

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND MENTORING FOR YOUNG LAWYERS IN CROATIA - RECENT FINDINGS AND PANDEMIC IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Unlike their Western European and American counterparts, most young Croatian lawyers feel they lack the necessary career support during their studies and later at their workplace. Based on the recent primary data, this study investigates the career development services and experiences, perceived legal education-labour market (mis)match and mentoring insights among final year law students and recent graduates in Croatia. Preliminary findings indicate plenty of room for improvement both in transferring Western good practices and organically creating career support initiatives at the workplace and during legal studies. In addition, this study emphasises the (increased) importance of quality mentoring relations in the circumstances of exogenous shocks such as the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Career development, COVID-19, Mentoring, Lawyers, Law school, Legal practice

1. INTRODUCTION

A recent Bloomberg Law article¹ on lawyers' mentoring experience states:

“Graduating from law school, passing the bar exam, and joining a firm are key milestones for new attorneys. *But mastering elements not taught in law school such as developing business and navigating firm culture can be daunting. That’s where mentors can make a difference.* ... They said professional guidance from a more experienced attorney—a senior associate or partner—who worked in their same practice area, or who shared similar life experiences, was of great help, even if only as a sounding

¹ Bloomberg Law, *Big Law Attorneys Share Why Mentoring Matters*, [https://news.bloomberglaw.com/bankruptcy-law/big-law-attorneys-share-why-mentoring-mattersG] Accessed 7 April 2022

board. Sometimes a mentor introduced the attorney to important clients, employers, or other individuals who proved to be key to their futures. Most said they were inspired to pass on that help to others.” (part of the quote italicised by the author of the article)

Unlike their Western European and American counterparts, most young Croatian lawyers feel they lack the necessary career support both during their studies and later at their workplace. Preliminary studies suggest that there is plenty of room for improvement, particularly when comparing the situation in Croatia to the developed systems of career support and mentoring like the ones in the United States and Western Europe. This paper is based on the recent research conducted within the project inspired both by the afore-mentioned differences and the needs recognised by young legal professionals.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the methodology. Section 3 provides the literature review on the importance and implementation of mentoring (system) as a part of career development. Section 4 presents and discusses the findings of the recent project on career development and mentoring among (young) Croatian lawyers. Section 5 concludes the paper.

This paper contributes to the understanding of the underresearched and underrepresented topic of career development (support services) and mentoring (systems) in the legal profession, with an emphasis on final year law students and recent graduates in Croatia. The findings of the study are expected to be useful to various actors in the field ranging from students, higher education administration and management to the employers.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study draws on primary research conducted for the purposes of the project ‘Promoting Entrepreneurial Life Cycle Principles among Law Practitioners - Lessons Learned from the US Practice’ funded by US Embassy to Croatia - US Alumni grants, conducted by CEPOR² and led by Ružica Šimić Banović. The initial survey was conducted in the period September – November 2020. It included interviews and/or focus groups with 52 final year law students and recent graduates, mostly from the University of Zagreb. The affiliation of the employed interview-

² CEPOR – SMEs and Entrepreneurship Policy Center, available at [<https://www.cepor.hr/en/>], Accessed 17 March 2022

Project information, Available at: [<https://www.cepor.hr/online-radionice-ide-abbott-razvoj-karijere-u-odvjetnistvu-i-mentorstvo/>], Webinars available at [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PW-drojw3f-0&t=115s>], Accessed 17 March 2022 (Strategic Career Planning) and [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ob3JFcENDSk&t=875s>] (Mentoring Matters), Accessed 17 March 2022

ees was as follows: majority of the respondents were employed in the law offices, followed by the European Commission, Croatian public administration, NGOs and corporate sector. Additional data were obtained from the post-webinar survey completed by 49 participants with similar backgrounds mostly from Croatia, and a minority of them from Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia. The Mentoring webinar was held in April 2021 and the post-webinar survey was completed within seven days after the webinar. The third, supplemental source of primary data for this paper comes from the conversations with Ida Abbott³, one of the leading US experts for career development and mentoring in the legal profession.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is well known that mentoring is linked with numerous benefits ranging from behavioural and health-related to relational, motivational, and career aspects. More significant effects are usually found in the academic and workplace mentoring (when compared to youth mentoring).⁴ Positive outcomes are commonly associated with the mentees. Yet, studies reveal that the mentors (managers in this case) are considered better performers by their supervisors⁵ and that their perceived training effectiveness was positively linked with their willingness to engage in activities leading to the wellbeing of younger generations.⁶ Overall, mentoring is markedly instrumental to mentees, to organisations and to mentors.⁷

