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“GLEAMING EYES”, THE SURVEY OF WORKPLACE COMPETENCE EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS CAREER STARTERS

Changes which can be experienced in economic life also form the selection and training practice of companies and may reorganize their expectations towards the employees. During our surveys we are dealing with the examination of workplace expectations towards career starters who participated in economic or technical higher education. We attempted to understand Hungarian companies' practice and thinking related to competences.

Surveys examining the career starters' integration at work mostly investigate the expectations of companies in one single moment along given competences. These studies do not pay attention to that in the relation system of demand and supply, competences may continually change and that companies may perform different kinds of selection and training practices. In our study, we expand the survey of workplace integration happening during the transition from higher education to worklife with the introduction of qualitative research results performed in new, entrepreneurial settings. The objective of our present research is to identify expectations towards career starters who have economic and technical higher education qualifications and to map out the employers' selection practice.

Keywords: selection practice, workplace expectations, competence, learning, career starters.

Skill mismatch in the workforce market

Learning about workforce-market requirements became an interesting research field due to the contradictory situation which can be sensed in the workforce markets. Despite the high unemployment figures, a number of international research results prove the skill shortage appearing in the workforce market. (Szabó, 2011, Lazányi, 2012) In the survey conducted by Manpower (2013) among corporate representatives, 35 per cent of the companies reported skill shortage. The main factors during the finding of proper workforce were the lack of experience, hard and soft skills and the lack of industry specific qualification. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP, 2015) in 2014 conducted research among employees aged 24 to 65 across all 28 Member States about skill mismatch. The research points

out that out of the ten companies four have reported difficulty to find colleagues who have the proper skills. On the basis of the international workforce-market figures, the proportion of people having a higher education degree is constantly increasing in employment. The spread of higher-level demands is expected to continue in the future, too, from the 44.1 per cent level of higher education workforce demand, the proportion of qualified job positions will increase to 90 per cent until 2025 according to a prediction (CEDEFOP, 2015), and this tendency can be observed in the Hungarian workforce markets as well. (Tóth et al., 2015) The appearance of wage differences between employees with better and less good skills also draw attention to the demand toward a workforce having higher skill intensity has appeared in the economy. The unequal waging originates from that the supply side is not able to keep the pace with the needs of the demand side. The technological change generates contrast between the supply and demand towards competences. (García – Velden, 2008) According to the Hungarian graduate survey conducted in 2010 the employers perceive significant deficiencies with regard to several competences among career starters. (Kiss, 2010)

The skill mismatch observed in the work market was mainly caused by changes in employers' expectations (demand side). „The companies in the age of information are in the state of continuous restructuring, reengineering, their strategy and organizing are equally flexible.” (Szabó – Hámori, 2006, p. 361.) These tendencies „reorganize” the contents and formal frames of work in worklife as well, and require a much higher level of flexibility from employers than earlier. „While the traditional organizations considered caring about employees a basic value, today's workplaces rather expect a kind of a responsible, self-caring attitude from their workers, they thrive to realize that their workers would identify themselves with organizational values and objectives.” (Kiss – Répáztzy, 2012, p. 16.) In the more flexible relationships of work, the emphasis is put on the completion of the task (Szabó – Hámori, 2006.), which significantly „influences the values and contents of necessary competences” (García – Velden, 2008, p. 49).

The changes in the workforce-market reform the attitude how companies evaluate the importance of trainings organized within the company or knowledge „purchased” from outside. In the economic approach, the employer only supports the acquisition of „special” knowledge, applicable in a specific company, and the responsibility of gaining „general” knowledge is passed on to the individual. The management literature however, highlights that the companies use internal training as a tool to adapt to changing market relations, to eliminate present and future competence deficiencies. (Polónyi, 2004). The human resource-management practice may also re-evaluate the line between „general” and „special” trainings, along with the selection and training strategy of companies. Prahalad and Hamel (1990)

stress the critical importance of the selection of core corporate competencies essential to the company. In addition Srivastava (2005) points out that required individual contributions, defining of personal competencies can be interpreted as one of the key elements to future success. However, to complete this task is not simple for the companies. The companies „answer” these questions in a very different way; therefore in the workforce market business strategies are not clearly outlined related to the expectations towards employees.

There are different views among researchers how these tendencies transforming the expectations of employers, which skills’ role would increase or decrease and what would be the role of learning. A number of economists expect the increase of demand toward people with higher qualifications due to technology, and this is proved by the above research results as well. Other researchers however, predict the polarisation of the workforce market, where in some workforce situations the expectations will expand, while in others they will decline (Hilton, 2008). Allen and Velden (2012) found that according to European graduate surveys three types of tendencies can be identified. First there are competences, like general basic skills, whose role will not change even after this. Second, there are newly appearing competences, like skills helping the orientation among 21st century technological innovations. Third there are competencies in the intensifying division of labor, which are reorganized and due to this more and more special competence expectations appear (Allen – Velden, 2012). Nevertheless, opinions vary regarding the role of education and learning, and within the relationship of competences and knowledge in the question formulated from the aspect of education (Benade, 2014).

