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Skills and Career Development for Young People with Higher Education in Business

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a questionnaire-based survey, designed by the authors and completed by students enrolled in the Master of Business Administrations course at a major university in the Romanian province of Transylvania. Our approach is justified by the urgent need to verify to what extent the training received by our students offers the further development possibilities needed by Romanian employers. The survey was conducted with 518 master's degree students. The study's findings confirmed the hypotheses formulated on the topics of: young people's success in the labour market; the manifestation of entrepreneurial spirit; the practical utility of the acquired knowledge and aspirations for professional development and employers stimulating the increase of competency and creativity levels. Whilst aimed at the success of youth in the labour market and at the development of companies working in Romania (as investments of Romanian capital and from abroad), the resulting information will be used to improve the structure and content of university curricula, in order to: increase professional competency, improve practical work skills and stimulate creativity and adaptability to employers' requirements.

Keywords: organizational change, professional development, competence and creativity, labour market and employment, company development, Romanian capital and from abroad

1. Introduction

Change, in the sense of development, is a vital issue for any company, especially in the critical state of the Romanian economy.

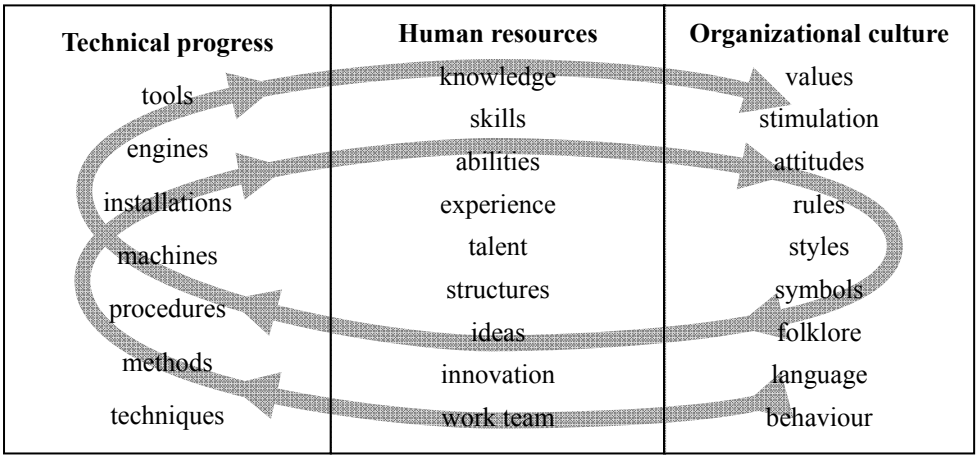

Figure 1. Organizational change

Source: Câmpeanu-Sonea & Sonea, 2011, p. 210

In this context, this paper aims to determine to what extent young people with a university education, who are a resource of competence and creativity, manage to satisfy the requirements of employers, offer the Romanian companies (as investments of Romanian capital and from abroad) the human resources necessary for quality work, ensure the adaptability required by employers for the capitalization of material and energy resources, and attract the capital necessary for a rapid economic growth.

In our opinion, the evolution of a company can be illustrated as shown in Figure 1. The progress factors are the techniques and technology, which determine the development of human resources in a specific framework for organizational culture, called "the human resource's personality". But a flexible organizational culture stimulates the human resource's evolution, through competence and creativity and technical development. The same spiral analogy can be configured for evolution at a macroeconomic level. Change in the macroeconomic area determines a change at an organizational level. The effects on human resources determine changes in organizations and in the macro and global economies.

2. Human Resources' Role in the Process of Change

Transformations in the organization as a whole include large and complex issues. These transformations are required by the need to resist in the competitive struggle on the domestic and international market.

Transformation, in the sense of development and adaptation, has been considered vital since the early 70s' by some authors, like George Land (Land, 1973, "Grow or Die").