Numerous universities have recognised the role of mentoring and alumni relations – the two can also provide synergy effects. Leading law schools nurture the alumni relationships at many levels, ranging from regular newsletters and blogs on their activities and School's updates to networking events, career days, thematic panels and career counselling (both for the students and younger graduates).⁸ The

³ About Ida, available at: [<https://idaabbott.com/about-ida/>], Accessed 21 March 2022

⁴ Eby, T. L., *et.al*, Does mentoring matter? *A multidisciplinary meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals*, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Vol. 72, No.2, 2008, pp. 254-267

⁵ Gentry, A. W.; Weber, J. T.; Sadri, G., *Examining career-related mentoring and managerial performance across cultures: A multilevel analysis*, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Vol. 72, No. 2, 2008, pp. 241-253

⁶ Parise, R. M., Forret, L. M., *Formal mentoring programs: The relationship of program design and support to mentors' perceptions of benefits and costs*, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Vol. 72, No. 2, 2008, pp. 225-240

⁷ Ivey, G. W.; Dupré, K. E., *Workplace mentorship: A critical review*, Journal of Career Development, 2020, Advance Online Publication [<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845320957737>], Accessed 10 April 2022

⁸ Selected examples from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) are following: Career centre and its services [<https://info.lse.ac.uk/Current-Students/Careers>], Alumni events [<https://info.lse.ac.uk/current-students/careers/events/Employer-and-alumni-insights>], Alumni

importance of a strong and visible alumni community is considered to be an asset. Alumni and their schools may contribute to the society in many measurable ways.⁹

Considering the (recent) pandemic conditions, it is valuable to analyse the recommendations for the online mentoring programmes developed based on an extensive review of e-mentoring programmes in medical clinics in the period between 2000-2017¹⁰. The novice mentoring and mentoring between senior and junior clinicians was scrutinised. Because of the deficit of mentors, online mentoring was suggested to be the more appropriate form. The framework that appears to be applicable in many other professions is presented in Figure 1. Furthermore, aimed at efficient matchmaking, three recommendations appear to be crucial: first, matching the mentor and mentee based on deep-level similarities; second, addressing the mentee's developmental needs during matching, and third, seek mentors' and mentees' feedback before reaching the final stage of matchmaking.¹¹ In line with that, Abbott explains the background and the need for mentoring training and guidelines being incorporated in the work environments:

“Effective mentors make mentoring a natural part of their daily work. They enjoy helping others succeed and consider the time spent as a mentor to be valuable and productive. They understand the important role mentoring plays in developing their organization's future leaders. For many people, being a mentor is easy and natural. Other people want to be mentors but are not sure what they should do. They fear that mentoring is too complicated and time-consuming, so they overlook opportunities to assist others who could benefit greatly from their wisdom and attention.”¹²

promotion [<https://www.lse.ac.uk/alumni-friends-and-partners/alumni-profiles>] and Alumni blogs [<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/careers/2019/02/05/insider-tips-digital-consultancies/>]; In addition, LSE Law organises various events: Life outside the magic circle coffee morning, Law careers panel, Criminal justice networking, Life as a Barrister, etc.

