

The Qualification Requirements of Companies and Businesses towards Their Staff

Захтеви компанија и предузећа на пољу квалификације запослених

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Abstract: It is a wide-spread phenomenon in Serbia that companies and enterprises train their freshly employed employees within the firm, thus avoiding spending financial resources by requesting another employee to train the newcomer. According to the half of the enterprises, (besides maintaining the adequate quality of the qualification content) training fees are highly relevant, therefore when training fees are planned for small enterprises their budget limitations need to be considered. The majority of companies tend to send only their highly qualified employees for further training, especially if they are legally obligated to do so (for instance, in the health sector) or if the changing laws/technologies require further training for employees (for instance, accountants, IT experts). The participants of various organized further trainings, courses are usually satisfied with the level and content of the training. Enterprises often lack the element of practical-oriented education from the educational system. Employers in Vojvodina require the following skills from their employees: communicational and organizational skills, digital competence as well as negotiation and presentation techniques.

Keywords: Companies and business, staff in training, adult education

Сажетак: У Србији фирме и предузећа своје нове раднике најчешће обучавају сами, у оквиру предузећа, јер тиме избегавају додатне трошкове. У више од половине предузећа сматра се да је, поред задовољавајућег квалитета садржаја обуке, од изузетног значаја накнада (школарина) за обуку, па из тог разлога треба узети у обзир и планиран буџет малих и средњих предузећа. Већина компанија само високо квалификоване раднике шаље редовно на даљу обуку, посебно ако закон то налаже (здравство), или ако промене примењене технологије то захтевају (нпр. рачуновође, ИТ стручњаци). Учесници доквалификација или тренинга су углавном задовољни нивоом и садржајем курсева. Предузетници сматрају да у образовању (у школама, као и у институцијама за образовање одраслих) недостаје применљивости знања у пракси. Послодавци у Војводини захтевају развој комуникативности, организационих способности, новине из информационе технологије, преговарања и вештине презентације.

Кључнeречи: компаније и предузећа, квалификације запослених, образовање одраслих

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Introduction

During the planning of regional policy of employment, ex-post measurements are required as a result of the large number of unemployed people; however, for the benefit of future employees the policy of employment expects ex-ante measurements (career agency, career advice office, adult education). In Serbia, the active and passive measurements of the National Employment Service are also present; however, they still have not introduced the aspect of monitoring and the facilitation of partnership building with institutions that are also oriented towards employment, such as school, employees, and employers. In certain regions, the cross-border movement of the population triggers common employment problems as well as the establishment of cross-border labor market and education system. (Gábrity Molnár, 2013, p. 231)

The new law on higher education was introduced in January 1st, 2013 in Serbia, according to which it is necessary to establish the adult education system. Proceeding from the hypothesis that since the law came into force, no significant measures have been introduced into this particular subsystem of the education. Additionally, the several positive opportunities and results of adult education have not been promoted among the public neither. The purpose of the present study is to analyze to what extent companies in Vojvodina resort to the alternatives provided by adult education and what training they lack for the qualification of their employees. This research has been carried out within the frames of the international research project, titled “*The foundation of the higher educational services attending upon the knowledge-industry in the region of South-Plain*” (2015). The Hungarian project co-coordinator, the University of Szeged, identified the employees as well as compared the labor force demand of companies with the current trends of educational institutions in the counties of South Hungary as well as in Vojvodina. Thus, the requirements of adult education could be formulated.

The present study is based on two empirical surveys. An online questionnaire filled in by employers/entrepreneurs in Vojvodina (102 subjects in 2015), and in-depth interview analysis conducted with the representatives of employers (Gábrity Molnár Irén (ed.) 2008).

1. Empirical research results regarding qualification and possibilities of employment in Vojvodina

1.1. Data collection

The empirical research was carried out via a Google Drive questionnaire¹. The poten-

¹ Data collection in Vojvodina was conducted by Renáta Baranyi, Viktória Beszédés and Enikő Ravasz, MA students of andragogy at the University of Szeged.

tial research subjects were selected from the online databases of *yellowpages.rs*, *privredni-imenik.com*, and *trzistesrbije.com*, which proved to be reliable and it also enable establishing contact with a large number of informants. The survey questions can be grouped accordingly: (a) general data of the company, (b) what types of qualifications/trainings their employees require, and (c) what specific qualification requirements companies have.

