A Career in IT? The Meanings of a Career at Business Process Outsourcing Centers in Poland from a Biographical Perspective

Szymon Pilch iD
University of Wrocław, Poland

Abstract: The paper reconstructs the ways of attributing meanings to IT specialists' careers at BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) centers in Poland. The findings rely on empirical data, collected through autobiographical narrative interviews. The technique of analysis applied in the study was inspired by grounded theory methodology and allowed for the identification of a basic social process at the analytical stage, namely, "career planning." On the one hand, the analysis also showed how IT specialists' careers are given meanings concerning career planning; there seem to be three main ways of understanding one's career in IT: (1) in terms of reaching economic and social stability, (2) as a transition period in a career as an IT specialist, (3) with regard to becoming an expert in IT. On the other hand, the second axis of analysis has been conceptualized, which is comprised of other subjective and objective elements that may shape career planning. These include the biographical experiences of work, the context of the Polish BPO industry, and career planning resources. Furthermore, a typology consisting of three ways of attributing meanings to IT specialists' careers at BPO centers has been put forward and analyzed.

Szymon Pilch is a sociologist and a Ph.D. student at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wrocław. He is currently the principal investigator of the NCN Preludium 20 grant, *IT Specialists in Outsourcing Centers for Business Services in Poland. Sociological Study of Experience of Work*. His research interests focus on the sociology of work, economic sociology, digital economy, critical management studies, and qualitative research.

email address: szymon.pilch2@uwr.edu.pl

Official reports published by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) indicate that the number of IT specialists in Poland is growing continually; for instance, during the nine-year period from 2011 to 2020, IT professionals numbered almost 250,000[1] in the Polish economy (Central Statistical Office of Poland 2011-2020). The rate of employment in the high-tech industry has more than doubled in Poland in the last near-decade. This article[2] offers new insights into these issues, and it aims to contribute to the research on highly-skilled IT workers by situating an analysis of meanings in a biographical perspective of IT specialists' careers at BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) centers in Poland within an organizational and labor market perspective. In other words, the purpose of the study is to discover career patterns and their characteristics (Prawda 1987) as inherent features within the course of a biography (Hughes 1997).

The paper begins with a literature review on the meanings of one's career and experiencing work at high-tech and multinational organizations. This is followed by an analysis of the relations among concepts of biography, career, and work; subsequently, the methodological aspect of research is introduced. The findings are then presented. These were derived based on 14 autobiographical narrative interviews with Polish and foreign IT specialists—women and men, aged between 22 and 40, conducted from August to November 2019, in Polish and multina-tional companies operating in Wroclaw, Katowice, and Opole. A typology of IT specialists' careers at BPO centers in Poland is presented and followed by a discussion and conclusions.

The Meanings Given to IT Specialists' Careers and Work Experiences at High-Tech Companies—Literature Review

Existing research on careers indicates several factors that may influence IT specialists' career trajectories, their work experiences at high-tech companies, and their interpretations of a career (Bohdziewicz 2008; Czarkowska 2010; Postuła 2010). The most significant findings include organization and management studies among Polish and American knowledge workers (i.e., programers, software developers, and software engineers) employed at high-tech centers in Poland and the US (Bohdziewicz 2008; Jemielniak 2008a; Rosiński 2012). The studies suggest that the aspects central to meaning attribution in IT specialists' careers include, for example, individual motivation toward work at high-tech organizations (Rosiński 2012). It does not generally take the form of material incentives (wages, social benefits, or various workplace amenities), though these are among the factors that may influence the interpretation of one's career or decisions made by IT specialists as to whether or not to change their employer (Rosiński 2012:206-207); however, these are not the only deciding factors. It should be emphasized that it is the formalization of relations between the actors at the workplace (manifested in the asymmetry of power between managers and employees) that is one of the issues that may influence the behavior of IT professionals, even though the managerial discourse refers to the flattening of structures, the withdrawal of bureaucratic procedures, and the promotion of egalitarianism in companies (Jemielniak 2008a). Moreover, another factor that may influence IT specialists' career trajectories

is the category of time in the work/non-work spheres (Bohdziewicz 2008), as well as the dictate of schedules rather than the actual output and efficiency of IT specialists. The latter (the dictate of schedules) of these is perceived as a potential area of control exerted by managers (Hyman, Scholarios, and Baldry 2005) (especially in a form of remote work). What is more, IT professionals are more likely to change their employer when they feel uncomfortable with breaches in the work-life boundary (Olson 1989). This is, however, related to the conflict of social roles (in spheres of work and non-work) of professionals, which manifests itself in this industry and stems from the fact of not being disconnected from working time (Felstead and Henseke 2017). Trust is yet another key factor that may influence IT specialists' careers, as the dictum "to trust and to be trusted" is an important rule in the workplace (about the employer and the client) and beyond (participation in social networks, being seen as an expert to colleagues and the public) (Jemielniak 2008a). Others have suggested that high-tech companies and their managers apply strategies that could be understood as normative engineering of behavior (or "engineering culture"), whereby employees experience their work and perceive their careers as part of a game—"playbor" (Kunda 2006). An alternative form of ideological control over employees and their careers in high-tech workplaces is creating an interplay between imposed and assumed identities, spanning a wide spectrum of images, such as an "artist" or engineer, especially in the case of highly-qualified IT professionals (Hunter, Jemielniak, and Postuła 2010). Even though the latter group may oppose labeling of their identities/images at work, they are more easily managed when work seemingly consists of standardized, easy-to-learn, repeatable, and predictable activities (Jemielniak 2008b).

In the literature, one of the most significant aspects of IT specialists' work experience, in terms of one's career and occupational situation, is that, in addition to standard work agreements, they also tend to choose non-standard ones, for example, fixed (business-to-business) contracts with employers, mediated by third parties (contract employment agencies) (Barley, Kunda, and Evans 2002). IT professionals are inclined to become freelancers, mainly due to economic factors (if the net income from a non-standard agreement is much higher than from standard employment). Given these facts, IT specialists may experience periods of alienation and anxiety in their careers (Barley and Kunda 2004) or intensification of work and a simultaneous drop in satisfaction of it (van der Lippe and Lippényi 2019); this often stems from changing employers/projects semi-annually to raise employability (measured by technical and interpersonal skills, and by participation in social networks), and to be more competitive in the labor market. Therefore, objective levels of employment security, income, and social stability are constantly in question (Ailon and Kunda 2006; Trusson and Woods 2016).

In addition to the above, there is research into the biographies and work experience of professionals employed at multinational corporations in Poland (Haratyk, Biały, and Gońda 2017). The findings suggest that while professionals have the socio-economic conditions to acquire, for example, biographical and occupational stability, it is not unconditional: they must consent to bridge the gap between the spheres of work and non-work in their lives (Gońda 2019). This choice is related to narratives about community, openness, and the promise of self-realization if one is taking responsibility for their self-development (Biały 2015).