Thus, the expectations raised towards the colleagues in the organizations do not appear as a static variable, but as serving their strategic targets continually changing within the relation system of demand and supply. Companies have to decide about what kind of personal competences they will need during the adaptation to market changes and about if they perform the training within the organization or they arrange it through the workforce-market. So on one hand they can choose a different selection and training practice, on the other hand they can also reinterpret their expectations towards their employees depending on their experiences related to their employees and the workforce-market supply. At the same time, employees may also choose differing career starting and learning strategies depending on what kind of expectations do they perceive from the part of employers, and if during their studies or as a result of other activities what kind of knowledge, skills, attitude do they possess (Sági, 2011). According to this, the absence of skills appearing in the workforce-market and the transformation of employer expectations lying in the background can be studied efficiently based on the understanding of the participants’ behaviour. The numbers of

graduated survey studies performed by higher education institutions primarily examine the deficiencies and search the reasons from the part of the employees. In this survey conducted in the Hungarian context we focus on the practice of selecting career starters and also concentrate on the employers' thinking. In our study, related to the transition from higher education to worklife, we dealt with the issue of workplace integration in enterprise setting by the methods of qualitative approach.

Research history

In our earlier prepared questionnaire OE 2012 survey (Tóthné-Hlédik, 2014); we primarily studied the expectations of large enterprises operating in Hungary toward career starters who have technical and economic qualifications. Our sample (N=88) was comprised companies actively searching for career starters, assuming that these companies have conscious expectations regarding them. We compared our results with the figures of two earlier secondary studies, we applied the outcome of Institute for Economic and Enterprise Research of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GVI) 2011 (Várhalmi, 2012) study examining the expectations of the employer side and the results of the Hungarian Graduate Survey (DPR) 2010 (Kiss, 2011) research exploring the perceived competence expectations of graduated students.

In the practice related to the surveyed companies' selection of career starters, less than half of the companies were established on competence based thinking, but besides the manager interview, tools observing different kinds of competences were also frequently applied. According to priority order stated in the preferences defined by the companies, competences serving the present performance proved to be the most important, which refers to that from career starters independent and efficient work performance is expected from „the first minute of the work”. The results received in our research, differing from the preferences of the GVI 2011 survey, appeared along the competences classified into the second quartile. In the GVI mixed composition entrepreneurial sample, professional competences were not involved into this quartile, in our sample based mostly on large companies, competences helping innovation proved to be more important and language skills also received higher assessment. Competences related to professional preparedness in our research got high marks as well, but were classified into the less important category. According to this, in complex jobs requiring higher level of qualification, successful work performance is not ensured by high level of professional knowledge in itself anymore. Without personal and social competences professional tasks cannot be completed successfully. Competences classified into the least

important group, primarily relate to the accomplishment of tasks connected with managerial work.

In the study of differences between expectations towards graduates with technical and economic qualifications, the comparison of group averages derived from the factors showed an interesting result. The competences of leadership skills proved to be more important in the economic area, while professional preparedness competence group in the technical field during the evaluation of companies. The difference in the results may refer to that in case of various professions the general competence expectations takes a different form.

In our study, on the basis of the employers' answers by examining the correlations of competences, it can be stated that in the thinking of company representatives, on the basis of the DPR 2010 research data, the arrangement of expectations differs greatly from the graduated students' opinion. As the result analysis prepared from the data of OE 2012 study, the 30 competences were arranged to seven factors. The cooperation competence experienced in the DPR research in our survey was „divided” into two factors by the participants. Furthermore, it is interesting that the learning skills in the DPR research got to the professionalism factor, while in our survey they gained a wider interpretation and were classified into the openness factor.

The explored differences give an insight into the diverse thinking schemes of respondents, referring to what participants may think in a very different way with certain categories of competences.

If we are to summarize our results of the surveys mapping out employers' expectations, on one hand similar results considering certain expectations show clearly emerging tendencies, but regarding several vital competences, we also found very differing results. Different kinds of workplace preferences appeared in various groups of companies, and in certain professional fields. Factor analysis however, showed that the differences which can be observed may also root from the different interpretations.

In our present study, in the relation of two professional fields, we set the target of examining the differing management decisions, selection practice and experiences of company competences, in order to interpret the expectations towards career starters in this light. In our later study, we continue the investigation of corporate thinking with the interpretation of competence expectations. As the result of the two surveys, to understand how certain competences are organized in the participants' judgment can be an important starting point for further research studies.

The objective of our present research is to identify workplace expectations toward career starters who have economic and technical higher education qualification, and to map out the selection practice of employers.