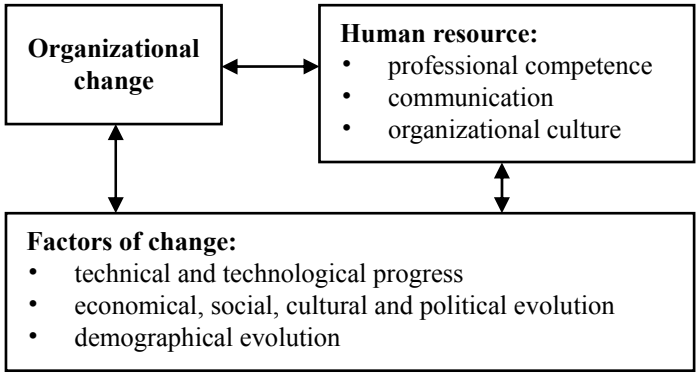

Figure 2. The role of the human resource in the organizational change

Source: Câmpeanu-Sonea & Sonea, 2011, p. 5

Change is the result of certain needs for the organization's operation and may be achieved through research carried out by specialists. On the other hand, the process of innovation, step by step development and empirical management has provided a process of change that has evolved in parallel with the one scientifically controlled and "pressured" to go faster (Burke, 2008, pp. 27–48). Psychologically, the issue of change is, in essence, acceptance (of change). Fear of change is an objective factor, acting at both an individual and group level (smaller or larger), similar to the transition from something known (even familiar) to something unknown, uncertain, with risky implications (Clarke, 2002, pp. 86–88).

For this reason, change is usually required by external factors (even if it is favourable and has immediate positive effects) and the "transmission belt" is found in the organizational communication process (see, for example, Elving, 2005, p. 134).

At an individual level, changes should be reflected in the development and results of all processes regarding the human resources of the company. At the group level, it is necessary to create better structured and cohesive work teams, as well as promoting a system for multifunctional group formation. Also, the company management must use techniques to prevent and solve intergroup conflicts, instead of stimulating inefficient competition (see, for example, Dygert & Jacobs, 2006).

People represent the active resources of the organization, the most valuable and the only ones able to produce and reproduce (at the same level of quality or at a higher technical level) all other resources (Milkovich & Boudreau, 1991). Increasing the level of competence is, first of all, an issue for the company management, who must ensure the service quality required by the consumer, through a constant process of learning at the

organizational level (Armstrong, 2006, p. 544–547). Secondly, the company employees must improve their professional training and experience to the level of personal competence required by career integration and development (Câmpenu-Sonea & Sonea, 2006, p. 71–75).

The learning process, understanding new values, consumer feelings and desires, become critical, given the fact that competitors can copy tangible goods and services. But, to an increasing extent, intangible goods underlie the competitive advantage (Coulson-Thomas, 2002, p.107).

3. Potential Offered by Young People with Higher Education for the Development of Companies Working in Romania

3.1 Study Objectives and Methodology

Starting from these ideas, we proposed a study (a sociological survey) on the prospects offered by young people with higher education for solving the problems of the Romanian economy. Our survey questionnaire is based on our conception regarding the development of organizational competence.

Providing the human resources necessary for the organization is achieved through a number of processes which, in our opinion, include: human capital strategic planning, recruitment and selection, integration and professional development, career planning and development of staff. The objective behind the process is to ensure performance at the organizational level or *organizational competence* for maximum business efficiency and ongoing adaptation to the socio-economic environment, as well as the internal and external consolidation of the organization.

Competence at the organizational level, for the organization's competitiveness in the market economy, requires the creation of *individual professional competencies* and their use to gain the best advantages for the organization. However, this process necessarily implies schooling and professional orientation to achieve those individual competences capable of performance and for a proper correlation of personal interests with the needs of the organization (see Figure 2).