The research was carried out in 45 towns and some villages of Vojvodina (the majority of questionnaires were sent back from Novi Sad, Subotica and Kanjiža). 102 questionnaires were filled in, out of which 46% were individual entrepreneurs, 37% were *limited* liability companies, 6 and 7% were non-profit and other companies. According to their activities, the majority of the companies were involved in economic activities (25%), followed by representatives of processing industry as well as the information and communication sector (12–11%); finally, companies of agricultural, forestry, fishery as well as trades and car mechanic services (9-9%). The research subjects' economic activities reflect the region's statistical profile, so the data is representative.

“The continual growth in the number of employees in private companies is eye-catching, likewise the continuous drop in the number of employees in commercial subjects in social ownership. Since the large company-based structure of the former social and economic formation was not competitive, its place was taken over by small and medium sized companies, employing ten or less employees per units. The development potential of these small companies is weak, i.e. the private sector cannot absorb the labor force, who became unemployed due to cutdowns in the public sector, with adequate speed and capacity.” (Gábrity Molnár, 2011, p. 4).

The natural resources of the region notably influence the economic activities of the region, also determining the population's employment distribution (Габрић Молнар, 2008). The economic structure of Vojvodina, according to the number of employed people, shows that the ratio of activities is the highest in the agricultural sector and considerable in the processing industry (the total number of employed people within the two sectors is higher than the half of the business activities). The agricultural population of the region is 14% of the total population. The ratio of services, hospitality industry, real estate and economic services is rather low. Vojvodina is characterized by the high number of micro and small enterprises. The stabilization of these companies is an important factor of the economic reform in Serbia, as micro and small enterprises provide the one-third of the workplaces, but their economic efficiency is also relevant.

The survey aimed to reveal which category the enterprises could be grouped in based on their sizes. According to the research results, the 37% of companies are micro-enterprises, 51% are small-sized enterprises, 8% are medium-sized enterprises and

4% are large enterprises. The diagram shows that small-sized enterprises (51%) and micro-sized enterprises (37%) dominate the economy. The decision-making processes of micro and small-sized enterprises are dynamic, its owners and managers often coincide (very often family businesses), they often work with a small number of staff who usually live in the neighboring municipalities of the company. The number of large-sized enterprises is rather low, since their management is the most challenging for several reasons, such as the large number of staff, the intensified level of bureaucracy nowadays, so their response to social, economic or market changes slows down.

1.2. The qualification requirements of employers

Training related to new technologies, infrastructural equipment as well as the development of communicational skill proved to be the most demanding for companies. Large number of companies reported the necessity of professional further and re-training at institutions as well as courses realized within the frames of the company. The demands of business are versatile: 15% revealed the lack of digital competences among their staff. Obviously, employers consider digital competence as a basic expectation since the more modern the technology companies use, the more efficient their work is; furthermore, it also raises the economic competitiveness of the enterprise. 14% of companies reported the demand for non-formal trainings in the field of trade, marketing and business administration. There is an increasing demand for marketing and business administration training as it encourages their market competitiveness. Companies continuously express their demand for the following training courses: market analysis from a marketing aspect, product policy, pricing policy, the organization of sales activities and methods of influencing consumers. Innovation appearing in the regulation of business administration can be successfully introduced only by those companies that thoroughly follow them as well as document their communication with their business partners and rationally record their accounting. Only 11 managers expressed concrete training ideas, such as further training in wood processing, printing industry, trade technologies, 3D modeling, financial analysis, shape forming, smelting, welding, metal processing, as well as in the fields of electronics and mechanical engineering. It can be concluded that companies did not consider the further training of their staff to be important for their professional development, but for the successful maintenance and development of the company itself.

