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The ways of graduates recruitment – the employers' perspective

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HE WAYS OF LIFELONG LEARNING.

TOWARDS SOCIALLY RELEVANT QUALITY IN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

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There are many ways of formalized and planned forms of job applicants' recruitment as well as many recruitment methods. Frequently workers are found via newspaper ads, job fairs, employment agencies, career offices or social media. In addition to traditional interviews and qualification tests, competence interview, practical tests (Work- sample tests) or Assessment Center are used more often to get to know the candidate better and check their suitability to work.

In our speech we will not be discussing the methods mentioned above. We want to take a broader look at the graduates' recruitment from a broader socio-cultural perspective. Recently, an important topic- the issue of transition period of graduates from education to employment is mentioned in different contexts, such as employment policy, higher education and training to labor market needs. We are interested in the process of transition from the level of higher education to the labor market from the point of view called employability We will comment on employability on the basis of research conducted within the project EMPLOY.

EMPLOY is a European project involving six partners and is co-ordinated by Dr Barbara Merrill, University of Warwick.

EMPLOY promotes the enhancement of the employability of students in higher education from a non-traditional background (both younger and adult) through improving the efficiency of transitions into the graduate labour market.

EMPLOY centrally aims to improve the efficiency of transition into the graduate labour market of those who enter higher education from non-traditional backgrounds, by developing two European toolkits that presents best practice by HEIs and offers guidance to students on improving their employability.

We define non-traditional students as including those from low-income families, under-represented ethnic and socio-economic groups, mature students, first generation into HE and people with disabilities.

As indicated by Jim Hillage and Emma Pollard [1998]

The term employability “is used in a variety of context with a range of meanings and it can lack clarity and precision as an operational concept. In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labor market environment) within which they seek work” [Hillage, Pollard 1998]

Thinking in the context of the effectiveness of entering the labor market by graduates lets us look at this process, not only from the point of view of an individual who is responsible for creating, identifying and implementing opportunities for career development. We cannot forget that every individual functions in reality dictated by the laws of the labor market, which is a part of the expectations and demands of employers. Referring to our research we want to show how employers understand employability and what they expect from those who have the diploma of higher education.

Analysis of the interviews with Polish employers confirms the trend to emphasize soft skills as a key competence, improving the rate of success at the job market. Formal qualifications, such as a degree, a diploma which is adequate to a position one is applying for is a condition, of course, but it is not the ultimate factor when it comes to the decision who will get the job and who won't. Employers are saying (...) we came to the point, where the diploma is just a formality, a box that needs to be ticked.

If I have 2 positions and 15 CVs I do not invite 15 people to the interview. I make a screening and choose those who I would like to invite and I would like to learn something from them. I pay attention to what experience they have. It is important for me to invite a person who had some contacts with people with disabilities, not just in the form of internship, but maybe a voluntary job, some other form of activity. If I see this , I know that is the way that the person chooses. "

"We notice that we got to this stage that the diploma itself for the director of an educational institution is a must have. That is where we start (...) let's suppose we have 10 CVs and we want to invite 3 people to the interview, so we quickly go through the qualifications which are mandatory, because someone with no qualifications will not apply for the job, so we look at these further points in CV ".

What are the expectations of the employers when it comes to graduates? Mainly, they are looking for interesting personality, passionate people, open minded. They seek for engagement, involvement, where passion is understood as a part of team building, creativity or merging theory and practical skills while performing the job.

"I'm looking for an employee, who will enchant me (...) I need to see a passion in him/her, need to hear how he/ she sees their future job, what kind of concept of it he/she has thought through...

"I'm always looking for the person. Formal qualifications are very important, and the awareness of this person's strengths, their good sides ... I always ask what you can offer to our school, our students, and what else can you do and in what areas you would like to fulfill your vision at school "Passion is on the second place. If there comes a student to our institution, I dare say, they know the music well, they play the music themselves but often it turns out that they do not have the spark, I'm not talking about talent, but there is no such personality that would allow them to enter the office and say:" I know this and that, I can help with this" or present any ideas from themselves. "

"And I am always looking for such a person who it is very difficult to define at a verbal level- but they must impress me with something. It must be something that will make me believe that they have a mission, they have a passion. So, they give me an idea of their work concept, it is good if they have a suggestion prepared and if they can show that they thought about certain issues."

Work experience matters as well, but employers are aware that a young graduate, merely out of college cannot demonstrate a certain level of job experiences. That can be expected from someone who is on the market for decades. That is why all extracurricular activities matters: summer jobs, voluntary work, (when it comes to education – summer camps jobs as a guardian or counsellor), any kinds of internships. These practical experiences in particular job contexts are often a token of soft skills, such as building and keeping the relationships, ability to cooperate, dealing with conflicts and crisis, confirmed in the field.