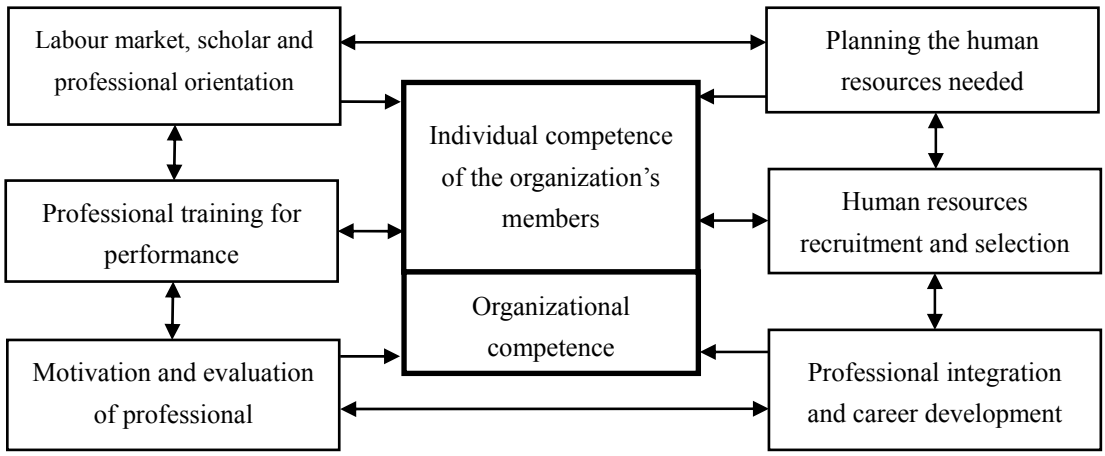

Figure 3. A developmental model of organizational competence

Source: Câmpeanu-Sonea et al., 2011, p. 301–318

A process that has to be emphasised is motivation and professional performance evaluation. This process has its place in the model, integrated into the system but having a direct and close connection with professional training, the integration of people into the organization and their career development.

Thus, in our opinion, achieving a certain level of organizational competence, and switching to a higher level, implies *a certain way of correlating the processes* shown in Figure 2, each of these processes having a significant contribution to creating and developing individual competences, as well as to achieving a certain result at the organizational level (Câmpeanu-Sonea et al., 2011, pp. 301–318).

At this moment, the professional development and use of young people in the Romanian economy and society is an internal problem, but it has links with the evolution of European and global economies. In our approach, young people with higher education are important in two aspects: (1) as labour market supply—the way that a

potential resource reaches the employer (organization) and (2) as potential for change in the organizational framework (a source of competence, creativity and performance).

The research aim is to determine: to what extent did the students' competences suit the requirements of company performance? What are the main difficulties facing a full-time workplace? How could employers stimulate professional training and innovation in their companies? What are the paths and criteria for employees' career development? What are the main gaps in the students' training? To what extent do the students have an entrepreneurial spirit? How can the development of companies working in Romania be stimulated with capital from internal or international sources by better using young human resources with higher education?

The main hypotheses of this research are:

1) A large number of students *have already taken a job*, compelled by the tuition fees and the other expenses incurred during studies. Since it is difficult for young people to find a job compatible with the acquired qualification, given the current economic and social background of Romania, many students accept a job *from another area* of specialisation, or which requires *a level of qualification* different from that obtained at the end of the academic programme.

2) Among the surveyed students there are entrepreneurial minds, who *have started their own business*, although prevailingly of modest size or in an early stage of development.

3) The main challenge faced by young people on the labour market is particularly the *lack of experience*, as well as the gaps in their practical and applicative training during studies.

4) Young people, especially those who pursue several degree programs, postgraduate and master's studies, *are willing to improve their professional training*, to further their education, to pursue a specialisation or even requalification.

5) There is a serious *concern for innovation*. The young with sound professional training take a keen interest in innovation, while the employers, who are looking to secure the sustainability and welfare of their business, encourage creativity and the implementation of new ideas.

The survey was carried out in May–June 2012, on 518 master's students in Business Administration from an important University of Transylvania, working in companies situated in West and Northern Romanian counties (our research area).

The sample size was calculated using Taro Jamane's method (Serban, 2004, p. 78): $\mathbf{n=N/(1+N\times e^2)}$, where **n**=sample dimension, **e**=maximum of accepted error (**e=5%**, in our case), **N=1202**, the number of master's students in the Faculty studied; **n=300** (approximately). Because of our investigation objectives (the problems of the labour market and opportunities for success), the students were very interested in our survey and more than 300 persons were eager to answer our questionnaire. Our investigation's subjects were chosen randomly because, considering our objectives, it didn't matter who the respondents were, so we accepted a larger number of questionnaires. That was very useful, because only 60-63% of the respondents were employed persons or employers and therefore able to answer all 38 questions, representing about 300-325 persons.