The majority of company managers highlighted the demand for the development of digital competences (10%), foreign languages (9%), communicational competences (9%) and organizational skills (9%), and less demand for learning techniques, conflict resolution and leadership skill development. Company managers expressed the requirement to develop the following key competences: foreign language competence (31%), digital and technical competence (22%), communicational and assertive communicational competences (25%). Their responses also emphasize the development of entrepreneurship, leadership and organizational skills as well as negotiation and

presentation techniques.

1.3. Qualification forms preferred by enterprises

Participation in adult education is not influenced only by the training supply of adult education institutions, but also how training courses are to be realized (T. Molnár, 2009). In the 21st century, traditional teaching forms are losing their popularity, while adequate and more efficient teaching methods emerge that fit the needs as well as timely and personality requirements of adult learners. To be specific, these methods are the individual coaching, distance-learning and e-learning. The European Union, as stated in their document titled “Designing tomorrow’s education” (2000) and Action Plan, aims to introduce ICT equipment in all levels and types of education. E-learning can also be realized via distance-learning, while the course schedule can also be determined based on individual needs and preferences. Individual coaching can also be successfully applied among adult learners. All these methods can be applied if the learner is a full-time or part-time employee. However, it is important that the employer and the institution that provides the course ensure the possibility for the employee to continue with their duties uninterrupted regardless of their participation in further education, re-qualification or training.

Based on the present research, enterprises in Vojvodina still prefer group classes with traditional teaching methods (55%), instead of opting for new learning forms that offer several benefits both for the employer and the employee. Only 21% of the respondents considered that individual coaching would be the preferred form of training, 14% opted for e-learning, while only 10% for distance-learning. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that tradition teaching forms still dominate the Serbian education and higher education system. Practical and innovative teaching forms are rarely applied during classes.

It has also been revealed that enterprises prefer short-term training, to be specific, a course consisting of 30-60 sessions was considered optimal for 44 companies (43%). Courses under 30 sessions were preferred by 42 companies (41%). Generally, it can be concluded that 84% of respondents showed higher preference for short-term courses. None of the respondents considered a course of more than 500 sessions to be optimal. However, the question what aspects company managers took into consideration arises. Undoubtedly, all participants are eager to obtain as much information as possible in the shortest possible of time. Nevertheless, a course might be cost- and time-effective, but it should be realistically assessed whether a short-term course would truly encourage development on a certain field of profession.

Enterprises show preference for course and trainings held on a weekly basis. The majority of respondents (35%) consider 2-3 sessions weekly to be the most adequate, while ¼ of the respondents believe 1 session per week is enough. Trainingsessions held during the weekend are welcomed by 19% of the respondents. Daily courses

are the least preferred by the respondents, while only 7% of the institutions considered daily courses to be useful for adult learners.

Regarding the types of required courses, the most important aspects of ranking are the following: lecturer of high professional expertise, short-term training and practical aspects of the training. The next groups of aspects are: training location and its accessibility, the application of modern methods, acceptable course fee, flexible course organization and the application of modern technical equipment. The fact whether a course is practical also played an important factor in the respondents' opinion, which also requires the application of modern equipment as well as the presence of highly qualified and experienced lecturers. To conclude, enterprises in Vojvodina incline towards courses that develop practical and innovative skills. Thus, the emphasis is firstly on professional lecturers, secondly on the duration of the training and finally on the introduction of innovative and modern methods.

2. Interview survey regarding the employment opportunities of professionals in Vojvodina

2.1. Research background, methodology and objective

The fundamental function of a regionally organized higher education system is to provide adequate human resources for economy in accordance with the market and economic demands of the region. There is no tradition of career or labor market force monitoring in Vojvodina. According to the data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, in 2010, 43.4% of the educated unemployed graduated from economic, legal or administrative faculties. In North Vojvodina, every fourth graduate is an unemployed college degree pre-school teacher or a university graduate teacher (24.8%) and every tenth unemployed person has a higher educational degree in agronomy (Takács, 2013: 133). Analyzing the degree issuing institutions, "unemployment graduates" are trained only on few degree courses.