Sample and Methodology

In this research, we observed workplace expectations with the help of competence definition and inventory used in the management professional literature (Shippmann at al., 2000). The objective of competence based thinking in organizations is the identification of personal success criteria (McClelland, 1973). The competence based thinking divides the definition of success criteria into two levels, to basic expectations and success criteria. The condition of staying in competition in Porter's definition is that the organization should be able to perform better than the competitors while other activities are also executed on an appropriate level, too (Kottler, 2012). Boyatzis (1982) during the survey of individual expectations also distinguishes threshold and discriminatory competences. At the same time, the validity of competences may alter with the change of business environment. There can be factors which have played an important role in the life of the organization in the past, but thanks to a strategic switch, will be less important in the future, or just the opposite. There are competences which become important especially during the changes, and there are competences, which are durable, their roles are dominant right now and also in the future. (Sparow – Bognano, 1995)

Workplace competence expectations are formed within the dynamically changing relationship of employers and employees (Kiss, 2011). According to this, we examined employee expectations formulated by employers so as to understand companies' thinking related to it. On one hand, we examined within the companies' practice how decisions are made about defining selection criteria on new colleagues' selection. On the other hand, we measured what kind of experience they have regarding the applicants who apply to their job advertisements and concerning their newly hired co-workers.

In the light of this, in the survey, we explored the workplace expectations set of career starters, and also companies' thinking regarding the formation of requirements from several aspects.

1. Why and in which cases do they decide in favour of hiring a career starter?
2. How do they form selection criteria? What kind of selection practice do they perform? How do they decide about the enrolment?
3. Do they consider short or long term suitability more important? Which are more significant: soft or hard skills during the selection procedure?

4. What kind of expectations do they set for career starters during selection? Which are the important and less important competences?
5. What kind of experiences do they perceive in connection with the preparedness of the career starters?
6. Do different expectations defined towards students originate from different (economic and technical) professional fields?

Our survey has an explorative nature, according to this we discovered the opinion of our interviewees in the frame of an in depth interviews. During the composition of the in depth interview guide, we applied open, repetitive questions, projective techniques (mapping, association) and BEI which is frequently used in competence studies, the behavior interview technique (Karoliny et al., 2003, Szelestey, 2008). We performed the in depth interviews in the fall of 2014. Major part of the interviews was executed by students participating in master's program.

Our interview subjects were HR professionals or high-level managers performing their selection tasks for at least three years. During the sample collection we sought to involve the representatives of organizations with different sizes and owner structures into the survey. We only performed interviews with companies which employ career starters with economic and/or technical higher education qualifications, too, and have several years of experience in the selection and employment of career starters.

The average length of the interviews was 60 minutes. We performed the analysis of the transcription prepared from the 24 in depth interviews with the help of NVIVO, and composed the content analysis with two researchers in order to avoid subjectivity.

The selection practice of companies during the employment of career starters

Employing Career Starters

The employment of career starters was considered an advantage by the companies participating in the survey, primarily because of the young people's flexibility, good adapting skills, enthusiasm and openness. „*They want to show what they are made of*”, „*they are very enthusiastic*” and „*their knowledge can be still bent more easily*”, said the interview subjects. Several people mentioned the innovative ideas, suggestions noticed by the beginner's eyes, things that are imported into the company's life by young people with fresh knowledge. „*A new perspective, innovative thinking, they question things, they are brave enough to question*

things”, moreover „they challenge the other people as well, their presence brings competitive spirit to the surface, for example: Well, s/he learned this as well?“, adds the representative of a given pharmaceutical company. There were also respondents who highlighted cost efficiency, too.

On the basis of the survey’s results, career starting young people are offered three kinds of possibilities by the companies. Young students are already being employed in *underqualified* positions or into an intern program during their studies by the companies, and later they can step forward into higher positions within the company. The third possibility is offered by the companies seeking to find new talents, search for young people into their replacement-education program. At the same time, companies frequently seek more experienced employees into the empty positions; they cannot hire a career starter.

In companies where undergraduate students are hired into so called „*understudy*” positions, young employees usually have to perform simpler administrative tasks or they get into an assistant job position. Many school-leaver students are recruited into call centres and customer service work fields as well. Subsequently young people with good performance are ensured possible ways forward.

From the surveyed companies, many people reported that they hire career starters through internship programs, bridging the practical deficiencies of career starters. At the multinational company participating in the survey and at the companies working in the technical field, career starters or undergraduate students can become the member of the team in several professional fields, where with time by completing more and more difficult tasks they would become experts in the long term. „*We observe that proportions would be acceptable, but in the majority of cases they need to be replaced from lower levels, from below if possible. Then the employee would socialize here, they would be brought up here, they would be familiar with the systems. So from below.*” (the manager of engineering office)

There were employers who advertised positions for career starters with the aim of replacement-education. In larger companies performing such practice, it is an „established” drill that from year to year when looking for more talented young people they advertise so-called trainee positions with limited access and they consciously shape their training. „*We always had the idea that a company with one thousand and two hundred employees is large enough, and it is more important that an employee should be talented, and during one year the candidates would find their places. Our experience was that, ..., trainees were loved so much that it was difficult to keep them in the rotation, ... they were encouraged to stay in the department as well.*” (HR manager of a large company) The representatives of smaller organizations perform a more flexible practice; in case of a more talented applicant they may

even redesign the position. The representative of a company distributing IT products told the following, *„everybody does as much from the scope of work, as much as he or she envisions.”*

Hiring career starters in case of empty positions occurs relatively rarely. *„Our industry demands from us to be ahead of our rivals at all times and to have a really serious expertise and preparedness”* emphasizes the representative of a multinational company. In strong competition, thanks to tight staff management, companies frequently seek *„people who can get into the fight as soon as possible”* since *„area performance must be accomplished immediately and quickly and an area cannot remain uncultivated for too long”* said the interviewees.