Biography, Career, and Work—Sociological Theory

The concepts of work and career are interconnected. However, it is important to distinguish between the work itself and the work being done with other people. The former of these is understood in a broader sense, after Strauss and colleagues (1985:290), as an "enterprise" (social activity), even if the actors engaged in it do not recognize it as such. In addition to this, work also includes an interactional aspect. Work, at the interactional level, is that, "which most of us scarcely note because action there is so implicit" (Strauss et al. 1985:132). The basis for interaction is taken-for-granted understandings, assumptions, rules, or norms that affect one's behavior. These terms consider silent contracts referring to such situations as conversation (being polite, listening carefully, etc.) or other actions like not breaking one's privacy, et cetera (Strauss et al. 1985:133). The work, in a narrow sense, according to Kozek (2018:267 [trans. SP]), "apart from its purpose of providing livelihoods, ensures an actor's anchoring in the social environment, gives a sense of usefulness, gives a social status, and a sense of self-respect." Therefore, factors internal (intraorganizational) and external (structural) to the work should be considered in influencing the attitudes toward it (Konecki 1988), as well as in the context of meaning attribution to one's career. Considering work being done with people, it is important to emphasize that "the way people see themselves and their work situation is the result of an ongoing process, never fully determined by one or another set of structural constraints. It is always a process of 'becoming' in the sense of successively shaping and transforming the subjective definition of self and society" (Konecki 1988:226 [trans. SP]). During the situation of work,

its significance and actions are constantly being negotiated, changed, or sustained within a social context that encompasses the actors' resources and identities (Domecka and Mrozowicki 2008:138). Work, as Hughes (1997) contends, is interrelated to one's career throughout the course of one's biography, especially during periods of life when the actor is carrying out wage work. Moreover, the career can be characterized by its subjective and objective aspects. The latter of these (objective aspect) is understood as participation within institutions and/or organizations, which entails voluntary or involuntary actions such as promotion or degradation in rank, or vertical/horizontal shifts of a social position. In the former sense (subjective aspect), the career is conceptualized by an actor concerning their self, identity, and one's transformation (Becker and Carper 1956:289 as cited in Domecka and Mrozowicki 2008:138). The actor interacts with others and with oneself throughout one's career. In other words, one's work is understood as a dialogue with oneself during which the actor "carries on his active life regarding other people and interprets the meaning of the one life he has to live" (Hughes 1937:413). Beyond the personal context, one's career takes place in organizations, but also some people are freelancers, though the author is interested in fixed post positions. The structural and economic contexts may have an influence, in the sense that changes within the cultural sphere (values, norms) or the company structure (e.g., due to layoffs that result in changing tasks in the remaining occupations) may entail changes within one's career pattern, its configuration, or even the termination of a career at a given company (Strauss and Becker 1956). What is more, aside from the institutional context of one's career, many other aspects may influence its patterns. These may be derived from the domain of social networks (which

comprise a set of trusted contacts), from the sphere of education (such as the diplomas one has earned), from the labor market (e.g., accumulated work experience), from other areas of social life (during which skills and competences are accumulated), one's social position, social status, and acquired power (both at the organization and outside of it). Such characteristics could be understood as capitals (cf. Bourdieu 1986—in this paper, they are alternately used as a category of resources[3]), related to the social field constituted by different relations between actors who are engaged in competition (undertakings) to acquire certain stakes (rewards) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The value of capital is defined according to the social positions of the actors and the relations between them. In this paper, the author will refer to cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1986). The former is understood in three forms: an embodied state, which is "the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body," an objectified state that is in the form of cultural goods (books, instruments, machines, etc.), and an institutionalized state, in the form of educational qualifications,[4] which increasingly leads to full efficacy on the labor market and facilitate access to several positions (Bourdieu 1986:243). The last of

these should be understood as an "aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition" (Bourdieu 1986:248). Under some circumstances, which can be empirically studied, social and cultural capital can be (but is not necessarily) mutually convertible. Careers within organizations are conceptualized by Hall (1990), who presupposes an interconnection between activities within the organizational structure and subjective meanings of work, which, in turn, results in attributing meanings to work through the process of the actor's internal elaboration. Furthermore, such a definition of one's career implies that professionals, while related to other occupations at the organizational level and outside of companies, aim at achieving their personal, as well as organizational objectives. Characteristics of the career should be interpreted as subjective, on the one hand, and objective, on the other. The concept of a career on which the author wishes to elaborate is not merely a tool for obtaining social status and economic stability but also a form of self-realization, fulfilling different career-related objectives, and a mode of self-expression. Therefore, one's IT career and its likely patterns are not economically, structurally, or culturally determined, but they, perhaps, are influenced in these (economical, structural, and cultural) ways (Orpen 1994:27). Another feature of a career in an organization is that careers are becoming increasingly individualized and elasticized, not only within the organizational framework but also elsewhere (Hall 2004). This means that personal and/or organizational purposes for work are not necessarily harmonized within the framework of companies (Orpen 1994:28). The existing literature suggests that professionals take responsibility for the course of their careers more

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[3] The author presumes that resources precisely "denote potentially advantageous properties of social agents' positioning in social structures and capital, that is, properties which are actively used by the individuals involved in relations with other social agents" (Mrozowicki 2011:77).

[4] The author is aware of the Bourdieusian notion of "habitus" defined as embodied schemes of perception, thought, and action (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990:54), which are durable over time and ingrained within the actor during early childhood (and further) socialization to hold given positions in the social field, though this category will not be referred to directly. The author will instead stress the three forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986:243-247). It is assumed that, in this study, such an approach would be more pertinent as it does not concentrate directly on the aspect of social class—though it should be stated that the author does not consider this issue irrelevant.

frequently than before. They adapt to the 'new spirit of capitalism' to maintain their employability; therefore, organizations lose control over the development of their employees' careers (Waterman, Waterman, and Collard 1994; Whymark and Ellis 1999; Parry and Proctor-Thomson 2003; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Hypothetically, these points stem from the current global economy, whose conditions lead to a high turnover rate. Moreover, as some studies have indicated, professionals are increasingly likely to focus on personal growth and individual career development, compared to those in other occupations (Lee 2002).

The Methodological Aspect of the Research

The author decided to utilize autobiographical narrative interviews to "establish typical sequences of events in the lives of specific groups of people and the structure of meanings ascribed to the former" (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996:41 [trans. SP]). Such an epistemological approach refers to the methodological tradition of Schütze's (1983) employment of biographical interviews. The study endeavors to explore *how* interviewees reconstruct their subjective points of view on the configuration of collective and historical events that have shaped present social formations (Kaźmierska 2016:10). The reason behind using this type of interview also included making use of biographical process structures (Schütze 1983; 2008) as sensitizing concepts in the analysis of data, to understand the work and non-work experiences of IT specialists. However, the interviews are used for data collection and do not include the entire biographical method elaborated by Schütze. The interviews consisted of three parts (Schütze 1983; Kaźmierska 1997). In the first phase, all informants were asked an initial question: *I would like to ask you to tell me the history of your life, beginning from early childhood until this moment, everything that you remember.* At the end of the informant's narrative—coda (Konecki 2000)—in the second part, the author proceeded to explain and expand stages of the biographical narrative, which have faded out, are inconsistent, or have unexpectedly been cut from the main line of the narrative. In the third part of the interview, questions regarding the theoretical part of the research were asked, which revolved around themes such as the values and meanings behind work, the values in one's life, everyday life connected with work and non-work time, and the structural and cultural context of work experiences at the BPO centers in Poland.