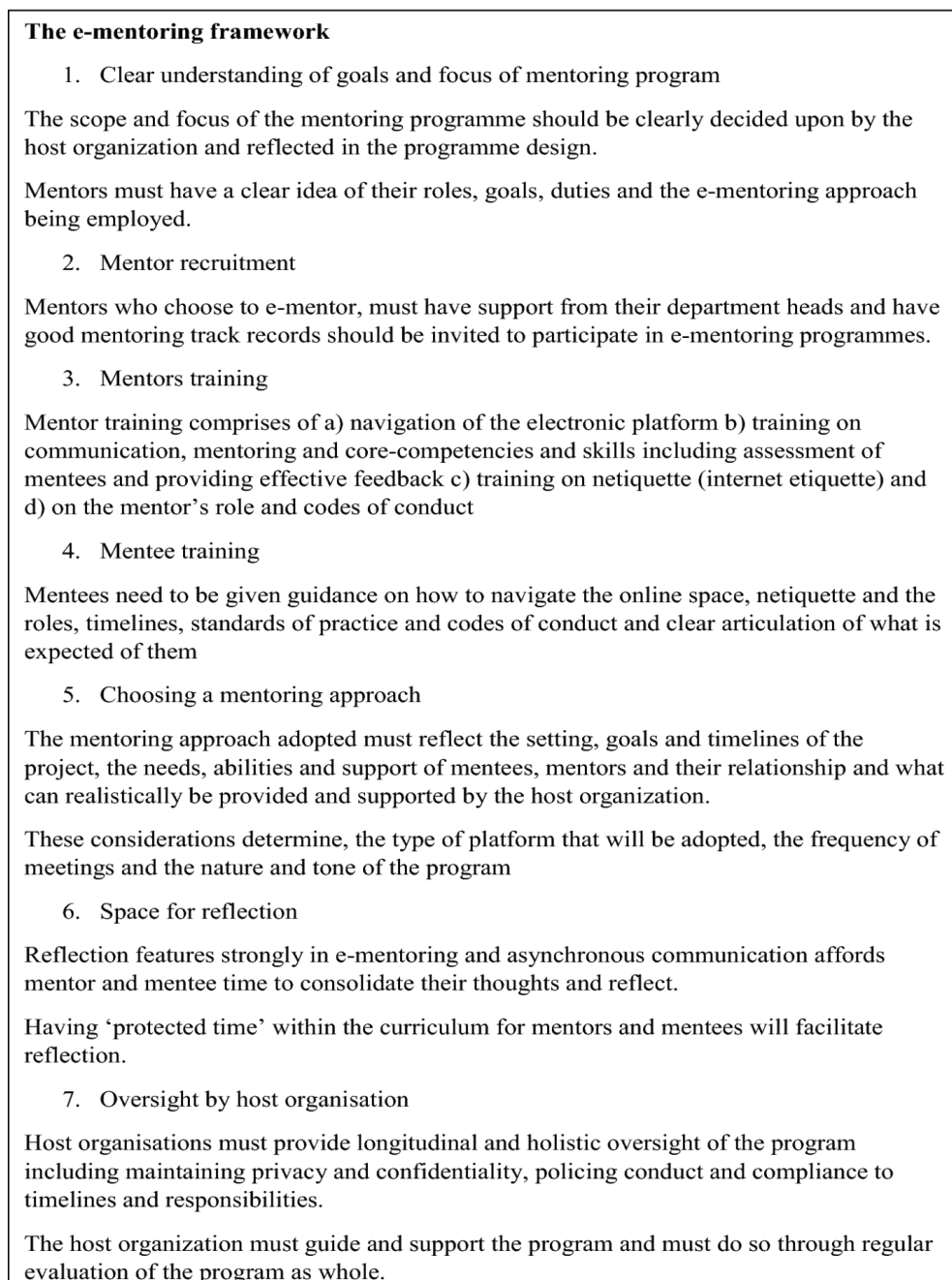
⁹ This campaign is one of the examples: [<https://shapingtheworld.lse.ac.uk/>], Accessed 10 April 2022

¹⁰ Chong, J.Y., et al. *Enhancing mentoring experiences through e-mentoring: a systematic scoping review of e-mentoring programs between 2000 and 2017*, *Advances in Health Sciences Education* 25, 2020, pp. 195–226 [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-019-09883-8>]

¹¹ Deng, C.; Gulseren, D. B.; Turner, N., “*How to match mentors and protégés for successful mentorship programs: a review of the evidence and recommendations for practitioners*”, *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 43 No. 3, 2022, pp. 386-403, [<https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-01-2021-0032>]

¹² Abbott, I., *Being an Effective Mentor: 101 Practical Strategies for Success*, NALP, 2018, [<https://www.nalp.org/productdetail/?productID=264>]

Figure 1. The e-mentoring framework¹³



¹³ Deng, C.; Gulseren, D. B.; Turner, N., *op. cit.*, note 11

In light of the legal profession, it is interesting that provision of online legal services had notably increased even before the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Chinese online legal service platforms have shown to be successful before 2020. The reasons for success were usually rather pragmatic. These include flexibility (i. e. scheduling autonomy) both for the clients and the lawyers and compensation for less offline work for lawyers despite lower professional status.¹⁴ Thus, the development of online mentoring platforms may be well in line with the digital legal market. Some studies suggest that e-mentoring may not be as efficient as face-to face mentoring and that the reason for that could be connected with the gender of the mentor. This was, for instance, the case in the observed online peer mentoring that resulted in less psychosocial support, career support, and post-mentoring mentee's results. That happened only for those with male mentors and it was mainly attributed to male mentors compressing their conversations in the chat when compared to live interactions.¹⁵

4. KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Setting the scene: Career aspirations of the final year law student and young legal professionals

In order to obtain the big picture on the career intentions of the respondents, several questions were asked in the survey. These were meant to cover the topics of their career goals, plans, resources to achieve them, possible obstacles and prerequisites for the job market. Table 1 shows the key topics that emerged when asked about the overall career goals of the respondents.

¹⁴ Yao, Y., *Uberizing the Legal Profession? Lawyer Autonomy and Status in the Digital Legal Market*, British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. 58, No. 3, 2019, pp. 483–506, [doi: 10.1111/bjir.12485]

¹⁵ Kimberly A. Smith-Jentsch, et al., *A comparison of face-to-face and electronic peer-mentoring: Interactions with mentor gender*, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Vol. 72, No. 2, 2008, pp. 193-206

Table 1. Career goals (intentions, motivation, ideal practice)

Key topics	Illustrative examples of the answers provided
Law offices	<p>“After graduating from college, become a trainee lawyer in a law firm, continuously develop my knowledge and skills and continue to study, pass the bar exam and become a top lawyer.”</p> <p>“My ultimate goal is to open an independent law firm. For now, I have more affinity for civil, commercial and financial law, but I would like to try my hand at criminal law as well, at least during my internship at the law firm. I am also interested in the field of legal and financial consulting.”</p> <p>“Develop a boutique office for up to 7 employees / Develop a highly professional specialised (boutique) law firm.”</p>
EU /international organisations and master studies	<p>“LLM and/or work in international organisations / EU organisations (human rights, international development, migration, diplomacy).”</p> <p>“I would love to complete an MBA at some stage in my career. I am very interested in entrepreneurial ventures, but I expect that time will show if there is room for that, and if so, in which direction.”</p> <p>“After taking the bar exam in my home (Croatian) jurisdiction, my main ambition is to gain international experience in several countries in the field of international (public) law. Ideally - an internship in an international public organisation and in an established “larger” office where I would encounter issues of international law.”</p>
Work-life balance	<p>“Balance of personal satisfaction, material security, family life and contribution to the community.”</p> <p>“Have a stable job without excessive stress, even at the cost of a lower salary.”</p> <p>“Lead a team / department, be a recognized expert in their field, know how to balance private and business life.”</p> <p>“Gain as much knowledge and experience as possible. Being successful and committed to what I will do, constantly improving. The ideal practice would be to work with someone who can pass on their knowledge, experience and advice to me. I strive to be great in my profession.”</p>

Table 1. shows rather clear ambitions of the interviewees with many of them emphasising importance of the work-life balance already at the early career stage. As a long term advice, Ida Abbott¹⁶ strongly advocates preparing a career development plan and checking it and, if needed, revising it on a regular basis. In the next step,

¹⁶ Šimić Banović, R.; Alpeza, M., *Razvoj karijere i mentorstvo u pravnoj struci*. CEPOR, 2021 [http://www.cepor.hr/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CEPOR-Razvoj-karijere-i-mentorstvo-web.pdf]

the interviewees were asked in more depth about their resources, tactics, plans and expected barriers on their career path.

The most representative answers include:

- “Lots of experience, knowledge, work and learning.”
- “I have a strategy for achieving these goals, and I need to graduate, get involved in as many projects in the target area as possible, which are not related to my studies, and improve my financial literacy.”
- “Find an environment that allows for progress, mentoring, collaborating with many clients, making a good impression based on the work done, expanding contacts, further education and leaving the comfort zone for training in other areas,”
- “I believe that strong internal motivation to work, adaptability to change and a proactive attitude are key factors for achieving goals. These traits will often be tested throughout our professional lives and we will often encounter conditions that are not ideal, but with focus and commitment to work tasks we will find it easier to get through such periods.”
- “First of all, to graduate from law school, to invest in further education, especially in the field of financial literacy (e.g. further specialisation in the field of economics, taking courses in accounting / bookkeeping). In addition to further education and financial resources, investments should be made in acquiring knowledge and skills in overcoming obstacles in terms of terminology and improving foreign languages, English in particular.”
- “As the most important item, I would set aside a lot of effort and work, and then the financial resources needed to make a person independent in their work. Also, I would like to single out the need for managerial and economic skills and interpersonal relationships in running a business, office, etc.”
- “I have a strategy: a mentoring relationship, consciously monitoring my working methods and evaluating skills, identifying the necessary training, consciously exposing myself to certain projects to improve my skills, etc.”
- “To achieve the above goal, it is necessary to continue education in one of the internationally recognized LLM studies - specialisation in international public law, international arbitration, etc. Obstacles I will encounter are financial in nature (since many LLM programs are expensive programs) and such that the competition for the small number of places they offer is extremely high. I have been working on the strategy of achieving this goal since the second year of law studies at the Faculty of Law in Zagreb, when I became involved in numerous projects where I gained valuable experience that I hope will be enough for me to enroll in LLM. After LLM, I hope to practice / work abroad with

the aim of gaining diverse experience and finding a narrower sphere of interest in the field of international law.”

- “I guess choosing a law firm is a very important moment to develop the direction of my career and my skills until I pass the bar exam. Certainly, one of the biggest obstacles is the coronavirus epidemic, due to which the economic situation and the labour market could suffer to a greater extent than now in a year, but I believe that I will overcome that obstacle.”
- “To achieve success in law, I believe that one of the most important factors is character. I have a great desire to develop my skills, learn and believe in my abilities, and I am aware of my weaknesses and negative traits.”
- “I need my own clients!”

...but also...

- “I have a very vague strategy.”
- “Achieving these goals will require a lot of work and dedication, graduate college, and lifelong learning. I don’t have a detailed strategy at the moment.”
- “I have a framework plan for education, but I do not have a specific strategy.”
- “I do not know. I have no strategy.”

The answers to these questions provide a heterogeneous mosaic that is most likely to reflect the attitudes of the full population of that age and professional background. Many of them seem to be rather focused on their career goals, well aware of the reality and milestones needed to be reached, emerging and existing obstacles. They predominantly emphasise lifelong learning, the urge to be flexible and to upgrade one’s skills and competences throughout the whole career. Still, some of them possess only an ambiguous plan and lack ideas about their career.

4.2. Legal education, job market needs and career progress

Most respondents feel ready and rather competent while at the same time noticing room for improvement. Some complain about the lack of practical skills and make a distinction in case they need to look for a job abroad such as this one:

- “I feel insufficiently ready to enter the foreign labour market, while after almost a year spent as a trainee lawyer I feel relatively ready to advance in the domestic labour market in the form of employment in another office or other institution.”

Regarding their legal education, the respondents usually consider the lack of various soft skills, practical experience and critical thinking. They argue that Croatian legal education predominantly relies on the reproduction of the

readings and consequently fails to incorporate sufficient training on the vital soft skills. The respondents emphasised the need of improving their negotiation, presentation, sales and similar skills as well as having more work experience. Findings presented in this study are mostly in line with the findings of a similar study conducted ten years ago.¹⁷ It could be argued that not much has changed in the meantime. Other important issues are included in the following statements:

- “Mostly practical knowledge, case study approach, taking exams focused on the application of information, not their mere reproduction. ... I am sorry that most of the studies of law in Croatia are focused on the method of mere memorization and reproduction of facts. In my opinion, such an approach to students and the subject is completely outdated.”
- “Obtaining information during legal education about various career options, especially non-traditional ones that do not include law, judiciary or legal service, and linking theory with practice, precisely to gain a picture of the daily routine of individual jobs - writing lawsuits, complaints, objections, discussions proceedings before judicial or administrative bodies, etc.”
- “I find that I lack knowledge of foreign languages since at work I often find myself in a situation where I have to communicate with foreigners, who prefer their language being spoken. Furthermore, practical experience in various branches of law, contact with contracts and litigation, etc. is something we almost do not encounter at law school, which makes the period after direct employment more difficult and arduous - a lot of time is spent learning some things “from scratch”.”
- “We lack everything! OMG, since I have emigrated, every day I identify the knowledge and skills I should have obtained during my studies. And I was among the best students. What would the mediocre ones say?”