Defining Selection Requirements

In defining the requirements set for career starters, the surveyed companies reported about four kinds of practices. In many cases professional managers compose the primarily *„position dependent”* expectations. There are places where the HR department *„adds”* the requirements ensuring company integration, and there are places where they also use a competence catalogue during the identical interpretation. Among the companies participating in the survey, there were two such which, thanks to the communication performed within the company, reported unified company competence expectations which were applied not only during the selection, but in development as well.

The requirements related to the advertised position are in many cases defined by the *„business area”*, the definition of requirements is exclusively built on their experiences: *„... the regional managers after several years of experience already have the set of competences, which they expect and that they have seen the development of many trainees, career starters.”* In those companies where the work of the company is based on the projects, requirements are defined on the basis of current tasks, *„there is a project, these are necessary for it, and these competences are needed.”*

Among the HR experts dealing with selection, there were individuals who reported that they help professional managers in this work, *„that in fact these expected skills would be present not only from technical, but from soft skill side as well”*. In these organizations the HR expert adds those general employee expectations which are necessary for the integration within the company.

A part of the surveyed companies is conscious about the selection decisions, by well preparing the decision they specify such clarified requirements in job advertisements which are considered to be truly important by the organization, *„we do not waste our time, since we have less and less resources”*. A more thoughtful decision can be observed in case of two

companies, since during the formation of requirements a competence matrix is prepared, or also that a competence catalogue composed by the company is accessible in order to describe the expectations in a unified way.

Among the participants there were also such companies which formed unified business competences expectations. *„Not only that these are catchy slogans, but our company puts a real emphasis on the existence, development of the behaviours or competences. In case of our own employees as well, and when we are searching for a new colleague.”* (an HR expert of one of the companies). Another person told that they *„chose the defined competences together with the managers”*, on which they agree on the different forums of the company from year to year, clarifying their content and role in the life of the organization.

Regarding the thinking about competence concepts there were people, who defined their expectations very naturally in case of the subjective factors as well, and there were people who reported the difficulty of defining the selection criteria, *„There are skills, which are very hard to put into words that we expect a kind of humility, which is difficult to describe.”* An interviewee told the following about competences *„some of them are a bit clichéd for me”* and in fact it is not „surprising” that communication is important in worklife. The defined competence expectations may sound „clichéd” for the candidates, but they are a very important condition for the companies: *„it’s good to feel about a person that he or she would like to be the part of the team”*, highlights a representative of one of the companies. An HR expert puts it that way: *„these are fundamental things, but they can cause terrible problems if they are not OK”*. The expectations frequently appearing in advertisements may many times sound so clear and corny that mentioning them might sound awkward even from the part of the company: *„I could say very sublime, great words that we are looking for ambitious colleagues who are able to work independently and are open to learn new things. In case of career starters this is very important and I can also confirm this.”* This problem is practically „resolved” by the internship program, where both parties are able to experience which expectations are the most important for them: *„A certain amount of time has to pass for this to crystallize not only for the employer, but for the employee as well, if he or she feels comfortable in that position at all.”*

The Selection Process

The companies taking part in the survey during the recruitment of career starters perform four kinds of selection practice. There are companies which select their young colleagues through a multi-step selection procedure. There are places where they have to go through a personal interview, in the IT fields many times the employee has to present a „work”, and

there are places where the performance showed in an *underqualified* or trainee position is very important. In all cases the final decision of recruiting the candidate is made by the professional managers.

That part of the companies which reported about a multi-step selection procedure, apply many kinds of selection tools in a combined way consciously, according to the given situation. During the pre-screening, recruiters primarily search for relevant studies and experiences in the CVs. This, on one hand shows the directions of interest, if the person would truly like to work in this field, on the other hand previous experience could help faster preparation training. The chosen interviewees go through different kinds of „screening” tasks, which can be linguistic tests as well or a telephone interview, different kinds of professional (e.g. programming) tasks, motivational and skill tests (e.g. reading comprehension test, logical thinking, arithmetic skills, speed, accuracy measuring test, etc.), IQ test, presentation of professional work, portfolio. In the next step, usually a personal interview takes place with the HR expert and with the professional manager. These interviews serve to measure the competences, and many times difficult situation drills are included as well. „*It can be a difficult and strange situation when a statistician comes who tells that he or she will calculate something and they ask him or her how she would solve a social situation*” (the manager of a technical enterprise). In order to realize higher integration proportions there are companies where a trial day or an Assessment Centre is realized as well, where the attitude, thinking and skills of applicants regarding work can be directly observed.

Another group of companies primarily decide about recruitment based on the personal interview. „*Personal interviews are very important, you can see how confident the applicant is, you can see the level of interest about the profession, from the body language, gestures and from the questions*” says the representative of a company dealing with software development, after „*we would see how well do they swim in the deep water*”. The importance of first impression was emphasized by several interviewees. They tried to reduce subjectivity with the principle of multiple eyes, „*we invite likeable applicants to another round*”.

