

## **ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG TRAINING, SKILLS AND CONTENTEMENT OF THE EMPLOYERS**

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**Abstract:** Successful designing and implementation of the quality management system in an organization requires taking into account the requirements of all categories of natural persons or legal entities which have direct or indirect interests towards it. Efficiency and effectiveness of the actions carried out to meet the expectations of stakeholders shall be assessed by periodic measurements and analyses accomplished with appropriate tools for each category.

Obtaining favourable results following the measurement of contentment does not put an end to the process of relationships with the customers and stakeholders. Implementation of the process will reveal new expectations and requirements that, in conjunction with the ones existing in the Organization and in order to improve the activity will lead to strategies and policies that are intended to contribute to the continuous improvement of the relations with stakeholders.

Thus, based on previous researches undertaken internationally and nationally, we carried out two investigations which aimed to identify the employers' needs and requirements related to the quality of skills provided by universities to the higher education graduates, and measurement of their degree of adjustment to the specified or implied requirements.

In our country, the studies on employers' requirements have permanently concerned the universities. The problems identified are almost similar with those abroad, and the solutions offered by many studies have not provided the solving key but only at most an improvement of the situation.

The labour market in Romania is not structured, and there is no nationwide program for its development, but nevertheless the universities must provide the workforce for the next 3, 4 or 5 years.

The researches carried out for this purpose show that work experience is considered by employers as a main criterion, stronger than the grade of graduation or than the reputation of the university where they graduated from.

A first research - the exploratory type – has aimed through investigation to identify the following issues: the importance placed by employers on the staff selection criteria; areas in which employers have difficulties in finding staff with higher qualifications; skills that the employers would like the University to focus on, preparing additionally the graduates in this respect, and the general level of contentment in terms of the educational services quality.

A second research – both the descriptive and explanatory type – has provided information on: identifying the skills required from the higher education graduates; measuring the importance placed by employers on several groups of skills and competencies; estimating the levels of the skills achieved in some Romanian

universities; contentment survey related to other services provided by the higher education institutions in Romania.

**Keywords:** quality, higher education, contentment, requirements, employers

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### 1. General Introduction

Successful designing and implementation of the quality management system in an organization requires taking into account the requirements of all categories of natural persons or legal entities which have direct or indirect interests toward it.

In the latest edition of ISO 9000 these individuals or interest groups are referred to as „*interested parties*“, and in the management literature *stakeholders*. They exist both inside and outside the organization, may have personal or collective interests, may be individuals or formal and informal organizations.

Orientation of organisations towards all types of stakeholders becomes a dominant of the philosophy of total quality management as a result of the fact that their requirements and expectations are met mainly through quality.

In order to meet the demands of stakeholders, the universities should design and implement efficient and effective systems of quality management to ensure the conditions for achieving success through TQM. Efficiency and effectiveness of the actions carried out to meet the expectations of stakeholders shall be assessed by periodic measurements and analyses accomplished with appropriate tools for each category.

Obtaining favourable results following the measurement of contentment does not put an end to the process of relationships with the customers and stakeholders.

Implementation of the process will reveal new expectations and requirements that, in conjunction with the ones existing in the Organization will lead to strategies and policies that are intended to contribute to the continuous improvement of the relations with stakeholders.

Conducting surveys on employers` opinion should be a common practice of all Governments and institutions directly concerned. Thus, in the United States it was made one of the most extensive survey, *Educational Quality of the Workforce, National Employer Survey*, conducted in 1994 (Zemsky, Iannozzi, 1995). The sample included 4,000 companies with at least 20 employees (so that the respondents have the experience of the hiring process) from the private sector (the state companies and non-profit organisations have been excluded). Among other things the survey aimed to analyze the stages and criteria that the employers make use of, in the occupational selection. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of importance of various selection criteria: professional experience, level of education, school results, reputation of the educational institution, attitude and communication skills.

In the United States other surveys have also been initiated and conducted through collaboration between higher education institutions in different states and central agencies, such as the State Departments of Education, the State Commission for Higher Education, the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, the Commission for achieving the skills required on the labor market (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary skills - SCANS).

Another representative research (Clarke et al., 1996) aimed to develop an instrument by means of which employers' requirements and the necessary workforce can be analysed. The purpose of this tool was to identify the fields of activity where employers need workforce with higher education, and the level of training required by vacancies. The results showed that for about 60% of the jobs that the companies declare as vacancies, it is required workforce with higher education. Among the most requested jobs by employers there are the managerial positions, the medical field and banking-finance jobs.