In the next stages of their career, the interviewees would like to acquire and/or improve some of the essential skills for the (junior) lawyers who are either self-employed or employed in a law office, a company or possibly in an international organisation: self-presentation/promoting skills, networking, sales of legal services (ethical, of course), finding and keeping new clients (especially when founding their own law offices), other complementary skills. But also, some young professionals (towards mid-career stage) claim they need to know how to identify market trends, and once they recognise the niche(s) they want to know how to spe-

¹⁷ Vedriš, M.; Dujšin, U.; Šimić Banović, R., *Uloga kolegija Ekonomska politika u obrazovanju pravnika: Iskustva Bolonjskog sustava obrazovanja na Pravnom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu*, *Pravnik* Vol. 51, No. 102, 2017, pp. 127-138, [<https://hrcak.srce.hr/192607>]

cialise in that niche in a small market like Croatian. Boutique law office remains an increasingly attractive and needed topic for some young lawyers.

Recent graduates mostly state:

- “I would like to learn how to attract as many clients as possible as a lawyer and maintain a quality business relationship with them, how to combine additional education and work, and how to start learning about an area of law that I have not dealt with so far (or avoid it).”
- “First of all, I would love to see what a real world law firm looks like. I would love to hear tips to help me with my further education and work.”
- “Since I do not want to build a career in the direction of advocacy, I think that a general introduction to the labor market in the legal profession, or what all the possibilities the legal profession opens up to us, would be interesting and useful.”

Young professionals have further developed their ideas:

- How to get along with different groups and profiles of people, how to be less emotional at work and not take everything personally, and how to know where to set and draw the limit.
- Elements of the entrepreneurial spirit needed for lawyers.
- Exchange of experience in law
- Use of new technological tools.
- How to find new clients and how to open my own office.
- Techniques and skills of communicating with clients, taking into account difficult personalities, personal involvement and “exposure” than is the case in large law firms when working with legal entities.
- Basics of business communication, negotiation, lobbying, peaceful settlement of disputes.
- Information on opportunities outside the Republic of Croatia.
- Psychological skills - setting boundaries in an office environment.
- Experiences of American lawyers in terms of relations with judges, relations with clients....

4.3. Career services provided

In terms of their ‘real life’ experience in legal practice, the respondents’ answers vary from an obligatory student practice that was not useful as expected to very useful experiences in Croatia (law offices, ombudsman, corporate sector, Law

Clinic at the Faculty of Law, student assistants' work) and abroad (EU institutions, law offices). Related to job search and employment opportunities in general, they mostly have an idea on the technical procedure, but they do lack skills for proactive job search.

- “I think I know. In addition to applying to office vacancies, many are hired by submitting an open application or by personal recommendation.”
- “As for the Croatian market - I know a little bit, based on the experience of friends and acquaintances. As for the Brussels market (lawyers, EU institutions), I know a lot because I have been here for over five years.”
- “I learned most about the employment opportunities on the labour market in the legal profession from my Zagreb Law School colleagues as well as from my LSE colleagues, personal research and through acquaintances in the profession, i.e. after graduation and through encounters with different people. I am aware of the possibility of finding a job through various channels as well as tools that can be useful, such as LinkedIn platforms, certain websites, networking benefits, employment processes in institutions and the like.”
- “I am familiar with employment opportunities in the domestic market and I believe I know how to start looking for a job and eventually get it somewhere. I would like to gain insight into employment opportunities in the foreign market and in the branches of law that are not as represented in Croatia as abroad.”

(Former) students having Western education experience are well aware of the importance of the career counselling during undergraduate and graduate studies. They consider it precious for their overall professional development, attitude and skills like preparing motivation statement and CV. Yet, formal career service (like the ones in Western Europe and USA) does not exist at the Croatian Law Faculties. Most students did not experience any sort of continuous and formal career counselling during their studies. Yet, some of them attended lectures on career development organised by student associations and some professors. Furthermore, there is no structured and continuous platform that would help students find a job. From time to time the Faculty serves as co-organiser of Career Days. Students and former students find the help and recommendations of certain professors very useful. These are usually from the Departments where those students acted as student assistants, so the professors had worked with them closely. Some respondents recognise the individual advice they got from those professors or senior colleagues as very valuable. To underline the comparison between the provision of career support services in Western countries and in Croatia, here is the excerpt from the interview with an alumna being education both in Zagreb and in the Western Europe and now working for an EU institution:

“...I realised that at my current job and during my LLM I got used to a “buffet” of opportunities to upgrade myself, to network and to reflect proactively on my professional path with expert support provided for all of that. Quite contrary to that “buffet”, in Croatian educational institutions I was mostly offered some crumbs which at that time I considered great, but, in order for our graduates to be competitive in an international environment, much more should be offered.”