In the IT field, the representatives of the companies reported that in this field to know how much does an applicant manage, would depend on the performed tasks. „*They come to accomplish a task*”. In this field, a degree is not a guarantee that a person would know how to solve an exercise, and can be quite successful in his or her work even without qualifications, „*the majority of IT experts do not finish their higher education, ... in our company there are 20-30 per cent of them*”, reported the HR colleague of a software development firm. In this field, the solution of a task is the entrance, only after that do they measure soft skills, how the

learning abilities are and how well the applicant fits the team, reported a representative of another IT company.

In relation with the opinion that the risk of selection decisions could be decreased by „*underqualified*” positions and trainee programs, the interviewees participating in the survey shared the same perspective. „*That is why we do the trainee program, so that in those 5 months when the students would work here, it could be seen how they could perform in the long run.*” (the manager of a technical enterprise) „*This is a kind of integration, a harmonization with worklife and we employ many of our trainees to main positions, if there is a possibility*” told the HR manager of a large company, about those in who „*we see potential*”. About the career starters who we „*brought up ourselves*”, „*we know it for sure what they are capable of*”, emphasized one of the managers of a smaller company regarding the advantage of the trainee program for them. Trainee programs serve getting to know with each other, to map out expectations and possibilities and this way it facilitates for the parties to find each other. „*In my opinion, the more they see, the easier they can decide what is closer to their hearts. They can see what work activity, process, task are those that they enjoy, and feel that they can achieve successes.*” (the HR manager of a bank)

Expectations towards career starters

The Proportion of Hard and Soft Skills within Workplace Expectations

The interviewees agreed in that during the selection, professional knowledge and personal characteristics have the same importance. When we asked the representatives of the companies about their selection practice, every respondent recommended to measure hard and soft skills. As the representative of an advertisement agency said „*one doesn't exist without the other*”.

Most of the people considered fundamental to find employees whose motivations can be harmonized with the plans and values of the company: „*what future do they have, what is important for them regarding the workplace, what can help them to stay motivated, what are the important factors for them*”. „*Social environment is extremely important. Does the person fit in or not? Some people will never be successful in a position, where they feel that the work environment is strange to them.*”

However, to the question if the role of hard or soft skills is more important during selection, two practices were outlined, which are influenced by the supply and demand relations experienced in certain competences. In case of most positions, it seems that companies roughly

have the possibility to select among graduated students who have the same professional skills, so they choose on the basis of outstanding personal skills. Primarily in case of technical qualifications, companies are more tolerant regarding soft skills, especially in fields requiring special expertise, where it is even more difficult to find more experienced workforce.

In a large part of the positions, during the enrolment, general employee skills received greater emphasis among requirements necessary for career starters than position dependent professional expectations. In this case the expectation towards professional skills appears rather as a basic criterion during the selection of young people, the importance of what kind of skills and abilities does the applicant have, was defined more significant from the perspective of employment and workplace success by interviewees. *„It can be a quite familiar fact that on the basis of the local university training, depending on the majors where students go, let’s say it can be roughly known what would the career starters bring from there. That is why I say that things depend much more on their individual skills, since what they can bring is quite the same.”* (a manager of an engineering office). In those cases when there is a possibility to choose from lots of applicants with the same qualifications, the employment of career starters by the companies primarily depends on personal skills.

In the cases of students with technical qualifications, hard skills are regarded to be more important during selection. They are *„a little more focused on their profession”*, that way the professional skills related to the position receive a greater emphasis during selection. Especially in the work fields which require special knowledge, tolerance is higher regarding not having soft skills. This appeared most dominantly in the area of IT. In this field, on many occasions it is not even important if the applicants have proper qualification, only the fact if they could solve a problem or could finish a given work. In such situations, companies are also much more indulgent considering soft skills, too, since *„primarily professional competences are important and personal qualities only come after them, but I would like to emphasize that we speak about programmers”*.

General Competence Expectations towards Career Starters

When we asked interviewees about how are the requirements formed, the usual answer sounded: *„it is position dependent”*. The participants continued with listing general competences, which showed that in fact companies set a number of expectations toward their employees which can be formulated in a unified way.

Among the first comments of the interviewees, expectations like this related to motivation were quoted: *„in what field would he or she like to work, what are their expectations”*, how

„quickly” they could integrate, how „initiative” and „flexible” they are, and if they have „curiosity regarding their own profession”. Two interviewees summarized it in the very same way: “gleaming eyes”, that is what we are looking for.