Nevertheless, according to the statistical data an improvement can be detected regarding the labor market force in Serbia (Rezultati Ankete o radnoj snazi, 2015). In 2015, the number of unemployed persons totaled 551 900, while the unemployment rate was 17.7%. The rise in the number of employed persons in agricultural industry contributed to the total number of employed population (especially the non-formal jobs of persons older than 55 years who dispose of primary or secondary level of education). Considering younger population, fixed-term contracts were signed in the processing industry, trade sector, vehicle repair sector and scientific or mechanical engineering activities. The employment rate in Serbia among 15-year-old and older population is 45.9%, while that in Vojvodina is 44.4%. (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2016: 57)

The research also analyzed the institutional professional trainings in Vojvodina

(secondary vocational schools, colleges and university degree courses) from the aspects of demand/supply and labor force. The research also analyzed the labor force issued by education institutions as well as company demands towards their potential employees in various economic and service sectors of the economy. In-depth interviews with the representatives of employers (company manager and owners) were conducted, and statistical data was collected regarding certain degree courses among secondary and tertiary levels of educational institutions upon their current range of degree courses. The group of experts² analyzed one segment of the labor force in Vojvodina, a few professional fields of qualifications: agronomy, health care, technological IT, mechanical engineering. (Gábrity Molnár ed., 2008)

2.2. Partial research results regarding company managers' opinions

For educational institutions to satisfy the labor force requirements of companies, labor force market research is needed in every economic and service sector. In this paper, a few remarks will be made upon four sectors that were noted during the interviews with company managers (Gábrity Molnár ed., 2008).

Similar to international trends, the number of workers in the *agricultural industry* is continuously declining in Vojvodina, as well. In 1961, 56% of the active population worked in this sector, however, by 2001 that number had declined to 11%. Those who work in the agricultural industry can be divided into two groups: family farms with a small amount of land that they farm themselves or with a small number of employees, and big land owners who employ hundreds of employees (usually founded by the privatization of former co-operatives, agricultural enterprises). The majority of private manufacturers are under-educated, except for young entrepreneur-manufacturers who usually have secondary level of education. As a result of unemployment, a number of inhabitants abandon their profession and start farming. Regarding the organization of their training, the lifestyle of farmers should be taken into consideration and concentrate on periods when there is not much work on the fields ("winter agricultural school"). Based on the reports of their interest representatives, the following types of trainings are highly demanded: short specialized professional courses (such as vegetable production, practice-oriented training upon the livestock breeding), trainings about quality assurance regulations, applying for competitions supporting agricultural industry.

Throughout the fieldwork, the representative of the North Vojvodina Agricultural Association revealed (2008) that they had approximately 1 000 members, to whom –

²The empirical research was conducted under the co-ordination of Irén Gábrity Molnár with the assistance of the Regional Scientific Association's research group: Krisztina Kovács, Verona Molnár, András Ricz, Tünde Ricz Dencs, Sándor Somogyi, Éva Szügyi, Zoltán Takács, Zsófia Veréb Miskolci.

in return for an annual membership fee – they perform various administrative services as well as regularly organize various trainings in 7 municipalities of Vojvodina (Subotica, Kanjiža, Senta, Bačka Topola, Mali Iđoš, Temerin, Bečej). From 1st December till 15th February different topics are discussed in the evenings, for instance lectures related to fruit production are common in the region of Subotica. Lecturers are either domestic, or are invited from Hungary. The Association has excellent relationship with the Corvinus University of Budapest Faculty of Horticultural Science off-site training in Senta and the University of Szeged, Faculty of Agriculture in Hódmezővásárhely. Such initiations provide an adequate possibility for co-operation for educational institutions, since associations assess the demands of farmers (and their employees) while institutions provide their experts for the trainings. The primary obstacle of such courses is the narrow financial capacities of the target group, while its secondary obstacle is raising the interest of the target group.

Contrary to the western European region, the institution of *farm manager* has not developed yet in Serbia. Farm managers are educated professionals whose role is to assist the daily work of farmers, professionally solve any occurring issues – firstly, via advisory services. In the region of Kanjiža, five villages are allocated to one farm manager, who spends one day in each village and provides assistance to them (for instance, in connection with plant production, administration or applying for competitions).