4.4. THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING

When asked about the features of an ideal law practice, the interviewees often emphasise the role of a competent and engaged mentor and/or supervisor:

- “Working with a mentor who can be relied on and in front of whom I am not afraid to make mistakes.”
- “Specialised law office. Because today the law is so broad and the market requires specialisation. But, the problem is that the size of Croatian market rarely allows specialisation.”
- “An office where I have responsibility and various jobs so that I can learn as much as possible and finally decide in which direction I want to specialise.”
- “Ideal practice would contain the following elements: dynamism, constant learning, quality relationships with co-workers in the workplace.”
- “Paid internship that involves working with a mentor on various projects, where the intern’s work can be immediately evaluated and therefore learned immediately.”
- “Getting started in the legal department in a corporation and merit-based advancement.”
- “A practice in which detailed feedback is obtained often and the possibility of learning with healthy interpersonal relationships.”
- “First of all, work with a quality mentor, from whom I will gain the necessary knowledge and experience, in the areas that interest me, so that I can gradually develop myself.”
- “Exposure to a number of frequent problems and situations of the relevant field of law, with taking responsibility for the preparation and execution of the task, but also clear mentoring and monitoring of the final product of the work. I believe that both of these aspects are needed in order to gain independence, develop creativity and the necessary skills, but with mentoring as ensuring the effectiveness of learning and the much-needed provision of security support in the beginning.”

- “An ideal legal practice is one in which a good and engaged mentor is present. Practice with a lot of responsibility, trust of the boss / principal, support and resources, with the possibility of additional education.”
- Also, when asked about their expectations on acquiring and upgrading practical, everyday aspects of practising law (such as conflicts of interest, client trust, monitoring the work of trainees), the respondents provided the answers similar to this one:
- “I think that in Croatia this knowledge is acquired through practice and years of work, and it is up to us how quickly we will adopt it. Also, many life situations that an individual has gone through, regardless of the job, are an important factor ... It would certainly be useful if there were workshops or seminars where you could learn more about it.”
- “Since I work in a small office that can be described as a family business, from the very beginning of my employment, I deal with everyday aspects of this job - caring for clients, not just performing tasks, monitoring and encouraging my own work and learning, attracting new clients, etc.”

In addition, the respondents argue that these topics would be vital for their further professional development: making the best use of the mentoring relationship, choosing a profession, niche and/or office according to personal preferences, importance of the entrepreneurial spirit for establishing and developing law offices: acquiring new clients and managing the relations with them, promotion and self-promotion, financial literacy, etc. Overall, mentoring is considered highly important in many aspects during the studies and at the labour market. Yet, the interviewees perceive a gap between its considerable importance on one hand and its insufficient availability at all study and employment stages on the other. Based on their experience, they also note another gap between the Western countries and Croatia, it is related to the mentoring development and overall career support. This refers both to their LLM studies and their work experience. As a way forward, the interviewees feel a pressing need for continuous quality mentoring. Based on their experience so far, they would like it to be more systematic, more coherent rather than informal, from time to time, in cases of urgency. The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the important tests of the mentoring relationships. According to Ida Abbott¹⁸, quality mentoring relationships served as a vital professional and personal support mechanism in those difficult circumstances. Numerous mentors and mentees witnessed the benefits of upgrading themselves through that kind of (mutual) support. Some of the benefits perceived include enhanced

¹⁸ Ida Abbott: Mentoring webinar (held online on April 13, 2021) and semi-structured conversations in preparation of the webinar

