

Akmeology – The Science of Reaching the Top

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In the Czech Republic and in the west as a whole, akmeology counts among the lesser known disciplines. By the majority of definitions, it is a science of adulthood. The Greek word akme, from which the name is derived, is most often translated as the climax of a given process, its summit, its pinnacle (Hartl, 2000). Akme occurs, when the person feels that their goals have been achieved, their potential fully realized, that there is nothing “higher” to strive for, and the people around them share the opinion. Akmeology is, put simply, the science of how to achieve this pinnacle.

While developmental psychology speaks of akme as a personal pinnacle of every individual, which may be achieved in a number of areas in life, be it creative activity, civil position, family position or maturity as a person – and thus a person can experience several akmes in his life – akmeology as an independent discipline focuses on maximum development of one’s potential in the area of work, and on the concept of professionalism, which brings it close to the current psychology of work and organization.

Since 1928 when the Soviet scientist B. B. Rybnikov first used the term akmeology «акмеология» as the name of a science of the development of mature persons, the discipline has gone a long way. Since time immemorial, elements of the future discipline of akmeology have existed in other disciplines, especially philosophical axiology and ethics – later in the newly established psychology.

In mid-20th century, the famous Russian psychologist B. G. Ananiev included akmeology in the system of human sciences (becoming their spiritual father) and opened the first laboratory for their active research. In the 90s, a first department of akmeology and psychology of professional activity has been founded at the Russian Academy of Civil Service. In 1995, an institute of psychology and akmeology was established in St. Petersburg.

Other departments and research sites followed which offered akmeology as a master's or doctoral program, or provided the opportunity to attend a variety of courses on the topic. Currently, there are two professional journals available in the Russian Federation dedicated to akmeology, and a number of textbooks and professional monographs have been published. Today, akmeology is actively researched by Bodayev (А. А. Бодалев), Dierkacz (А. А. Деркач) and Kuzmina (Н. В. Кузьмина) (www.acmeology.com).

Akmeology is dedicated to the issues of reaching the highest degree of individual development and the associated questions of self-discipline and self-actualization, which links it closely with the humanist schools of psychology and psychotherapy. Its central task is to examine the factors which lead a person to the pinnacle of their career and make them become a professional in their field, as well as examine career types and the conditions and circumstances contributing to the growth of the professional abilities of an individual. The key is to identify influences aiding this development and the ways in which they can be directly supported, as well as to identify negative factors and risks. Akmeology attempts to analyze and get closer to the inner process of professional and personal growth, which would otherwise only become apparent thanks to the professional results achieved. One of the methods used is therefore a social experiment in the real environment.

Using various forms of training, and methods such as finding resources, optimization of emotional and personal stability, development of creative potential and activation of self-regulation, the client is lead towards reaching professionalism (Dierkacz, 2012).

As already mentioned, the central terms of akmeology are professional and professionalism. Beyond professional competence, a vital role in the concept of the professional is played by cultural competence (communicative, semantic), social competence (e.g. relationships with co-workers), motivational competence and value competence (Kholdova, 2008). Today, akmeology can answer the critical question of how to help a person fully realize their potential (already from childhood and youth), and can help bring valuable stimuli to the field of pedagogy and andragogy. Creativity and a high level of professionalism are now viewed as essential human resources, among others also in the context of solving global modern problems (Kholdova, 2008).

The issues of professionalism, creativity and the formation of a mature personality have been and are studied in other disciplines as well. This can help explain the absence of development of akmeology as a separate scientific discipline in the United States and a portion of Europe. In the form in which I encountered it in the Russian Federation, akmeology is an interdisciplinary science with its own history, terminological and methodological apparatus, and a comprehensive set of diagnostic methods and training procedures. It does not put emphasis only on development, but on its pinnacle form itself. It may thus be of much use in professional training of future specialists, and the akmeologist may become an advisor to your professional career.

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