The research revealed that large-scale manufacturers tend to apply unqualified agricultural labor force. Workers without a secondary level of education are employed only in the sector of livestock farming. Nowadays, tractor drivers are also required to have a secondary level of education. Young job applicants prove to lack experience and practice that is highly absent from secondary schools. Employers require skilled workers; they are unwilling to train them. *The shortage of labor in the agricultural sector is primarily not quantitative, but qualitative.* Agricultural companies reported the following professions as highly demanded: plant protection expert (third-level of education) and watering expert as well as, although from a different industry, electrician, plumber, welder. According to the agricultural company managers, the University of Novi Sad Faculty of Agriculture ensures an excellent qualification, and reported the attendance on the following courses: agricultural seminars organized annually one or two occasions, retraining organized by subcontractors (short courses related to agricultural appliances, machines or vehicles) and wholesalers' conferences (often associated with exhibitions).

The Serbian state is still the most considerable employer in the *health care and social sector*. The Law on Healthcare defines two groups of human resources working within the sector: (1) employees of Healthcare that is persons with medical, dental or pharmaceutical university degrees or some other medical or healthcare certificates, who directly and professionally deal with patients, and are employees of a state or private health care institution. (2) healthcare co-workers that is persons with a secondary school diploma, college or university degree, who work within the field of health pro-

tection in state or private health care institutions. The Law on Healthcare specifically defines the professional training of health care employees (specialization, narrow specialization and continuous training). The constant professional preparedness of health care employees is insured by the Serbian Chamber of Healthcare Employees through its control over issuing, renewing and withdrawing the license upon independent work permit. In Vojvodina, (especially in case of small municipalities) the shortage of medical specialists is considerable, i.e. ophthalmologist, internal specialist, gynaecologist, psychologist, radiologist, otolaryngologist, paedodontist, outpatient healthcare specialist, paediatrician, pharmacist and radiological technician. Regarding healthcare technicians, besides the qualification of general nurses, there is a demand for specialized technicians, such as anaesthetist, transfusion assistant, midwife and operating assistant. *The shortage of labor in the health care and social sector is primarily not quantitative, but qualitative.*

The majority of *IT companies* are recent in the region. The continuously broadening and developing sector is hardly monitored by the educational institutions, thus highly professional IT experts are in demand. The large number of IT programmers' migration in hope of a well-paid foreign job causes a serious challenge for the domestic industry. The headquarters of IT companies are usually in towns, therefore the labor force demand is also concentrated in towns; however, technological spillover cannot be detected in this sector. According to the interviewed IT companies, the majority of employees are IT experts and the following aspects were considered during their recruitment: whether the applicant has a degree (although companies have also valued the candidate's knowledge resulting from independent self-study), functional foreign language skills, practical experience and age (preferably young). The majority of employers are content with their employees while others only if their employees are willing to work overtime.

There is an oversupply in computer maintainers and web designers, but a demand for programmers, IT network experts and IT managers. Despite the high interest towards the above mentioned shortage of professions, companies still fail to employ adequate experts for the workplace. Specialized knowledge proves to absent from the candidates' professional background. *Oversupply in the IT labor market is quantitative and not qualitative.*

Educational institutions do not have any formal relationship with IT companies. Company managers poorly assessed their quality of education, primarily considering their outdated content of knowledge, the unprofessional knowledge of lecturers and lack of practical knowledge. This is one of the reasons company managers urge the organization of local courses; however the number of respected, the number of experienced lecturers is low. The training of newly hired employees is realized within the company. The employees regularly participate in retraining sessions that are free of charge and organized by subcontractor or manufacturing companies.