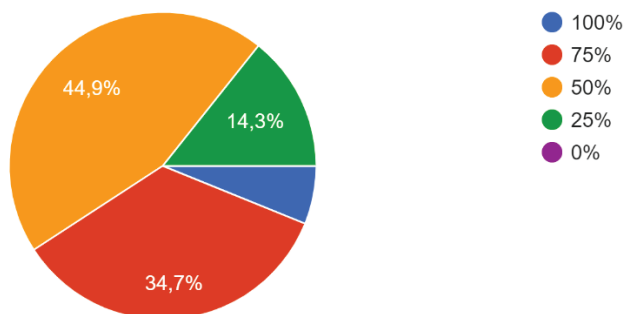
resilience, more innovative ideas, higher levels of flexibility and empathy. In addition, workplace mentoring adds to the continuity in client relationships that consequently leads to increased credibility and reliability. Ida Abbott mentioned the case of retirement, but even more of an illness or similar circumstances that required an immediate takeover. Moreover, the ‘reverse mentoring’, defined as juniors mentoring seniors, is perceived to be on the rise in the United States. It increases reliance and trust in the mentoring relationship, encourages young professionals to contribute to their workplace and is usually aimed at enhancing the IT skills of their senior colleagues (social media are among the most requested topics for the ‘reverse mentoring’).

In order to further assess the mentoring status, development and perspectives among law professionals in Croatia, the findings from the post-webinar satisfaction survey present valuable inputs. Webinar ‘Mentoring Matters – The Impact, Mechanics and Benefits of Being a Mentor’ was held in April 2022. As shown in Graph 1, for most of the respondents, the majority of seminar information was new. Furthermore, as presented in Graph 2, almost 70 % of the participants can use the webinar information immediately. Also, a vast majority (93,9%) of the participants would like to learn more about mentoring.

Graph 1. What do the respondents already know about mentoring?

What percentage of the information was new to you?

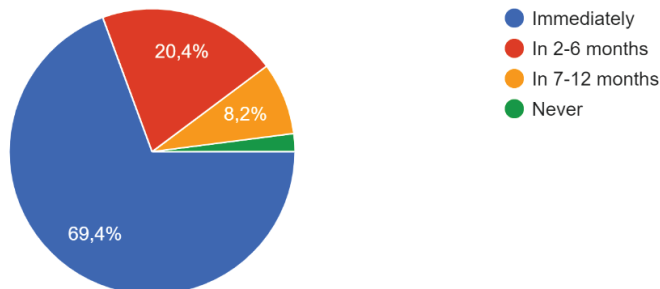
49 odgovora



Graph 2. Immediate use of the mentoring webinar information

I can use this webinar information:

49 odgovora



The respondents assess that the most useful webinar sections were the following:

- Mentoring Functions, Old vs. New Concepts, Mentoring vs. Sponsorship vs. Coaching;
- Elements of Successful Mentoring Relationship, A Mentoring Plan, Communication Techniques;
- Good Mentoring Habits, Feedback and Feed-forward, Overcoming Obstacles, Pandemic Mentoring.

The afore-presented list could be useful for the future organisers of the mentoring training. Namely, a vast majority (93,9 %) of the participants would like this training to be organised by their Bar Association, Corporate Lawyers' Association or Law School. In general, the respondents consider that the following organisations and professionals should be taking a lead in providing life-long learning and professional development education for lawyers: senior mentors, colleague, experienced lawyers; established business coaches who are also lawyers; law professors from various law schools; the Bar Association, Corporate Lawyers' Association; Chamber of Commerce, but also, as per advice from webinar, not one, but multiple mentors/coaches are the optimal way.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The benefits of mentoring are identified primarily for mentees, but increasingly for the organisations and mentors as well. Same as mentoring schemes, career support services are common and are deemed to be well developed and highly valuable in

the Western Europe and in the United States. These countries are mentioned because, in addition to their leading positions in legal education and practice, a part of the respondents, when assessing the situation in Croatia, relied on their first-hand experience of studying and/or working in the West. In addition, the insights of a well-known consultant, lawyer and awarded author from the USA are used. The study is rather timely as it stresses the (increased) importance of mentoring relations in the circumstances of exogenous shocks such as the global pandemic.

The findings suggest a substantial room for improvement both at the university level and among the employers in legal practice in Croatia. At the university level, this would include establishing a professional career centre(s) in the law schools in addition to the already existing legal career fairs that are usually organised several times a year. Among the employers, two compatible directions of actions are recognised. One is raising the awareness on the importance and advantages of mentoring at the workplace and the other one is mentoring training provided by bar association, law schools, corporate lawyers' and other associations. Finally, linking the employers and law schools could be a win-win if mentoring schemes would, for instance, be organised by the alumni associations with a long-term perspective.

Note: The author would like to thank survey respondents and focus group participants for their valuable inputs. A special thanks goes to Ana Martinić for her research help and comments.

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