The category of IT specialists is vast and ambivalent; for sake of the research, the author applied the ISCO-88 (1988) classification of occupations, which defines IT specialists as a major group of professionals that specialize in software engineering and programing. This category is also specified considering the Polish labor market. For this purpose, the Polish classification of professions and specializations issued by the Minister of Family, Labor, and Social Policy (Classification of Professions and Specializations in Polish Labor Market 2014:15, 22-23, 46-47) was used, in which IT specialists are recognized as programers, IT software architects/designers, IT software development specialists, IT application development specialists, or IT software analysis specialists. The interviews were conducted from August to November 2019 with female and male IT specialists, including citizens of Poland (7 men, 3 women), Ukraine (2 men), and Brazil (2 men). 14 interviews were conducted by the author in 3 Polish cities: Opole (4), Katowice (4), and Wroclaw (6), which differ, according to BPO industry experts (Pro Progressio 2016:7-8), in terms of their economic advancement in the BPO industry. Wroclaw is the

most developed; by contrast, the Katowice BPO industry is still in development, whereas Opole has the least developed BPO industry of the three. The sampling of informants was purposive and based on the following criteria: (1) length of work experience in the BPO industry, (2) citizenship, (3) legal form of employment, and (4) occupation. The author tried to select one Polish and one global BPO center in each of the cities, though it was not possible due to difficulties in reaching the informants. IT professionals were contacted via social media due to denied access by HR and management departments at the companies to use existing, formal channels of communication. The ages of the IT consultants interviewed ranged from 22 to 40. The length of work experience at the centers varied from 1 to 12 years. During the data analysis, the author made use of analytical procedures of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Charmaz 2006). Furthermore, a two-step coding procedure was employed: (1) open coding and (2) selective coding. ATLAS.ti software was used to code emerging properties from the interview transcripts. The analysis of data was also conducted in this program using functions such as the Co-Occurrence Table, the Code-Document Table, and the Query Tool. Further to the above, the author incorporated *memoing* (Glaser 1978:83) and *the constant comparative method* (Glaser and Strauss 1967:105). Evidence, ideas, and research from other scholars were also used to identify the theoretical categories and show how they are grounded in the data (Charmaz 2006:165). The author applied *theoretical sensitivity* during data analysis (Glaser 1978:2). Extant research was consulted on experiences—their influences, processes, and phenomena—from the business services industry in Poland and elsewhere, especially those focusing on the concepts of "career" and "biography." During the coding procedure, the author identified a core

concept, herein termed "career planning." Properties were grouped into three conditions of "career planning" that may seem to shape the interpretations of careers of IT specialists in the BPO industry in Poland: (1) *biographical experiences of work*, (2) *objective context of the Polish BPO industry*, and (3) *career planning resources*. These aspects outline the typology of career meanings attributed by IT specialists, presented in the matrix below. The first condition of "career planning"—along with its meanings and the biographical experiences of work—pertains to one's interpretations of the social, cultural, and economic circumstances that directed the actions of IT specialists up to the moment of the interview. In the first condition, the author emphasized how the participant had acquired and maintained their social and economic stability, self-realization in IT as a form of personal interest, acquiring a craft or occupational prestige, or a form of entrepreneurship. On the other hand, the author highlights the development of skills, competencies, and expertise in a given field of IT, as well as in management, team building, or sometimes even business analysis. Therefore, a career in IT is perceived as a pathway to other projects, careers in IT, or work in other occupations.

Taking into account the second condition of "career planning"—the objective context of the Polish BPO industry—the framework of macrostructural determinants is central, namely, the technological or institutional changes in the industry, or the differing wages in the IT labor market; on the mezzo level, belonging to professional or student organizations is of importance, as is completing a vocational course in IT, graduating from IT studies or another related area. Other factors that may shape the understanding of the careers of IT specialists include the type of employment, the type of career path development at the company and outside, one's work-life balance,

and the technologies that are utilized at the center. Concerning the third condition of "career planning," for example, career planning resources, these are exercised following the capitals obtained by a given narrator. These properties vary in every biographical narrative, but may be differentiated within the two above-mentioned cultural and social resources. Such resources are activated during important biographical events and experiences (a change of career, or while acquiring new skills or competencies, when resources may or may not be transformed). Properties relating to social capital (established social networks), cultural capital (gained skills and expertise), and economic capital (the amount of income) have been not-

ed in the data set. The author has reconstructed three ways in which IT specialists attribute meanings to their careers at BPO centers: (1) *acquiring economic and social stability*, (2) *a transition period in an IT career*, and (3) *being an expert in IT*. While the first type pertains to the focus on social and economic stability, the second and third relate to personal development in a career trajectory. Such ways of attributing meanings to careers do not assume that IT specialists consider their careers in one condition only. It can be understood as a disjointed typology, meaning that IT specialists can move from one type to another (as it is a social process), depending on age, social position, or accumulated resources.

Table 1. Typology of attributing meanings to IT specialists' careers at business services centers in Poland

Type	Biographical experiences of work	Objective contexts of the Polish BPO industry	Career planning resources
Focus on economic and social stability	Work as an existential determinant and form of security; Holding material values; Family and relationships (priority); The path of career development at the center (anchor career); Maintaining a work-life balance	Standard employment; "Outdated" technology used at the center	Medium or high level of (declared) economic resources (income); Medium or high level of skill set and expertise in IT; Low or medium quantity of social networks
Focus on personal growth *transition period in a career*	Striving for self-development; Belief in meritocracy and entrepreneurship; Individualism; Lack of attachment to the center; Work-life imbalance	Mostly non-standard employment; "Outdated" and cutting-edge technology used at the center	Low level of (declared) economic resources (income); Low or medium level of skill set and expertise in IT; Little social networking
Focus on personal growth *being an expert in IT*	Striving for self-development; Post-material values; Craftsmanship in IT; Being active in the BPO industry and among IT "professions" outside the workplace; The path of career development inside and outside the company; Work-life imbalance	Standard and non-standard employment; The cutting-edge technology used at the center	Medium or high level of (declared) economic resources (income); Advanced level of skill set and expertise in IT; Large social networking

Source: Self-elaboration.

Focus on Economic and Social Stability

The type of focus on economic and social stability is represented by those narratives in which two main biographical structures dominate.[5] On the one hand, these are biographical patterns of action; one of the main objectives of the IT specialists interviewed is to gain an advantageous social position, which consists of predictable prospects in one's life and career, a satisfactory job, and stable employment, as well as securing existential and economic underpinnings for individual prosperity and/or that of the participant's family. Within this type, the narrators demarcate spheres of work and non-work life, at least in the case of experienced IT specialists who have several years of expertise in the labor market. On the other hand, institutional action schemes presented in the IT specialists' biographies are based on meeting the demands of completing higher education. Another aim of IT specialists is to acquire skills and competencies that are considered warrantors for obtaining a decent job and good standard of living, as well as "comfortable functioning" (Jarek, 35).[6] Simultaneously, IT professionals are putting relatively little effort (compared to other types) in further investment in cultural resources encompassing skills and competences in the business services industry. It is related to the "pattern of development" (Jar-

ek, 35) in a given company, taking into account its internal logic, which assumes periodic promotion from lower to higher rank, alternatively widening the scope of one's duties, and degree of autonomy of currently occupied position in the center.