The database of responses obtained was processed using a SPSS program. As a result we obtained: *univariate* analyses, i.e. the structure of the studied community based on responses to questions and *bivariate* analyses, i.e. the connection which may exist between the answers to the questions in the questionnaire, taken two by two. The connections were established according to the correlation coefficient value (nominal by nominal contingency coefficient value) and their significance was tested using the "chi square" test.

Bivariate analyses include: a table of frequencies for the two variables; a graphic; the analysis of association between the two variables.

The hypothesis referring to the existence of this connection will always be the same regardless of which the two variables are:

$$H^0: \chi^2 = 0 \text{ (there is no connection) or } H^1: \chi^2 \neq 0 \text{ (the connection exists).}$$

The significance of the connection, i.e. the probability that the connection exists, verified by the "chi square" test is given to us by the "Sig" dimension.

If Sig < 0.10 we can say with 90% probability that there is a connection between the two variables.

If Sig < 0.05 we can say with 95% probability that there is a connection between the two variables.

If Sig < 0.01 we can say with a 99% probability that there is a connection between the two variables.

For all groups of variables which have a connection, a fourth table will appear, called: Symmetric Measures. This table indicates the degree of association between the two variables through *"nominal by nominal contingency coefficient" (correlation coefficient).* This coefficient takes values between 0 and 1, where 0 means total independence and the more values approach 1, the higher the degree of association becomes.

3.2 Results of the Questionnaire—Univariate Analysis

3.2.1 Sample Structure and Labour Market

Our study sample consisted of 518 subjects who answered at least the first 20 questions from 38 on the questionnaire. The sample structure depicted by the subjects' answers is presented further on.

Table 1. Univariate analysis—structures and issues in the labour market

Question's subject	Structure (number) of answers					
Grades average	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	
			31.7%	37.3%	19.1%	
Work program	Full time	Part time	Own business	Not engaged		
	50.6%	3.9%	6.9%	38.6%		
Time till employment	< 1 month	1-3 months	3-6 months	6-12 months	No answer	
	23.7%	14.1%	10.2%	9.5%	35.5%	
Field of work	Same field as qualification	Other fields	Do not work			
	45.2%	26.1%	28.7%			
Satisfaction with the job*	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither, nor	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	No answer
	12%	31.1%	12%	4.2%	1.2%	29.5%
*Employed subjects	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither, nor	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	
	17%	49.9%	25.5%	6%	1.6%	
Acceptance of other job (multiple choice)	Other qualification	Other specialization	Higher qualification	Lower qualification		
	220 answ.	242 answ.	320 answ.	48 answ.		
Reasons of employers' rejection	Other specialization	Higher qualification	Lower qualification	Knowledge quality	Lack of experience	Other reasons
	68 answ.	56 answ.	40 answ.	31 answ.	304 answ.	37 answ.
Required experience	Same field	At workplace	In other areas	No answer		
	66.8%	14.5%	8.1%	10.6%		
Years of experience	1 year	2-5 years	6-10 years	No answer		
	27.4%	55.4%	0.6%	16.6%		
Useful for success (multiple choice)	Foreign languages	Computer knowledge	Theoretical knowledge	Practical knowledge		
	285 answ.	106 answ.	80 answ.	426 answ.		
Reasons of employers' appreciation (multiple choice)	Specialization	Service quality	Theoretical knowledge	Practical knowledge	Practical skills	Other aspects
	47 answ.	270 answ.	49 answ.	166 answ.	199 answ.	41 answ.

Level of education: 77.8% had a university education, 13.9% held a Master's Degree, 4.6% had studied at postgraduate level, 3.35% had only a high school education and 0.4% did not answer.

Fields of education: 73.4% studied in economical schools, 5.2% studied in technical schools, 5.2% studied natural sciences, 4.2% studied social sciences, 3.9% studied public administration and 8.1% studied in other fields.

Age: 94.4% of subjects were under 35 years old: 82.4% were under 25 years old and 12% were between 25 and 35 years old.

Gender: 32.2% of subjects were male, 67.6% were female and 0.2% did not answer.

Of the total subjects surveyed, 31.7% had average grades in the years of study until graduation of between 7 and 8; 37.3% had an average between 8 and 9, and 19.1% had an average between 9 and 10 (maximum grade) (see Table 1).