(...) I think, therefore, sort of a general orientation to comprehend everything is needed more. Knowledge of the events, the people, knowing the names that are important in this business. So I think this is important and I think this is missing. This orientation even in basic things related to the business. Knowledge of the market. (...) "

"I also pay attention to such key life skills, teamwork, knowledge of what encourages and what disturbs good relations, coping with difficult situations."

Employers are also looking for coherence and accuracy on what was written in a CV and how the candidate presents him/ herself during the interview, if he is capable of pointing his/her skills, if he/she can elaborate on that. Ability to cooperate with others, to organize your own work and general curiosity of the world was also mentioned as important features of the prospective applicants.

"(...) It is important if in addition to their diploma they have some extra curriculum courses, postgraduate studies, or any other skills and abilities that can be used at work, without additionally employing an outsourcing company, to make use of -so I say in quotes - this teacher (...)"

(...) We ask the question if he can cook. If yes, then great, because it will be used to provide practical training, if in addition to that they have also artistic skills then children and the institution (when decorated) will benefit, during all kinds of festivities, picnics (...).

"(...) As in any business, knowledge of people, names, key events, key terms (not confusing some key notions), it happens. (...) If a young person is involved and can learn a lot, and if it comes with a high level of knowledge, that knowledge will be consolidated, raised to a higher level. "

And it is important that our student, our future teacher wrote in their CV about those abilities they acquired outside the formal market. Those skills acquired outside the school did not matter a few years ago (...) but now it is so important- these other skills.

What is employability for employers?

For employers "graduates" employability is primarily a capital that graduates bring to the workplace. Employers see this capital within three ranges. We refer here to the concept of the three capitals by Tom Schuller.

Identity capital

The first range is the personality of a graduate which is self-awareness and their capabilities, competencies, talents, experiences; entrepreneurship, commitment, passion, the general daily activities of life, etc.

2. Human capital

The second range is the knowledge and skills but mostly of a non-formal character (checking prior experience of graduates connected or not with a workplace); meeting the formal requirements by a graduate / law-related requirements, e.g. a teacher or surveyor are treated as obvious. Prior experience of graduates are employers' source of knowledge and skills that a graduate "transfers" to the workplace and uses them in practice (the concept of "wide-learning" and "learning transitions")

3. Social capital

The third range is the social contacts network - the real and the virtual. Using other people's knowledge, joining actions, being interested in the world, commitment – which is assessed by employers as a good basis to "find itself" in a new graduate environment or a new graduate workplace; prior experience ensure that the young worker will focus on work and not on their new role.

Employers' theses as summary

EMPLOYERS' BELIEFS:

1. A candidate's employability is judged intuitively by employers in the recruitment process.
2. Employability as a capital (s) brought by the graduate / candidate is evaluated by the employer always in the context of the job needs and economic value of the skills brought.
3. Candidate employability for the job is not evaluated through their diploma. The knowledge and skills acquired in different contexts are valued more, and „on the job practice," is valued most. *Does it mean, that employers do not believe in the effects of formal education?* Lack of faith in the effects of formal education (?). Compliance with the formal criteria (in relation to the profession) in the recruitment process "does not matter".
4. Employability as lifelong learning at the workplace ("learning by expansion " at the workplace) is related to the work processes which become increasingly social by nature. Features such as job stability, predictability and routine methods are weakened. A good worker is not the one who operates smoothly once learned competence. Employers are looking for employees who are willing to take on new challenges, ready to learn all the time. Expansive learning is an activity creating a new business activity. In this context, the worker not only performs, but through their activity expands the possibilities of the organization in order to effectively create its future.

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Human capital refers to the knowledge and skills possessed by individuals, which enable them to function effectively in economic and social life. The key insight of the human capital theory was that investment in education produces returns, in more or less the same way as investment in physical capital does.

Social capital is most generally taken to refer to the networks and norms which enable people to contribute effectively to common goals. Unlike human capital, it is not, or not only, a personal attribute or asset, but refers to the relationships that exist between individuals or groups of individuals.

Identity capital – according to Cote and Levene

In their definition identity capital refers to two types of assets:

- 1. tangible assets, which are socially visible. They include such things as qualifications, and membership of networks*
- 2. intangible assets, which include ego strengths such as internal locus of control, self-esteem, sense of purpose in life, ability to self-actualize, and critical thinking abilities. These ego strengths give people the capacity to understand and negotiate the various social, occupational, and personal obstacles and opportunities that they are likely to encounter throughout late modern life. There is both a subjective/ experiential and behavioural component.*