Even though the social and economic conditions of a career are based on the predictability of professional prospects and lifestyle demands, it seems equally important that at the workplace the significance of professional prospects is often attributed to skills development (in the sense of managing a team or widening the scope of autonomy and one's responsibilities in a given position in a center). BPO companies (at least those based in Poland) tend to collaborate closely with one or several clients, or support one project. In consequence, one relies on a single technological stack, which may limit the scope of technical development. Notably, IT specialists are mainly trying to develop their interpersonal skill sets; technical expertise is not as desirable. On the one hand, this approach implies taking on a wider spectrum of duties in project management, contact with clients, and bureaucratic, as well as administrative tasks, besides programing, which is emphasized in an excerpt of Mariusz's narrative. He is the leader of a team of programers in one of the Polish companies in Katowice: "If you are 35 and you're not a leader, it means that you're a loser. So you have to evolve in this direction, whether you want it, or not." On the other hand, due to professional development within a given organization, IT specialists have the opportunity to increase their autonomy at work and prioritize their scope of duties, which can prevent routinization and cases of professional burnout that are symptomatic of the IT sector, but not only. Jarek, a participant who combines the responsibilities of an IT architect and business analyst in a branch of a global company

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[5] In some of the collected biographies, one can observe the presence of trajectory as one of the biographical processes (Schütze 2008); it particularly pertains to biographical experiences (violence during childhood, break-ups in relationships, psychotherapy), but it is also related to a lack of coherent plans during education and in forming professional prospects. It can be related to a so-called patchwork career (Alheit 1995; Domecka and Mrozowicki 2008). It is only mentioned to underline this aspect, though because of the short form of this article, this issue will not be elaborated upon further.

[6] The brackets next to every quotation contain anonymized names and ages of interview participants (narrators).

in Wroclaw, characterizes work organization as follows: "you go to work in the morning, you check the email box, you set tasks for a given day, you check when you have scheduled meetings, and you do your job…Some of these tasks require computer-related work or calling, some others require meeting scheduling" (Jarek 35). The type of focus on social and economic stability is based on education, and cultural and (sometimes) social resources acquired during childhood. Not all of the biographies collected in this study represent social backgrounds from urban, highly educated families (so-called "intelligentsia"); most of the narrators obtained higher education in the form of degrees or attended university courses, though in some cases, these plans were canceled. Additionally, the presence of personal computers, game consoles, or programing and gaming activities comprise another central area within the IT specialists' narratives, of childhood and education. It can be related to entering IT professions, and the social background of the families into which the participants were born. In the 1990s, PCs were very expensive, and not all families could afford such a purchase (most of the IT specialists of this type grew up in those years). Moreover, educational strategies in middle school and high school are not purposefully planned to lead to work in IT, to program, design, and develop software, or work in the business services industry. The education patterns of IT professionals of this type are very similar in the context of attending a science-related profile (e.g., math, physics, computer science) and having an interest within the scope of these subjects. These (technical and science) studies are not always continued in the curriculum during university-level education. It can be shown in an excerpt of a narrative by Jarek, who graduated from robotics and automation at one of the technical universities in Lower Silesia in Poland:

I didn't want to go to work in a factory or somewhere below my expectations. I wanted to work either as a programer, or whoever. I thought back then that programing is a very wide notion, so to speak, so I didn't know what I wanted to do. But, it paid off when I went to the first job interview where some guy told me that programing could be learned by everyone, and learning to speak communicatively in two languages, English and German, is something big, so learning languages eventually paid off. [Jarek, 35]

The meaning of work is found in its instrumental value in this type. Work is needed for sustenance and living at a relatively high level of consumption, typical of aspirational, middle-class status in Poland. Employment in the business services industry is perceived by Mariusz as a "perfect way to generate income…there are no ideals and I don't want to do anything just for fun" (Mariusz, 34). As far as the value of work is concerned, taking into account biographical experiences of this type, it does:

not necessarily [have a crucial value], it is just a way of earning my living. I do not have any high-profile approach to work. No, I don't force myself to make programing my passion, and thereby after work, like many of my other colleagues, still tinker and improve my code, and, therefore, work for free, you know. There is something that needs to be done for a client, we need to do this, et cetera. In that sense, they can sit until midnight—I cannot, I log out; see you later; goodbye; that's all. [Tadek, 35]

Even though the labor market in business services is absorptive because "work [in IT sector] will always be, that's for sure, the job can always be found, especially in these times" (Jarek, 35), when having

pertinent work experience and appropriate skills, IT specialists more or less actively and/or reflexively plan their further career development in a given industry/sector. These prospects are fully present in a narrative by Juan, 29, who is a programer in one of the global BPO companies in Katowice. His narrative can be characterized by trajectory, chaos, and suffering. He emigrated from Brazil two years before the interview, after a breakup with his long-term partner. In the beginning, he worked briefly at an IT company in Bucharest, Romania, where he was attending psychotherapy sessions and taking anti-depressants. After a year, he had to leave Romania due to legal issues concerning his employment status. He then settled in Poland, where he was still working at the time of the interview. He is not interested in getting a promotion from his current employer because he perceives his workplace as a "sweet spot," where he occupies a senior IT engineer position. It allows him to satisfy his needs and reflexively plan his career in the IT sector (on the path of technical coaching) and life plans (having a family in the future):

> I used to think like going fast, starting as a developer, then becoming a team leader, then an architect or a manager. But, a few months earlier I thought, okay, I don't have time to do everything I want to do. So I have to focus on what's important, and a career is not as important as…having a family or things like that. So the former is on the lower priority level…I will not sacrifice my family for a career…Maybe I can get promoted, but maybe not. It's not like I need to, because the current level of salary I'm at is good. It's not like, okay, I have to because I need more money, and I don't have a sufficient amount of it. No, it's okay. So the only reason to be promoted is a position. You gain more status, you gain more responsibilities and a better position. The salary…

doesn't compensate for the amount of work and responsibilities you have. [Juan, 29]

Narratives presenting the type of focus on economic and social stability in IT professionals' biographies attest to general attempts at strategizing career planning (which are presumed to be highly predictable) in relation to accumulated capital (Bourdieu 1986); the objective conditions of the labor market in Poland and the meanings and biographical experiences of work of the narrators related most often to the sphere of ontological and economic security (which is lacking in some cases due to the presence of trajectory, chaos, and suffering). This can be seen in the case of the aforementioned Tadek, a former debt collector, who, due to professional burnout caused by the physical violence he sometimes encountered and hearing about the personal tragedies of clients in his previous job, attended psychotherapy sessions. He stated that "I'm already burnt out, after 7 years," nonetheless, the money he earned in this job was very satisfactory. While attending the session, the narrator tried to open his business by running an online shop. Ultimately this idea failed, but during that time, he learned a lot about programing from various sources, which allowed him to enter the IT job market, starting from the position of a junior programer. Tadek is currently engaged in nurturing his relationship with his wife and buying a house with her. In terms of values that he holds dear, he just wants to be happy because "I can have a lot of money and be happy and he can have no money and be happy." A career in his current company is not as important as having an economically stable job. Despite the fact that work is a source of money for him, he does not consider it his passion, but more an activity that can help develop skills and make friends without necessarily advancing his career.