From a labor market aspect, *mechanical engineering* is a very important sector in Serbia/Vojvodina. It is important to know that in the 1990's (as a result of the war) several factories went bankrupt, which caused large-scale unemployment in this sector. One portion of labor force was re-directed to other economic or service sectors; however, the other portion is still registered as unemployed. A partial solution was brought by foreign investment companies whose primary profile is spare part, tools, equipment, and device production and who were looking for skilled workers, however, with hardship. The majority of large-scale companies are employing trained workers since it can be realized at the company and there is no adequate vocational center nearby (for instance, high-tech winding and repair). Training courses are realized by a mechanic and take one to three months. The companies continuously face a shortage in labor force in the following professions: miller, welder and latheman. The establishment of an energetics degree program has been suggested, due to a labor shortage on both secondary school and university levels of education. Such experts could provide assistance in the maintenance and improvement of several companies' energetics systems. Vocational secondary school graduates lack practical knowledge, employers report upon the absence of modern vocational centers, thus they do not show a tendency to require re-training from educational institutions. *The shortage of labor force in the sector of mechanical engineering is primarily qualitative, but partially also quantitative.*

Conclusions

Employers have a common requirement from their employees: competence. The task of the education system is to reduce (and not to increase) the number of unemployed professionals. The education system should be governed by market demands in producing the adequate professional labor capacity. If we take into consideration the potential labor force that leaves vocational secondary schools and higher education, we can conclude that very often the employers' demands from the employees are unrealistic. Our education system is deficient, vocational secondary schools do not prepare the pupils either for employment or for further education. The causes of this deficiency are in the inappropriate teaching staff and outdated curriculum. The primary issues of secondary education are: lack of vocational standardization (knowledge + skills), a lot of theory, scarce practical teaching, lack of modern trades, rigid curricula, teaching plans and programs. Most schools in the region fail to have a simple and clear, publicly presented adult education plan, their programs are *ad hoc*, frequently we can speak about school-type education, vocational training and therein re-training, upgrading, supplementary training and specialization only. Their contacts with the representatives of industry/economy are scarce. There are occasional contacts with the National Employment Office to organize re-training for unemployed in the duration of a couple of months. In the case of schools, market-based attitude is absent; hence they stick to traditions (delegated by the Ministry), established habits to train in a school-system and are not willing to open up towards trainings, which could be commercialized more easily. (Gábrity

Molnár, 2011, p. 11)

The majority of employers demand contemporary knowledge, flexible and dynamic work performance, while their demands towards the employees are good communicational skills, reliability, practical knowledge and good digital skills. Surveying the company needs in Serbia, sooner or later it will be necessary to reschedule the re-training of the employed, the adequate supplementation of skilled work force and the introduction of modernized educational programs. The human resource management of employees and companies in Vojvodina is still not efficient enough in defining the demands for course supplementations and program courses.

Companies working in the IT and communication sector require courses in IT, foreign language communication skills and creativity development. Agricultural companies also consider the development of communication and negotiation skills, problem resolution and leadership skills. Regarding other services, there is a high demand for IT courses, courses related to new technological equipment and professional trainings. Legal regulations formulate the obligation of school practice or fieldwork for students, however in lack of modern vocational training centers schools fail to fulfil this requirement.

The functioning of a uniform, flexible and mobile adult education network is necessary for the human resource potential of the region. The modalities of adult education should include: re-training of redundant and not adequately qualified labor, institutionalizing supplementary training, organizing upgrading by developing a rational, cost-effective and flexible educational infrastructure.

The opinion of company managers is crucial. The present study contributes to the survey of course and labor force demands in Vojvodina.

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Summary

In Serbia, companies often train their freshly employed employees themselves within the firm. The majority of enterprises send only their highly qualified employees for further training, especially if they are legally obligated to do so (for instance, in the

health sector), or if the changing technological regulations or new technologies require the further training of the employee (for instance, accountants, IT experts, engineers). The participants of various organized further trainings, courses are usually satisfied with the level and content of the training.

Companies lack the element of practice-oriented education from the education system. According to several of them, it is highly required to re-introduce the dual education system. The relationship between business and the education sector is weak. Some companies welcome apprentices, but the majority of them refuse to realize common trainings, courses with vocational institutions. The relationship between employers and the educational/adult educational institutions need to be reinforced. Neither companies, nor schools initiate negotiations regarding common adult educational trainings.