In the interviews a number of expectations regarding skills and abilities were mentioned by the experts in the following wordings:

- the perfect applicants would be able to work independently, they have initiative abilities, they would have the perspective to contribute to good work, they can react quickly, they can adapt well to this work tempo, they can prioritize, work towards results, perseverance
- quick learning abilities, willingness to learn, desire to learn, to learn as much as it is possible, desire and ability to improve
- ability to work in a team, willingness to work in a team, ability to integrate in a team, team spirit
- good communication skills, politeness, user friendly, customer centred, assertiveness, good argumentative skills, willingness to ask for help if needed, humility, takes responsibility, openness towards other people
- problem solving skill, ability to solve problems effectively, leading changes, ability to take risks, conflict management, ability to work in projects, systematic approach, to see the big picture, to be able to think in processes and systems, to have the capacity to perform

Particular skills, abilities were mentioned by the interviewees according to the frequency of the above order in the interviews. The representative of an IT enterprise told the following, „we target the independent innovative skills”, but in fact every respondent considers these general employee competences important. These are followed by competences related to learning, cooperation, communication and problem solving. An interviewee formulated a very interesting thought: „The most important is that the career starter would know if he or she had these competences, what are the strengths, weaknesses that he or she possesses, to be aware what kind of level is expected within the particular competences in the given field.”

Regarding professional expectations, interviewees think in two ways, one part of them is looking for usable knowledge; others interpret them as motivation and learning skills. There are employers who are looking for the „knowledge behind the man”, the result of the learning, if the employee was able to complete a job. This is mostly characteristic of the IT field. The majority of respondents expect a professional foundation which reflects their interest and learning abilities, „we are not looking for concrete knowledge, rather for learning ability and the desire to learn ... this has to be learned in worklife anyway.” (a manager of a technical enterprise). Due to the faster and faster obsolescence of knowledge in the technical and IT

fields, the experience is „that the most important competence is to be open and to learn like a machine”.

The surprising result of the interviews is that among the expectations set toward career starters, who have higher education qualifications, leadership skills and creative thinking, were not mentioned by the participants. *„Otherwise we do not expect from an average career starter to have leadership skills. Moreover, in the majority of the cases career starters get into lower positions, that is why the existence of such competences is also not necessary.”* (the HR expert of a bank)

An observable difference became apparent in defining expectations in the first part and at the end of the interview. In the spontaneously mentioned answers, firstly, the more easily definable competences were listed by many of the respondents. For example the expectation towards language knowledge, which appeared less rarely in the answers given to the questions related to the ideal career starter asked at the end of the interview. At the conclusion of the interview regarding the question about the ideal career starter, we usually got more structured, more compact answers among whose the competences defining work performance to the greatest extent primarily skills, abilities were listed, professional preparedness was less rarely specified. Most of the people highlighted competences related to learning, followed by the independence, problem solving, teamwork and communicational ability.

Short and Long Term Expectations towards Career Starters

The majority of interviewees reported that expectations set toward career starters are not separate from expectations set toward other positions of the companies, „we have no special expectations, just the same, like toward others”, told the representative of a bank. The difference from the rest of the positions is in the probation time in the form of support, received as training. All of this depends on how quickly do we need to „*deploy*” the newcomer into „*action*”, and if he or she can be a useful member of the organization if there are any tasks in this period which can be solved.

Most of the interviewees reported about long term preferences, but there was an enterprise which set short term integration as a priority, and there were people who believed that these two perspectives do not split. In trainee positions „obviously it is not our aim to be able to assign tasks as soon as possible, which are more and more big and independent”. *„If we see the spark at the beginning then we strive to keep it”, „we would not like to bring up a prompt, immediate, quickly trained worker, but a banker who is complex and able to think quickly.”* There were people who believed that short and long term goals do not split, that is, if a person

meets the requirements at the beginning then he or she will solve the tasks later as well. *„It is important that they should integrate as early as possible, and deal with things effectively, and it is also important to become an employee who can act like a mature engineer ... in my opinion these two things do not contradict each other.”*

Among the choices of interviewees the most important characteristics supporting short term success are flexibility, openness, the willingness to learn, and the colleague's bravery to ask questions. These competences serve quick integration, adaptation. These are the times when young people's attitude to work is also measured, and when it can be seen if *„he or she is really hardworking, trustworthy, conscientious, interested”*. Humility *„belongs to the topic of patience: I am willing to learn, to invest my time, even if earn less, even if I would be in an administration position for years”* (the representative of a technical enterprise).

As a competence supporting long term success, interviewees specified cooperation skills, diplomatic sense, loyalty, that *„the career starter would not lose his or her enthusiasm because of overload, to be persevering and tough”*. The expectation related to learning is primarily a durable self-improvement process, in which the employee improves his or her professional knowledge. *„They should continually feel the need to professionally improve themselves”*. *„We need good basic skills, professional sense”*, which includes such competences like professional knowledge, presentation skills, conflict management skills, assertive communication; *„all of these are knowledge expansion, knowledge improvement, which takes the person to the expert level”*.

Experiences related to the preparedness of career starters

In the question of experiences related to the preparedness of career starters, the interviewees assessed career starters similarly related to particular competences. About the adaptation to the accelerated tempo, related to the usage of IT and social media a clearly positive response was formulated. Regarding the significance of work procedures, in the field of their connection however, some told that they perceived very big deficiencies. Considering motivation, important soft skills and professional preparedness however, the interviewees reported very different experiences.