Focus on Personal Growth—Transition Period in a Career

This type of meaning-making of a career is represented mostly in the narratives of young IT specialists (students or graduates of computer science) who are trying to follow individualized patterns of planning and development of their careers in the labor market. They also have an atypical work agreement (e.g., civil law contracts, fixed-term employment contracts, etc.) These characterizations of the biographical and professional experiences of IT professionals of this type are reminiscent of the strategies of young precarious workers employed under flexible, unstable forms of the employment contract. The dominant strategy in the labor market and in career planning seems to be the "normalization" (Mrozowicki 2016) of unstable employment on flexible forms, being the result of taking for granted the effectiveness of such a way of developing one's career.

In the narratives that are part of the analyzed type of assigning meanings to careers, it is possible to observe, at the level of analysis of the communicative structure, the predominance of argumentative communicative patterns rather than narrative ones. The coda in the form of a long summary of the life and its assessment from the current perspective is not always elaborate and most often has the character of a lengthy argumentative or theoretical commentary, which may indicate biographical problems that the narrator has not worked through, or to present them to the researcher in the best possible way. In this type, the biographical experiences of work and participating in the labor market seem to be differentiated in terms of the occupations the narrators held. Most of them had already worked in industries outside of IT before

entering the business services industry. Bruno and Irek worked physically during their school and university years, the former as a factory worker for a few months, the latter as a postman and security guard, earning extra money for their studies. Ivan was in a similar situation and after coming to Poland from Ukraine to study computer science, he worked physically (e.g., restocking shelves in a supermarket), without a contract, to collect the money he needed for his studies. While working as a strawberry vendor in a parking lot, he tried to use this time to learn English and read books on cognitive science. He then enrolled in a work and travel program in the USA, where he could develop his language skills and earn some extra money for his studies, and to visit places. Sylwia, on the other hand, had been working after her matriculation for a few years in a state-owned company selling insurance, which she thought was a "rat race." She did not like the working conditions and relations between co-workers there. As a result, she decided to look for a more developmental job with a better salary and the possibility of living in a bigger city, Opole. Eventually, she decided to learn programming to become an application developer, and then to study computer science to obtain her degree. Bruno had a similar experience and decided to look for a more developmental and secure job in his country of origin, Brazil. Therefore, he decided to study computer science, which would allow him to get his dream job and international career in software development. Irek's original educational plan was to study history, but he finally decided to study computer science after he took a one-year break from high school. At the time of the interview, he worked as a software developer. A good example showing the biographical meaning of work of this type is an excerpt from the narrative of Sylwia, an IT specialist working for a multinational compa-

ny with a branch in Opole. When asked about the meaning of work in her life, she replies:

> work is very important to me. I like my job very much. It gives me a lot of satisfaction. For example, I get a task; I have to do something, so I do it and my team leader tells me, for example, that, "It's a great job." It's so much fun…[The work should be] well paid, developmental, and it should give creativity, and openness, so that you can do things, and achieve a goal, in many ways. No one should tell me how because I don't like being told, for example, someone has to do so and so and so, but I have, for example, several options to choose from, that I can go this way or that way, that I have to, for example, do some thinking. This stimulates such creativity that you can prove yourself. [Sylwia, 27]

In the already mentioned case of Sylwia, the narrator talks about being bored in her workplace and in the city where she lives. She does not see the possibility of further development there, both professionally and in terms of her private life. She would like to emigrate to the Netherlands to work in her profession and to develop her career (become an IT professional in a company outside of the BPO industry). A similar structure can be observed in the biography of Irek, who also talks about plans to emigrate to Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon countries because he sees no future for himself in terms of professional development and quality of life in Poland. He would also like to learn about new cultures and visit the world. Ivan and Bruno, whose biographical experiences in terms of work and education have been described, are immigrants who have temporarily settled in Poland. Bruno emigrated from Brazil to build an international career, which began with several months of exchange studies in Canada, where he learned the country's culture and customs.

Material resources seem to have an instrumental value in this type of assigning meanings to a career in IT. They serve the purpose of achieving an assumed goal (making an international career, temporary or permanent settlement in another country, traveling). Work, in turn, serves to improve one's qualifications, both technical and interpersonal. Such activities aim to increase the possibility of being mobile in the labor market. Such properties are illustrated in the fragment of Irek's narrative.

> Why do we work? Not for pleasure, but to have something from it, to develop oneself, educate oneself. I wouldn't want, for sure, to work just to go on with it, and that's it, though I'd consider it when they'd pay me extra cool. I want work to be interesting, developing, somehow deepening, not just profitable…Everyone would want this, it's obvious, but it will never be like that. Work itself doesn't hold any value in my life. [Irek, 23]

In a sense, what Irek is perhaps saying here is that work is for making money and developing the skills needed to build social and economic capital or change employers and/or industries. Possibly, it is through the biographical experience of work that IT professionals choose to make a change that gives them a sense of fulfillment and self-realization of a career.

IT specialists' narratives that constitute this type of focus on personal growth are linked mainly with characteristics such as work flexibility and lack of attachment to companies. A stable path of career development in just one company is not attractive when considering the accumulation of cultural and social resources that could be transformed in the future to achieve other goals. In their biographical plans, the interviewees include changing em-

ployers in search of better employment conditions or career prospects, or they strategize shifting to another industry, related to the IT sector. The case of Maciek, employed on a business-to-business contract in one of the Polish business service outsourcing companies in Katowice, embodies these characteristics. Arguing why he chose such a career path, he asserts that:

a lot of kids [during elementary education] say that they wanted to be a garbage collector, a policeman, or something. I never had anything like that. Well, when I chose to study computer science, I wasn't planning on going away from computer work. So I became a programer. And according to what was said in those days [when he was a student], it's best to have 2 years of experience after graduation, I started working in my third year. And I studied and worked practically full-time because I did about 140 hours to earn enough money to support myself. And that's how it stayed. And simply since the third year of studies. [Maciek, 35]

During his career, which lasted for about 12 years, Maciek changed employers about 6 times, working in the business services industry and other areas (i.e., international start-ups, orders for web design) within the IT industry. The narrator considers full-time employment "nonsense" for purely economic reasons. He decided to "earn real money" with an atypical work agreement. He thinks of himself as valuable, entrepreneurial, and resourceful, unlike professional IT lecturers in academia. Thus, he can easily change jobs, employers, or even industries. A passage of Maciek's narrative from the interview may demonstrate this attitude.

It's not that I hate what I do but, you know, in the morning, I would rather get up and go to the moun-

tains than go to work. So, well, it is a necessary evil. But, to some extent, I'm telling myself: "If you're doing it, then do it right, do it with a smile on your face, and when it doesn't suit you, change it." And so I do, and so I change. And, well, unfortunately, this IT industry, being an IT aristocracy, allows me to do that. And that's the truth, it's an employee's market, not an employer's market, so they should be honest, open, and forthright in what they expect, what they tell me it will be. If they lie, what do they expect?... The kind of job I want should be here, not me for a job.