## **2. Researches conducted internationally and nationally at institutional level**

At institutional level, the universities run surveys through which they try to identify: selection practices for graduates, education-related information, and candidates skills desired on the labor market. The main purpose of the surveys conducted by the educational institutions aims at analyzing employers' opinion on their own graduates. Most of the educational institutions which are concerned to ensure and provide high quality education have developed a customer-oriented policy (especially towards employers). To be more specific, we will show some of these surveys conducted by universities and then we will briefly present the most important results.

Such a survey has been conducted by the University of Sussex (*Report to HEFCE by the University of Sussex School of Education, 2006*). There have been forty-one (41) interviews, three (3) focus groups and one hundred (100) questionnaires. The work experience of candidates is the main selection criterion used by employers. As regards the importance of quality in general, namely the quality standards of educational institutions, the employers do not consider this aspect as very important, only 20% of them are turning to the information provided by the universities.

Another study conducted at institutional level includes regular surveys performed by the Palomar College in California, aiming at identifying the employers' attitudes towards graduates.

Even if the employers have declared themselves satisfied with the technical knowledge specific to the workplace, there are still several dimensions that require improvements, namely, the problem solving skills and critical thinking. In terms of behaviour, punctuality of graduates is the most favourably assessed, while the initiative is rated as the most unfavourably. Analyzing the employers' assessments for these three dimensions at the level of the surveys conducted by the educational institutions, we will note that the dimensions that need to be improved are just the general skills pertaining to attitude, pro-activity and initiative (Hodges & Burchell, 2003).

To conclude, we note that investigation-type studies aiming at the employers' opinion differ through both the coverage level (application of questionnaires to companies at local, national or international level) and the objectives which they pursue.

In our country, the studies on employers' requirements have permanently concerned the universities. The problems identified are almost similar with those abroad, and the solutions offered have not provided the key to their solving but, at most, an improvement.

The labour market in Romania is not structured, and there is no nationwide program for its development, but nevertheless the universities must provide the workforce for the next 3, 4 or 5 years.

The researches carried out for this purpose (Quality Barometer 2009) show that work experience is considered by employers as a main criterion, stronger than the grade of graduation or than the reputation of the university where they graduated from. Most employers prefer graduates who have worked either part-time (40%) or full-time (26%) in college; only 7% of the employees would prefer those who have not had a job during college. On the other hand, employers prefer Master's graduates, and if talking about the graduates with Bachelor's Degree, they prefer the pre-Bologna graduates (prevailing in both cases the duration of studies).

The Technical University of Cluj-Napoca has conducted a survey on 34 companies with the following outcomes: 48% of the participating companies require knowledge of English, 15% of them insist on experience in the workplace, while the other requirements focus on communication skills, team spirit and a willingness to learn.

A study at the University of Oradea conducted in 2011 on 39 companies with 3,700 employees (many of them being graduates of the University), had as objectives:

- assessment of the employers' degree of contentment regarding the graduates of the University of Oradea,
- identification of shortcomings in the study programmes (curriculum) of the University of Oradea, and making recommendations to remedy them

The outcomes show that employers are definitely pleased with the theoretical knowledge of the graduates from the University of Oradea, Romania. With regard to the poor skills and abilities of those who own diplomas issued by the University of Oradea, the employers bring most often a charge to low practice in the field (29% insufficient and satisfactory) and to the lack of resistance to stress and pressure (28.2% insufficient and satisfactory).

In the context of launching the National Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education, we have had the opportunity to present the outcomes of the study "Recent Graduates of Higher Education and Their Integration in the Labour Market", an achievement of the UECNCFPA. The sample under investigation includes 5576 graduates from over the past five years, a number resulting from a fruitful collaboration with the employers who have previously sent us a list with the graduates from our university employed by their companies; in turn, these graduates have facilitated the access to other graduates. Also, we have obtained 4,000 of responses from the employers and other workforce recruiters have been inquired on the topic. One of the study's findings is that "both employers and graduates consider that, at the moment, the higher education system provides graduates with the theoretical knowledge they need, but fails to provide practical skills. There is a difference between what the universities are able to provide and the workplace requirements".