Of the total 518 respondents, 73.4% had graduated from an economical school. Technical schools, natural sciences, social sciences and public administration graduates represented shares between 5.2% and 3.9%. Those included in "other fields" were qualified in: military, police, arts, music, theology, etc.

Table 2. Univariate analysis—competence and professional development

Question's subject	Structure (number) of answers					
Competency vs. technical equipment*	Appropriate level	Higher level	Lower level	No answer		
	53.3%	18.5%	3.9%	24.1%		
*Employed subjects	Appropriate level	Higher level	Lower level			
	70.2%	24.7%	5.1%			
Competency vs. work performed*	Overqualified	Properly qualified	Under qualified	No answer		
	22.1%	48.5%	4.8%	24.5%		
*Employed subjects	Overqualified	Properly qualified	Under qualified			
	29.4%	64.2%	6.4%			
Professional development stimulation*	Encouraged by employer	Not encouraged	No answer			
	44.8%	28.8%	26.4%			
*Employed subjects	Encouraged by employer	Not encouraged				
	60.9%	39.1%				
Employers' targets	Higher specialization	Training improvement	Adapting to equipment	Higher productivity & quality	Career development	Other objectives
	117 answ.	61 answ.	38 answ.	45 answ.	87 answ.	8 answ.
Stimulating ways	Level of wages	Career development	Improving work conditions	Other ways		
	130 answ.	116 answ.	77 answ.	27 answ.		
Desire for further training*	Yes	No	No answer			
	76.6%	3.1%	20.3%			
*Employed subjects	Yes	No				
	96.1%	3.9%				
Type of knowledge needed from school	Theoretical concepts	Secondary degree	Practical skills	Other aspects of training		
	74 answ.	28 answ.	291 answ.	12 answ.		

Our first hypothesis is verified: students with a predictable specialization structure previous to their master's degrees are in an overwhelming proportion interested in filling a job (45.2% of respondents work in the same field as qualification; 26.1% work in other fields and only 28.7% do not work). Regarding the acceptance of another job, the respondents could each choose more than one of the responses suggested. Of the 518 subjects, 220 said they would accept a job that required another qualification; 242 would be willing to prepare for another specialization; 320 would agree to raising their qualification level, in order to work on a job that required a higher qualification; 48 would accept a job at a lower qualification level than that of their training (Table 1).

Our second hypothesis is also verified: there are a number of students with entrepreneurial spirit (6.9% of respondents already have their own business). They became owners of companies and they are directly interested in the efficiency, sustainability and development of a business (Table 1).

Those who were rejected by employers were asked to specify which of the reasons suggested by us best fitted. The greatest proportion of the 304 respondents answered lack of experience (see Table 1).

Therefore, the main cause for the difficulties faced by young people in the labour market is their lack of experience, which verifies the third hypothesis formulated by us; graduates do not have the necessary experience, even in the fields in which they were trained. Most employers require between 2 and 5 years of experience.

Respondents were asked to assess what is most useful for success in the labour market (multiple answers question). So, 285 responses emphasized the importance of a thorough knowledge of foreign languages (one, two or even many); 106 respondents believed that serious knowledge in the field of computers is useful; 80 people appreciated that more serious theoretical knowledge is necessary and 426 responses showed the need for practical knowledge (Table 1). Also, in the same vein, responses to the question, “what do you think your employers appreciate about your service” are interesting. Responses included: service quality (270); practical knowledge (166) and practical work skills (199) (see Table 1).

The conclusion is that, on the one hand, employers are interested in providing services to meet the level of the customer’s requirements but, on the other hand, these requirements lead to the need for solid practical knowledge and practical skills for work, i.e., experience.

3.2.2 Competence and Professional Development

Service quality, which is considered worthy of appreciation by most respondents, implies, however, increasing the level of competence in all areas: specialization, continuous improvement of professional training, (theoretical and practical knowledge and practical skills for work) and also creativity, willingness and ability to innovate.

According to the respondents, employers stimulate professional development of their own employees in 60.9% of cases (Table 2).

The employers’ targets in terms of stimulating professional training are, according to the respondents: specialization in a particular area (117 responses) and promotion of employees to a higher level (87 responses) (see Table 2).