This way of arguing in the narratives of IT professionals in the analyzed type of attributing meanings to their careers is closely related to the issue of individualization and belief in meritocracy. It can be linked to neo-liberal practices of self-development: improving one's skills is one of the most important values in the narratives. The belief in one's talent and accumulated technical expertise can reinforce one's drive toward career planning. It can be seen quite clearly in the case of Ivan, 22, a junior programer from Ukraine, who works in a global company with a branch in Opole. He contends that "even if you are a graduate of technical high school or high school, even if you are 15, but you have the knowledge, they will employ you in the IT sector without any experience or any particular diploma."

Another characteristic of this type of career path is the presence of an intentional disturbance of the balance between studying and life, or work-life, observed in IT specialists' narratives. Such choices are consciously made and accepted as a trade-off for career development in the IT sector and business services industry. The case of Irek employed in one of the Polish BPO companies in Opole seems

to verify that claim. He is in the middle of finishing an engineering degree at one of the universities in Opole, but to be competitive in the labor market, he simultaneously learns new skills on his own, studies full-time, and works on an atypical work agreement. He is aware of the consequences of this career development strategy: he neglects his relationship with his partner, and, to some extent, he misses out on his studies. Irek describes his day at work as follows:

> I get up at 6:00, I have a bus to work at 7:10, I come to work, make tea, sit down, look at what needs to be done, look at the news, and slowly start doing things for myself. At 9:00, we have a conversation with a client and we say what we did, what we didn't do, and so on. I do these tasks more or less until 15:30, there around 15:00, I don't feel like it, so I slow down, put in the code, and so on, around 15:20, I pack up because I have a bus at 15:48, and I go. I go to my room in the dorm. Sometimes I have classes, 3 days a week, or 4 days a week, so I go straight to the class, I sit until 18:00, and then, at 20:00, I'm, let's say, in the room, because I live nearby, I eat something, I sit down, then it is around 21:00, I do my engineering work, assignments. Sometimes I need to go out with my girlfriend, and I'm completely out of time… OK, well, maybe it's nice because I earn money and everything goes smoothly here. It would be best to both work and have a relationship, but I'm exhausted, it's driving me crazy.

Despite that Irek feels tired of his lifestyle, he believes there is no other way to achieve professional success. It can be hypothesized that meanings attributed to work of this type that hold the greatest value include striving for the development of qualifications and competencies, which can be illustrated by the following fragment of Irek's narrative.

> If I will not help myself, then no one will, goddamn it! I must educate myself, get work experience myself, go study myself, go to work myself…If I were an employer and wanted to employ me [without work experience], then I would have no skills…One must educate and work in [IT] profession, you can even earn 1000 zloty, but in one's learned profession. Why does one want to be a bartender during [computer science] study?

This fragment can be interpreted by referring to the concept of ontological security. As Anthony Giddens asserts, "to be ontologically secure is to possess, on the level of the unconscious and practical consciousness, 'answers' to fundamental existential questions which all human life in some way addresses" (Giddens 1991:47). In other words, ontological security means feeling a fundamental safety based on a basic trust in other people, which provides a sense of well-being and freedom from anxiety (Giddens 1991). Irek seems to be deprived of such a feeling, considering the excerpt from his narrative.

Yet another feature of narratives presented in this type is the lack of attachment to a particular company. Furthermore, they can be characterized by hyper geographical and labor market mobility (Van Maanen and Kunda 1999; Barley and Kunda 2004). The case of Bruno, 29, a Brazilian man who came to Europe to build his international career and improve his language skills can portray this characteristic. He is employed in one of the global companies in Katowice as a senior programer. Some parts of his narrative relate to social and economic changes on a macro level (labor market conditions) in the context of planning his career. After leaving the job at the start-up company where Bruno had been working, he was offered a job in Brazil with

a higher salary than in other European countries. Though he could have worked for his previous employer (a start-up IT enterprise in Germany), he decided to move to Poland.

> Yes, but it [the start-up company] was part of the European company because it was, like, going here [Europe] to work in Germany. I have wanted to work as a researcher in Germany, but the European company just cut the costs of IT positions here and relocated them back to Brazil because it was cheaper to employ one German. The European company can hire, like, ten Brazilians, and one Brazilian does the same amount of work as one German. So it was cheap for this company to employ me. And the research start-up became a normal IT company. So, for me, there was no difference to work here or there, it's the same. And I have wanted to pursue my international career and also to improve my English because I have a strong accent that you can hear. [Bruno, 29]

Outsourcing business processes presumes the transfer of production processes, tasks, and also occupations to less developed, semi-peripheral, or peripheral economies. Therefore, companies can focus on core responsibilities, preserve operational flexibility, and cut operational costs (Kakabadse and Kakabadse 2002; Tas and Sunder 2004).

IT specialists' narratives within this type of career meaning attribution are characterized by career planning concerning finding the optimal (the most profitable and developmental) job offers in terms of salary and following the accumulation of cultural resources, that is, required certificates or scarce skill sets. This may have consequences in the form of work-life imbalance. One of the most substantial forms of career meaning attribution is a subjective aspect linked to career instrumen-

talization. One's goal is to preserve the material means to an end. What seems important is that biographical experiences linked to work are characterized by individualism, entrepreneurship, belief in qualifications, and flexibility, which can be observed in the narratives. Flexibility in particular seems to have negative side effects, which is the (generally accepted) price for personal growth during the transition period in an IT professional career Sylwia mentions when asked how she spends her typical weekday.

> I get up in the morning at whatever time I want without an alarm clock. So I get up at what time I want to start work. Then I start, then we have somehow a daily [meeting], between 10 AM and 11 AM. Well, we always say to each other what we did, what we are going to do, what we are working on, and, well, nothing. I do my job, I do not sit for 8 hours, for sure, I just do what I have to do and I do my job. Then [programing] the application. In general, when I get up in the morning, I sit at the computer and I program until the evening…It is around 11 PM or 12 AM. [Sylwia, 27]

Focus on Personal Growth—Being an Expert in IT

This type is mainly seen in the narratives of IT specialists born in well-educated families ("intelligentsia") or in families where a higher social status was acquired, that is, school teachers, military men, economists, psychologists, et cetera. The collected cases differ in age and level of education. Narrators within this type may hold higher qualifications than a master's degree. This type is focused on personal growth in the sense of being a professional, though in some narratives, especially among married IT specialists or those with

lengthy experience in the labor market, one can observe a drive towards economic and employment stability. The stage of starting work in the IT industry in most collected cases falling into this type is the stage of higher education.

In general, institutional patterns of expectation might be evident in the narratives, mainly related to attending the schools chosen by the parents, fulfilling their will in terms of career choice, as well as other biographical plans. As has been said, significant others are influencing this type of career meaning-making in the narratives of interviewees. For example, Piotr, who was brought up by a pair of teachers, had all his needs provided for, similarly for Wiola, Fiodor, and Ala. They all went on to higher education and started working in the industry during or immediately after graduation of studies. The contrasting case is Franek, who does not come from an intellectual family but rather from a working-class family. All of these cases will be elaborated on broadly in this section.