Related to the experiences with career starters, technological development and the adaptation to an accelerated world, a clear opinion was formulated during the interviews. *„There are a high number of trendy things in the world, which are mostly IT and social media, and such territories where today's young people are very much at home”*. *„Young people today*

think very-very quickly and they live in an even more accelerated world” (told by an HR expert of a service company).

The greatest deficiency was clarified by some interviewees that young people do not see through the operation of companies, professions and because of this, they do not easily find their place. *„It is difficult to hand in an application to a bank, when they don't even know how the banking system is built up”* (a banking expert). Others missed the most that young people do not easily find their own role, place in an organization, since during the university training they received no picture, which would help them to see the significance, work distribution, structure, value system of their profession. *„... they would need some kind of a compass, to find their own role. Right now, they don't have such a thing. I have the feeling that in the field of different professions, the situation is the similar... They choose something for themselves, but they have no idea where their own suitability and affinity would emerge.”* (the manager of an engineering office).

In reference to the rest of the competences, we met very different opinions, the representatives of entrepreneurial life reported about very positive and about very negative experiences as well.

Two kinds of extreme opinions were formulated about the motivation and work attitude of career starters. There were some who highlighted that career starters are loved because they are very motivated, *„they see it as an opportunity that they can work here”*. This is the attitude which counterbalances that they are not prepared enough professionally, and that *„they don't have that sense of responsibility or way of seeing yet”* (the representative of an IT company). *„When the most confident fresh graduates arrive, then you can absolutely feel the respect towards the work. They absolutely seek cooperation, and want the best for everybody; they try to bring the best out of themselves.”* (the representative of a pharmaceutical company)

„At the same time, career starters need a completely different work culture, they solve problems in a different way, they have a different attitude” (a manufacturing worker). Some said that according to their experience, their young employees had difficulties with constraints and monotony. Several HR experts complained about the impatience of career starters, that they feel the employees' expectations are over-exaggerated, *„they want everything at once”*, and miss humility from the behaviour of career starters the most. *„I believe respect is the most important, we haven't met it recently”*. There were some who believed that the higher education institute „suggests” this attitude to students. Several interviewees reported about the experience that young colleagues compared to the old ones are usually more conscious about their careers, but they are less loyal: *„young people are more ambitious, and not necessarily plan to stay with the company in the long term”*. The representative of a multinational company

also told that *„the intensified career expectation is many times counteractive, and it doesn't turn out as it should. People - simply - have to get mature to certain positions, I believe.”* There were interviewees who meet both extremes of *„the polarized career starter layer”*, they met with both the sure-footed applicants and with those *„living in the Mama Hotel”* during the interviews. *„There are people who are very well prepared and who build their knowledge, career and experience very consciously even during the university years”* (the representative of a research-development company) and *„there are some who are a little lost in the world of work”* (the representative of an enterprise distributing IT tools).

Different expectations were formed by the respondents during the interviews about the professional preparedness and also about the language skills of the respondents. In higher education institutions several companies treat the acquired skills as a general foundation, which provides an *„up-to-date professional knowledge”*. In case of employees working in technical fields however, several interviewees highlighted that *„this is not a deep, established professional skill, unfortunately”*. The manager of a company added that *„freshness, the willingness to learn and the learning skill”* are more important to them than the actual skill material. Some of them also reported about the differences experienced between higher education institutions, that *„there are higher education institutions where young people leave with very good practical, clever competences, and they are very self-confident and there are educational institutions or faculties where they are very proficient at theoretical knowledge”*. Regarding professional preparedness, IT fields form a separate category, since here *„preliminary study sometime means nothing at all”*. In these profession special skills, special things are sought, *„the amount of self-taught knowledge, shows and helps a lot, because we see what interests them in the profession, this is formed in a way that most of the developers consider programming as a hobby”* (the representative of a software development company).

Regarding communication and cooperation skills extreme opinions were also formed. There were people who were very satisfied with the soft skills of higher education students: *„I notice that within the frames of higher level education they try to prepare students to be able to work even in a multinational company.”* But there were negative opinions as well: *„nowadays degrees are given to such students, who can't even put a sensible sentence together”,* their communication skill is *„terribly weak”*. Some interviewees reported a difference experienced regarding students graduated in technical and economic field related to these employee competences. *„I believe based on my individual experiences, that technical graduates ... are a bit more focused on their profession ..., but they not necessarily have other skills, ... thus they can't work so well in a team than, let's say, alone. But the expectation would be this. ... Economic graduates are much more flexible, ... an economic graduate can integrate into a*

company more easily than a technical graduate, in general.” (19) In case of IT specialists, it can be experienced that „*in human interactions they are not so good*”, told the representative of a company distributing IT products. The reason for this is that here regarding the expectations, companies are much more indulgent towards soft skills, since „*primarily professional competences are important and after that personal qualities are secondary, but I would like to emphasize again that we are talking about programmers.*”

Research summary

By summarizing the results, fundamentally two kinds of approaches are observable about companies participating in the survey regarding the recruitment, selection and employment practice of career starters having economic and technical high education qualifications. Both of them take into consideration that the integration and training of career starters take more time and energy. The majority of companies participating in the survey ensure the acquisition of practical experiences with the performance of a simpler task (*underqualified* positions, trainee program). At such times several people receive an opportunity and companies decide only during the work about with whom they would like to work together in the long term. In the other cases filtering happens at the time of entrance, and they try to filter out the more talented even at that point (trainee programs). They pay more attention to these people's integration and support their training actively and in many cases they receive significant tasks at the end of the program, but it can happen that they „customize” the task for the applicant within the company. The recruitment of career starters in these companies is part of long term thinking, upbringing the new generation and right „proportions” are important.

