passion or following the reasonable arguments?

Ideally one may find a job that corresponds to one's passions and that pays perfectly well. However, this is not very likely to happen, as everybody strives for this. Thus there is a huge competition for the passionate jobs whereas the rather uncomfortable jobs have to offer higher remuneration to become attractive. Those are simply the market rules.

Any decision between those options is very personal and thus no general recommendations can be given.

However, it seems worth to question what makes a job attractive (so that one may be prepared to abstain from some salary surplus). This is mostly an occupation that we are competent to perform, and that gives us freedom, responsibility and respect of others. At a first glance this is the case for such professions one feels confident with. However, this might be the case for many other professions as well. As we mostly judge unfamiliar things less attractive than familiar ones, experience shows that individuals tend to estimate well known jobs as more attractive than those one they do not experience. So, be aware that the passions you feel will likely enlarge with a broader experience. One can even over-exercise and losing interest with too much engagement.

International experience

Many students consider obtaining some work or study experience from other countries. Without discussing the general pros and cons of such an experience, there are some tactical aspects to consider if you wish to work outside the country.

First one has to check if the profession or academic program exists in the focused country. This is likely the case for professions in science and technology, but unfortunately the medical and health care systems are formally very incompatible between different countries. Although no significant differences exist for the patients to be treated, crossing the border is mostly difficult or impossible due to the different shapes of professions and the different education requirements. Please check carefully if this may be relevant for you.

Secondly, the targeted country will have to issue a work or study permit. Whereas study permits are mostly a financial issue (one must ensure to have enough funding to stay) work permits are getting more and more difficult to obtain if one does not fall under the category of scarce skills. Those are normally very high skilled persons and/or science and technology experts. As far as one can outlook to the future this tendency will continue at least for the next one or two decades. However, the professions that are sought after are not all similar in different countries. For example Australia and Canada are searching more craftsmen than academics, and economists are sought after in South Africa whereas most European countries face unemployment in this domain. In general, the success chances increase dramatically with the level of education and the degree of expertise.



What makes the HKE degree particular?

Seeing the HKE program one might consider it as a mixture of subjects around the human that may be applied for many different issues around human health and performance in different environments. From this point of view HKE is rather unspecific compared to other much straighter professions in the field.

The core of HKE is its holistic approach to study the interaction between humans and their environment as well as between the different subsystems of the human body with its physical, cognitive and emotional domains. This makes the HKE subject complex, what can be seen as difficult or as interesting depending on the viewpoint. Similarly, it one can consider it for its application side as vague or as versatile.

However, many problems of our days are complex in nature and cannot be solved by simple means. The HKE knowledge reflects this complexity and provides methods to solve actual and future problems. For this reason HKE experts work in many different areas with many different responsibilities.

From a career perspective this is initially a challenge because the professional focus it is not as easy to "grasp" as other well defined professions. However, it is very much sustainable, as many problems can be sorted out only with consideration of the complex human-environment interplay. For this reason many HKE experts work in management or design for work life, healthcare, sports and technology.

Questioning if this is the perspective one is looking for, HKE requires flexible and complex thinking all the time and very versatile organisation and communication skills in order to interact with many different persons. It promises a unique insight into many areas of life that only very few professions may provide and is, always challenging to grow, even after many years.

HKE might be the right choice for persons loving this challenge. Individuals who prefer a well structured job and do not get bored from the routine of doing similar things for many years might probably get happier with other types of occupation.

Success chances

The chances to succeed depend very much on the size and the growth of the job market. For the different foci of HKE graduates very different conditions exist:

- Sport Science is very fascinating for many students, however the professional job market is rather small and thus very competitive. There is no formal professional certification.
- Rehabilitation experts (e.g. Biokinetics) face a broader job market with many people sought after, but consider a higher competition due to the large number of graduates (~150 per year) dropped out by the different universities offering this degree. From an everyday perspective this is a



social type of job with continuous client interaction. Depending on personality people either hate or love to communicate every day with 10-20 clients in 30 or 45 minutes periods. Professional accreditation is required for most occupations. Accreditation in the medical domain is very specific to each country and thus the acceptance of this degree in foreign countries might be difficult or impossible.

- Ergonomics is still a rather small market in South Africa. Actually some dozens of ergonomists are practicing only. However, those are highly researched, as the market is growing. Compared to developed countries a country of the size of South Africa would have easily a job market of about 500 to 1000 ergonomists. A national professional for Ergonomics certification is pending.

This is obviously only a very simplified basic categorisation. Many other opportunities, probably the majority, does not straight match to one of those categories, but arises in related fields with a particular professional profile.

Once again, the huge advantage of the HKE degree is the option of addressing multiple job markets. So if the first priority is not successful there are options in other areas still accessible.

Edited by M Goebel, July 2009