Meanings attributed to careers are related to cultural resources drawn from the social background of the narrators. On the one hand, a career is perceived concerning a decent lifestyle; it provides ontological security and has specific ethics (such as professionalism). Moreover, it "contributes surplus value in society" (Ala, 40) or fits in with middle-class values. In a general sense, the sphere related to work and its ethics is highly exposed in the communicative schemes of narratives. On the other hand, the meaning of a career is related to the development of one's (technical and interpersonal) skills, combined with technologies of self-development in the Foucauldian theorem of technologies of the self (Foucault 2008), and individual responsibility for one's personal growth

("reaching beyond one's boundaries," "going out of one's comfort zone" [Wiola, 27]). These characteristics are aptly illustrated in an excerpt from Wiola's narrative. She is 27, and a mid-level programer employed by one of the global companies in Wroclaw. Additionally, she leads IT non-profit projects and participates in the local activities of IT associations (industry meetings, workshops for her colleagues in the company where she works, and elsewhere). Her case is indicative of being involved in programing, as well as management, marketing, and code testing, which often leads to health issues and neglect of her private life.

> I have got this since my childhood. I have always wanted to learn new information, and read new books, first, second, third, and next. I do not like to be bored in the sense that I can go on holidays and do totally nothing for a while, but, in general, I tend to keep my mind occupied, I like to be occupied. I like to be tired and, you know, and, in the evening, have this kind of feeling that, oh, I have worked myself hard today, haven't I? And then that kind of leisure gives you way more fun.

Development of skills can be facilitated by participating in projects that meet such criteria as implementing technical solutions that offer various opportunities for skill set advancement or give more outlets for creativity, innovation, and self-realization at work, which are desirable traits of this type. Within this type, economic gains are not as central as in the other types, though these capitals have a secondary priority, which could be illustrated by Ala's case. She is 40, and a senior application programer in one of the global firms in Wroclaw. She conceptualizes programing as "a creative activity, especially if one can create some new area of application, new application, and one can get a chance

to participate in designing such functionality." What is vital in this type is the meaning ascribed to applications, and in a wider sense—to technologies used at the workplace. Having to choose between higher wages or "outdated" technology and unattractive projects, narrators tend to prefer an employer who offers better employment conditions, that is, where the technology and projects give opportunities to enhance one's competencies or skill set, and the chance to achieve self-fulfillment. Meanings attributed to careers of this type are linked to influencing the expansion or growth of a company or leading and managing a team. Careers are not perceived in this type as instrumental but more autotelic. It is a passion and a kind of craft. Thus one needs to do as well as one can. The software produced may attest to one's skill, label, reputation, and personal involvement in this craft. These characteristics can be found in the case of Piotr, 35, an IT specialist and business analyst employed in one of the global centers in Wroclaw, and in the case of Fiodor, 22, a junior programmer in one of the Polish companies in Opole. The latter narrator plans to establish his business after he gains sufficient work experience from his present employer. The former participant tried to start his firm during his master's and doctoral studies, though unsuccessfully; in his narrative, he emphasizes the importance of self-development and that of his colleagues in the team he leads, and also highlights the aspect of improving the quality of products and produced software. On the other hand, he strives to be an authority (not only in technical but also organizational and social areas) in IT associations, so it can be hypothesized that his reputation plays an indispensable role in this type of meaning-making. In this sense, stable income and employment could be valued as highly as being viewed as a professional in IT industry

organizations and companies. It can also be interpreted as a symbolic resource, which can be exchanged for employability when someone starts a career in IT. It can be noted in an excerpt from Franek's narrative. He is 25 and employed as a junior programer in one of the Polish BPO centers in Wroclaw. He is also involved in activities related to the university field, such as participation in several scientific student associations. In the past, he also conducted classes for younger students at his university. Franek is an active participant in an IT sector association, which consists of popular programing language users. His narrative seems to reflect some qualities of the *New Spirit of Capitalism* (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

> I developed there [in one of the scientific student associations] my interpersonal skills, too. [Now I deal with] internal project management in our company, [I gave] lectures for my colleagues, [I did] some kind of social action. I've never been a person who is doing it just for the sake of the certificate itself, just to have a paper out of it, but I consider it as a means to an end.

Activity in organizations outside the workplace is also a biographical plan, realized based on available capital and resources accumulated during life, as may be indicated by the fragment of Franek's narrative.

Meanings attributed to careers in this particular type are connected with autotelic values. Work is recognized as an activity that contributes value to society in general. This attribute related to work can be observed in Wiola's fragment of narrative: "You do your duty, you write a program that can save somebody's life, or can help to improve something, economize something" (Wiola, 27). The case

of Ala, in turn, can reflect the ethos of work, which resembles the one attributed to the Polish "young intelligentsia" elites.[7]

> Work constitutes our image and our place in society and defines our function in the latter. I do not claim, though, that functioning as a developer is less worthy than being an IT architect. I think that more precious is the fact that someone was able to build oneself professional capital and acquire this profession and skills, which allows someone to find oneself in society and satisfy the demands of the latter. I think it defines human capabilities more accurately. [Ala, 40]

Within this type, a career can be conceptualized in a twofold manner. On the one hand, it is realized and planned in a narrow sense, within companies, but also in a wider scope, within an industry's organizations and associations related to the IT sector, which brings together experts and professionals. The latter form of career in IT is described in terms such as participation and involvement in these organizations, getting promoted within structures of associations, being recognized as a talented speaker at conferences, being an event organizer, being a technical or interpersonal coach, et cetera, and not only a gifted IT professional in terms of having a wide technical skill set. These characteristics were apparent in other cases, especially when IT professionals were re-

sponsible for several technical leadership or business duties in various forms (e.g., scrum mastering and business analytics). Some narrators reported that they were attending to other tasks after work hours, such as running workshops for professionals outside of the company or organizing seminars during meetings of IT associations. These traits are aptly reflected in the case of Piotr, 35, who has a Ph.D. in IT. He has been employed for one year in one of the global companies in Wroclaw. He is accountable for three roles in his company: technical duties, team coaching, and business analysis. Piotr is also engaged in activities related to IT associations—participating in and co-organizing meet-ups and workshops whose main aim is to develop the technical and interpersonal skills of IT professionals through numerous techniques of gamification.

> The company [where he works] was a sweet spot, taking into account satisfactory financial and employment conditions…So I assume that I, and the modern labor market a little bit, look for team shape, that one has a wide spectrum of knowledge, but simultaneously one can dive deeply…these two things allow me a wider scope of flexibility. [Piotr, 35]

In the narratives, phenomena related to suffering and chaos can be identified, such as relationship breakdowns and divorces caused by the lack of balance between life and work. Piotr is an example of such characteristics as he got divorced during his Ph.D. studies. He tried to cope with the aftermath of divorce using various self-development techniques, for example, solving Gallup tests. At the time, he was teaching classes at the university, which he tried to organize in such a way that they were useful to the students in a practical sense. The narrator himself expected

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[7] Research conducted among young representatives of the elite in Poland shows that members of this group do not identify with either the traditional intelligentsia ethos or the lifestyle of the middle class. Young intelligentsia representatives consider themselves to be well-educated professionals who feel responsible for their environment, institutions, family, and work. They are characterized by a peculiar yet separate lifestyle and self-defined ethos. They are convinced of the purpose of their action and the sense of the existence of their group (Kulas 2017).

this during his studies. At the same time, he did not feel satisfied with the classes he was teaching, even though he put an adequate, and even sometimes higher than required, amount of energy into them. This may indicate a process of professional burnout linked to the suffering of going through a divorce.