It appears as a clearly „convenient” practice in the rules of the enterprises that they employ young people into trainee positions or some arrive to the companies through „*underqualified*” positions still during their studies. The transition from school to work gets „telescoped” which is advantageous for both the career starters and the enterprises. For the career starters this is good because they still lack practical knowledge, and on the basis of the interviewees' presentations they have not got a „coordinate system”, they cannot really orientate, they do not find their places in worklife. Companies' practice on one hand can be interpreted as an adaptation to the supply aspect; on the other hand the trainee program also serves as a bridge between selection difficulties. During work, aptitude can be measured more accurately, and this reduces the risk of selection.

Companies participating in the survey in many ways apply different practices during the defining of selection criteria and the accomplishment process. There were companies where

the definition of requirements happened on the basis of professional managers' individual decision, or maybe with the support of the HR professional department. In other cases, in order to interpret the requirements in a unified way, a competence catalogue is used. And there are places where there are systematic dialogues about the definition of those competences which the company expects of its future and present co-workers. Some interviewees reported the difficulties of defining requirements and some of them used these concepts very naturally. During the selection practice there are companies where the role of personal impression is dominant, and there were others where the applicants had to go through a multi step selection procedure. The results of our survey show that the companies do not put the same emphasis on the selection and procurement necessary for the enterprises. There are cases where the employees' competences are managed less consciously and there are others where they are more conscious. All of this might have an effect not only on the recruitment, selection and employment practice, but on defining the real and declared workplace expectations as well.

The organizations usually do not distinguish between the content of expectations set towards career starters and experienced employees. The difference is in the length and support of probation time and training time. Among the first remarks of the interviewees' expectations motivations were mentioned, for example that the applicant should integrate „quickly”, should be „initiative” and „flexible”, that he or she should be „curious about his or her own profession”, simply to have „gleaming eyes”. The most important expectations towards career starters are competences related to learning, independent work performance, problem solving, and team work and communication skills. Expectations related to professional or language skills did not appear among the most frequently highlighted success criteria.

In contrast with technical and economic graduates, general employer expectations were usually identical according to the results of the survey. The role of soft and hard skills were considered equally important in both fields by the interviewees, which reinforces the earlier research result according to which in complex work positions with higher education qualifications, successful work performance is not ensured by high level professional skills in itself anymore. The deviation between the two professional fields can be experienced in the proportion of soft and hard skills.

In the great part of positions during the time of record, soft skills gained a higher emphasis in the list of requirements set career starters supposed to face. The expectation towards professional skills appears rather as a basic criterion, since according to the interviewees, people arrive from higher education institutions with a very similar professional knowledge and they do not have professional experience. According to the experiences related to career starters, regarding the attitude towards work, humility and ambitions, but even in the case of

communication skills as well, young career starters are very different. In accordance with the supply and demand relations thus when there is a possibility to select from many applicants who have similar qualifications, during the recruitment of career starters the companies decide based upon personal skills.

In case of students who have a technological qualification, the emphasis is put on hard skills during selection, which also takes shape in the relation of supply and demand. According to experiences they are „a bit more profession focused”, some of them regarding cooperation and communication skills felt a „lag” compared to those with economic qualifications. In technical professional fields, especially in job positions requiring special knowledge because of this, there is a greater tolerance considering soft skills. This most dominantly appears in the field of IT. The selection practice applied here also fully deviates from traditional recruitment and selection practice. In this professional field, in many cases not even qualifications count, just that the applicant would be able to solve a problem or perform a given work. Companies in these applicants’ situation, considering soft skills, are forced to reach a compromise in many cases. Regarding learning competence however, the role of independent learning and the responsibility of self-improvement also appeared here most powerfully.

Independent work performance, cooperation, communication, learning and problem-solving expectations frequently included in advertisements in the large part of the positions are in fact important entrance success criteria. During selection at the same time, emphases may change based on how characteristic or how purchasable are particular competences in the work market.

The IT professional field’s example at the same time well shows how competences can be reorganized due to the effect of the new market environment. In this field the development of technology can be felt very quickly, which does not only mean the solution of tasks requiring new professional knowledge, but new work organization and new kinds of work relations as well. The reorganization of the frames of work content and form in this professional field also significantly reshape competence expectations ensuring success.

As a summary of our research results, it can be said that in different workplace situations, expectations towards employees are organized in a very different way, they are formed by the change of business environment, the different selection practice of companies and the supply and demand relations experienced in the market of competences.

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