Ways of stimulating the improvement of professional training (multiple-response question) recorded the following responses: by increasing the level of wages depending on the level of professional training (130); by promotion to a higher level (116) and by improving the conditions of work (77) (see Table 2).

There is also a desire for further professional development, according to their own statements, from 96.1% of the 518 respondents (Table 2). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis proposed above is also verified.

Regarding the activities carried out, respondents were asked to specify what kind of knowledge would be useful for them, knowledge that the school they graduated from did not offer (question with multiple answers). Responses included: specialized theoretical concepts (74) and practical work skills (291) (see Table 2); so, the usefulness of practice and the problems of lack of professional experience are emphasised once again.

3.2.3 Creativity and Career Development

When asked if the employed respondents consider that the company where they work stimulates innovation, we found that creativity is stimulated in 58.4% of cases (see Table 3).

Respondents accepted as motivational levers for stimulating innovation: awards for improvements to installations or methods of work (91); salary increases for the time after applying the innovation (90) and promotion to a higher hierarchical level (89) (Table 3).

Innovation attempts have been made in the case of 64.3% of employed persons, who have tried to introduce innovations in their workplace (Table 3).

The main results obtained from innovation trials have been listed by respondents as follows: improved working conditions (58); improvement of the quality of service to the customer (139) and an increase in business efficiency through better organization of work (144) (Table 3).

Table 3. Univariate analysis—creativity and career development

Question's subject	Structure (number) of answers					
Stimulating innovation*	Yes	No	No answer			
	43.6%	31.1%	25.3%			
*Employed subjects	Yes	No				
	58.4%	41.6%				
Levers for stimulating innovation	Awards	Shares of profit	Salary increase	Career development	Other levers	
	91 answ.	30 answ.	90 answ.	89 answ.	10 answ.	
Innovation attempts*	Yes	No	No answer			
	48.1%	26.6%	25.3%			
*Employed subjects	Yes	No				
	64.3%	35.7%				
Innovation results	Technical improvements	Better working conditions	Service quality	Cost diminish	Better organization	Other results
	49 answ.	58 answ.	139 answ.	49 answ.	144 answ.	6 answ.
What are the criteria? (multiple choice)	Training or specialization	Length of service	Professional results	Informal relationship	Other criteria	
	177 answ.	190 answ.	235 answ.	81 answ.	11 answ.	
Difference between 2 hierarchical levels	Professional training	Wages	Authority	Responsibility	Other differences	
	137 answ.	234 answ.	125 answ.	214 answ.	16 answ.	

From the responses received, we can see that the fifth hypothesis is also confirmed by the situation encountered by people in the community we studied.

Employers around the world prefer to hire people with experience in their field of work, which usually means people who are not too young. On the other hand, the desire for professional development, creativity and the desire for innovation, as well as the degree of involvement of young people can all be huge advantages when seeking adaptability, flexibility and organizational development.

Both professional development and creativity and interest for innovation are stimulated by promotion on the corporate ladder and career development of employees.

The criteria for promotion from the current position to the next hierarchical level, for those who responded to our survey are: professional development or specialization (177 cases); length of service (190 cases) and the professional results obtained (235) (Table 3).

The difference between two successive hierarchical levels, according to the respondents, is reflected in significant differences in: the employees training (137 responses); wages (234 responses); the authority they are invested with (125) and increased responsibility for decisions made (214) (Table 3).

3.3 Correlations between Answers to Questions—Bivariate Analysis

Between the level of education acquired and finding a job there is an acceptable intensity connection (the correlation coefficient is 0.232) (Table 4).

According to these results, the desire of many young people to pursue university studies, including postgraduate and masters' courses, appears to be perfectly justified.

There is an acceptable intensity connection between the average of marks obtained and the number of job contests in which the investigated subjects participated (0.279) (Table 4).

The distribution of the group according to the Gaussian Curve can be tracked both regarding marks and regarding the number of contests they participated in. More than half of the group of respondents (51.3%) represents individuals with marks between 7 and 10, who attended a reasonable number of contests (one to five).