IT professionals representing this type tend to plan their careers according to cultural resources linked to "intelligentsia" work ethics while focusing on the development of skills (through advanced technology and attractive projects) and symbolic resources, such as reputation. These assets seem to be prioritized in this type. Thus, economic resources have an instrumental role and employment stability appears to hold a similar level of significance. Social resources play an indispensable role in relation to career planning, both within the industry and within expert organizations in the IT sector—especially considering being located in the social networks that emerge in this field. Biographical experiences and meanings of work are connected both with narrators' social backgrounds and with biographical action schemes, which often leads to work-life imbalances.

To sum up, it could be hypothesized that this particular type of meaning-making of a career in IT combines the characteristics of the previous two. On the one hand, the narrators look for companies that provide adequate conditions for the development of their skills (valued more than the material conditions of work), and, on the other hand, they are not permanently attached to a particular company and look for another employer when they feel that they stop developing their skills.

Discussion and Conclusions

The paper aimed to reconstruct the ways of attributing meanings to IT specialists' careers at the business process outsourcing centers in Poland, from a biographical standpoint. The analysis of the life stories of IT specialists allowed the author to highlight the role of three reconstructed types in career planning as a basic social process that has been discovered during the data analysis stage. Those three types are as follows: (1) a focus on economic and social stability, (2) a focus on personal growth—such as a transition period in a career, and (3) a focus on personal growth—becoming an expert in IT. Moreover, the biographical analysis allowed the author to note three (subjective and objective) influences, which may play indispensable roles in attributing meanings to IT specialists' careers at BPO companies in Poland: meanings and biographical experiences at work, the objective context of working in the Polish BPO industry, and career planning resources. Combined with the pathways of following IT specialists' patterns of building careers, the conditions of the study permitted the author to construct a typology of attributing meanings to work at BPO centers in Poland. It has been shown that when various structural (micro, mezzo, and macro level), economic, and cultural aspects were simultaneously present in either type, the focus was on economic and social stability, or both subtypes of personal growth while planning one's career. The last aspect, which might influence the basic social process (life project), was shown to be the resources owned by IT specialists. Another feature of the mechanisms for attributing meanings (when considering structural, cultural, and economic facilitation or impediments to achieving one's plans) has been defined as the resources owned

by IT specialists. As mentioned above, the created typology of career meanings is ideal-typical in the sense that IT specialists assign, reflexively, all of the identified ways of attributing meanings to their "career planning" process.

Although the research on biographical meanings of work at multinational corporations in Poland (Biały 2015; Haratyk, Biały, and Gońda 2017; Gońda 2019) suggests that inherent socio-economic conditions given by this type of employer facilitate achieving occupational and biographical stability, it seems that among IT specialists who have been interviewed, it is pertinent only to those narrators who have families and strive to anchor their careers in one company, or those who are trying to achieve stability due to biographical events that generated suffering and chaos in their lives. Their narratives focus on economic and social stability. What is more, these IT professionals are intentionally separating the spheres of work and non-work, which results from their personal goals and private concerns (a particular focus on family, building relationships, etc.). Those interviewees seem to follow the widespread discourse of self-development, but only do so to a limited extent—that which brings an optimal level of employability and competitiveness in the labor market. Younger IT professionals (without families or formal relationships) seem to lean towards self-development discourse (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) to build their future careers (not necessarily in the IT sector) or to become an expert in IT. These narratives resemble being an expert in IT and the transition period type. To achieve their plans, IT specialists falling into this type intentionally bridge the gap between work and non-work life with flexibility that has further biographical consequences and costs, such as dissolving bonds with their rel-

atives, occupational burnout, health problems, and so forth. As far as the economic aspect of careers in business services in Poland is concerned, IT specialists do not tend to act according to the *homo oeconomicus* (or rational choice theory) by choosing the best possible offers in the context of wages and type of work agreement (non-standard contracts or freelance employment) that allow for the highest net income (Barley and Kunda 2004; Ailon and Kunda 2006). Though it is pertinent to the participants who are focused on accumulating economic resources (focused on economic and social stability), the majority of IT professionals interviewed tend to value more cutting-edge technology used at centers over high wages provided by the employer, as they perceive technological conditions to be conducive to improving their future employability and social resources. However, the former group has changed employers and projects more often, on average, than the rest of the interviewees, though they are not as focused on being participants in social networks. While the research on IT specialists employed at Polish and American high-tech companies (Jemielniak 2008a; Czarkowska 2010; Postuła 2010) advocates non-material ways of perceiving careers and work experience, this approach does not seem applicable among the IT professionals interviewed by the author. As mentioned above, the material aspect of a career still plays an indispensable (and, in some circumstances, decisive) role, taking into account the focus on economic and social stability and the transition period type, which tends to accumulate economic and social resources. The same can be hypothesized about the work-life balance as a constitutive factor of meaning in the case of narrators' careers; their narratives reflect the type of being an IT expert and the transition period. They do perceive intentional bridging of

the work-life boundary as something unavoidable and "normal" in the current social and economic conditions to achieve one's life goals. In that vein, they do not see the formalization of relations as detrimental to their careers or as a tool for control by managers over the work of the IT specialists. Those narrators most often emphasize aspects of the agency of employees, a participatory approach in making decisions at firms, egalitarianism, as well as flattening of the structures at workplaces. Trust among colleagues, employers, and clients, however, is perceived by them as conducive to shaping the meaning of one's career at the center. The narratives that are typical of experts in IT focus on maintaining relations with all the actors, though the other two types seem to concentrate on being trusted by clients and/or employers, as this can preserve or increase the level of one's employability. Considering the normative strategies of employers and ideological control of managers over IT specialists in the form of identity choices (Jemielniak 2008a), it can be hypothesized that the "playbor" and other managerial tactics that are apparently "hidden" (Kunda 2006; Hunter, Jemielniak, and Postuła 2010) are rather far-fetched in the Polish context. Based on all of the interviewees' narratives, most of the IT professionals are well aware of the control that may be exercised over them at workplaces, though the author does not claim that the interviewees openly oppose such methods of control; however, sometimes they take an ironic or cynical stance on it, and other times, conform to it as a kind of status quo in this type of industry or organization.

While contributing to existing research on experiences of work and studies on careers, this paper has certain limitations. First of all, it was restricted to only three Polish cities that experts have identified as exhibiting different degrees of development in the business services industry in one of the Central-Eastern European countries. It could be beneficial to study the experience of work and career meanings of IT specialists originating from other cities, states, or core economies, where the business services industry is relatively more advanced, compared to that in Poland. Second of all, it would be necessary to study in more detail the biographies of IT specialists who are involved in activities related to non-profit or project work outside of companies in the area of IT, as factors that contribute to career planning and meaning attribution. Third of all, the sample consisted predominantly of men and young people, due to objective barriers in reaching out to women, older IT specialists, and foreign IT professionals. It would be valuable to understand the role of sex, age, and citizenship in relation to life plans, including career planning, biographical experiences, and individual resources.

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