Table 4. Bivariate analysis—correlations between answers

Correlated answers	Correlation coefficient	Sig ("chi square" significance)
Level of education acquired and finding a job	0.232	0.021
Average of marks obtained and the number of job contests	0.279	0.012
Desire for professional development and success in finding a job	0.497	0.000
Desire for professional development and receiving employment in the appropriate field of qualification	0.304	0.000
Satisfaction regarding the job occupied and desire for professional development	0.299	0.001
Satisfaction regarding the job occupied and availability for innovation	0.270	0.006
Employers' stimulation of professional training and stimulation of innovation	0.629	0.000
Desire for professional development and knowing the promotion criteria	0.534	0.000
Time necessary until promotion and desire for professional development	0.501	0.000

The desire for professional development correlates well with success in finding a job (the correlation coefficient is 0.497) and with receiving employment in the appropriate field of qualification (0.304) (Table 4).

In our opinion, satisfaction regarding the job occupied and the work performed plays an important role in increasing the individual's competence and creativity level. In our case, the satisfaction declared by the respondents regarding their workplace correlates with the desire for professional development, at a level of acceptable intensity (0.299) and with the availability for innovation (0.270) (Table 4).

A high intensity correlation exists between the employers' stimulation of professional training and stimulation of innovation (0.629) (Table 4). The conditions that employers create for stimulating an increase in the competence level depend, to a great extent, on the motivating factors. Thus, the desire for professional development correlates very well with knowing the promotion criteria by the investigated subjects (0.534) (Table 4).

For the same reason, the time necessary until promotion, according to respondents, correlates to an appreciable level of intensity, with their desire for professional development (0.501) (Table 4).

4. Conclusions

We consider that the objectives of our practical study have been achieved.

1) Our research hypotheses were confirmed. The student economists have already found a workplace, but many have accepted jobs in other areas or even with different levels of qualification required.

2) There are young people with entrepreneurial spirit, who have developed their own businesses.

3) Our subjects were willing to improve their professional training in order to develop their competence, to specialize or even to retrain.

4) The problems of the initial training were the lack of experience and gaps in practical and applicative knowledge.

5) In the labour market, it is a great advantage to be able to competently speak one or more foreign languages.

6) Concern for innovation does exist in young employees with good professional training and in employers who want to ensure their business viability and prosperity.

7) There is a very clear connection between the employer's motivational system and the employees' openness for professional development and creativity.

We have conceived an "Identikit" for a typical employee from our study sample i.e. a depiction, a portrait with

the main characteristics of the study's employees, based on information from the univariate analysis (Tables 1, 2 and 3). This person can be described as:

• a woman, up to 25 years old, with a university degree in economics and a grade marks average between 8 and 9, working full-time in the northern and western areas of Transylvania, who speaks two, three or even many languages;

• competence: she has an adequate level of qualification compared to the technical level and performance requirements of the workplace;

• she has a desire for professional training and innovation, achieving results in improving workplace organization and service quality development for a more efficient activity;

• she is interested in career development based on competency, professional performance and creativity;

• she is stimulated by the promotion criteria established by her employer.

The information revealed in this study will be used to improve the structure and content of university curricula, in order to: increase professional competency, improve practical work skills and stimulate creativity and adaptability to employers' requirements.

Areas identified for *future research* include:

• With masters' students and managers from successful companies we have already started to identify ways of improving the curricula and the training processes used on the Master's Course and in the relevant Faculty.

• We intend to continue research into the improvement of human resource training and use in the other Romanian counties.

• Also, as a follow-up to the survey of the students' training requirements, we will conduct a research on the opinions of employers from various areas of activity.

Research limitations

• The project to which our article is subordinated includes several hypotheses, which, due to the limited extent of this paper, are not commented upon. As such, the survey may seem incomplete in some regards.

• Also, the comprehensive results of the survey contain further information regarding the students' training, certain details provided in response to the 38 items of the questionnaire, which were not included herein, but will be used for the improvement of the educational system.

• There is previous research that we conducted on employers' opinions about our students' training, but a correlation with the results of this survey is difficult. Likewise, it is difficult to draw such correlation for other future surveys.

• The information contained in our database is obtained by means of a sociological inquiry, recording the surveyed subjects' opinions, at a certain point. As such, it cannot form a continuous series of data or a dynamic series. Nevertheless, the software we use, SPSS 10, enables the processing of data, to the point these correspond to the needs of our project.

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