Prioritizing the curricula based solely on research-centered indicators has led to penalization of the knowledge-oriented universities education, underfunding them. However, the number of students will still remain an important element of survival. Prisoners of the certification culture, the student is still concerned with completing a degree, and less with the accumulation of knowledge and acquisition of skills.

### 3. Research regarding awareness on employers' requirements in terms of the skills provided by universities

The research problem aims at identifying the employers' needs and requirements related to the quality of skills provided by universities to the higher education graduates, and measurement of their degree of adjustment to the specified or implied requirements. The following issues have been taken into account:

- the criteria used by employers in the recruitment process;
- employers' requirements concerning the skills to be formed upon graduates through educational services;
- fields and specializations in which employers are experiencing difficulties;
- ranking made by the employers for the core skills that graduates must have;
- available jobs for the young graduates

In our country the employers' perception is that there is a significant gap between the graduates' skills required and current level.

Most scholars credit the University system with much or very much confidence in terms of its ability to provide high-quality graduates on the labour market

A first research - the exploratory type – has aimed through investigation to identify the following issues:

- the importance placed by employers on the staff selection criteria;
- areas in which employers have difficulties in finding staff with higher qualifications;
- skills that the employers would like the University to focus on, preparing additionally the graduates in this respect;
- the general level of contentment in terms of the educational services quality.

The analysis sample is composed of 220 companies represented by the senior staff involved in the recruitment and selection of personnel.

In a first stage we have aimed to identify the main criteria for the selection of staff that employers take into account in the selection process, regardless of the origin of candidates (fresh graduates or people who already have a previous practical experience). For this purpose, we have made available to employers a list of criteria, asking them to specify how important in the selection process such criteria are, on a scale from 1 to 5.

**Table 1: Assessing importance of the criteria used in the selection process  
(grades on a scale from 1 to 5)  
(average grades)**

Position	Selection Criteria	Grade
I	Candidate's motivation, attitude towards work	4,61
I	Motivation and interest in the work	4,61
I	Conscientiousness, reliability	4,60
I	The honesty and trust the candidate inspires	4,60
I	Willingness to learn new things, openness to change	4,55
I	Practical skills (what he can do)	4,47
I	Candidate optimism, positive attitude	4,44

Position	Selection Criteria	Grade
I	General Skills and Competences (communication, teamwork)	4,43
I	Pro-active, solution-oriented	4,40
I	Matching the nature of the candidate with the job	4,39
II	Promptness, organization and efficient use of time	4,34
II	Computer Skills	4,30
II	Candidate's enthusiasm, his dynamism	4,28
II	Self-control, calm, patient nature	4,26
II	Personality traits, character	4,23
II	Matching the nature of the candidate with the organization	4,22
II	Strength and ability to work under pressure	4,19
II	Results from tests / applications / practical tests / interview questions during the selection process	4,15
II	Desire to have a career, to promote	4,14
II	The general level of intelligence	4,12
III	Mature and professional attitude	4,02
III	Job specific knowledge	4,00
III	Language skills (knowledge of foreign languages)	4
III	Interview overall performance of the candidate	3,87
III	Graduated specialization (matching the field of study with the job)	3,84
III	Candidate`s job expectations	3,84
III	Specialized theoretical knowledge of the candidate	3,82
III	Quality of the educational institution graduated	3,80
III	Knowledge specific to the company`s field of activity	3,80
III	Professional results obtained in the previous place of work	3,80
III	Management skills, leadership	3,79
III	Candidate's level of higher education (Bachelor Degree)	3,78
III	Negotiation skills	3,77
IV	Neat appearance of the candidate	3,67
IV	Recommendations you received about the candidate from people you know	3,64
IV	Work experience in the business of job	3,55
IV	Results obtained in college (grades, general average, Olympics)	3,49
IV	Training and extracurricular activities, volunteer activities	3,49
IV	Recommendations from teachers	3,47
IV	Letters of recommendation from former employees	3,38
IV	Elective courses you attended during college	3,35

Position	Selection Criteria	Grade
IV	Willingness to work overtime	3,35
IV	Degree of selectivity at admission of the university graduated	3,34
V	Salary solicited by candidate	3,31
V	Master diploma	3,15
VI	Work experience, but for unskilled positions / unrelated with the job	2,59
VII	Appearance of the candidate (how attractive he is)	2,29

A second research – both the descriptive and explanatory type – has provided information on:

- identifying the skills required from the higher education graduates;
- measuring the importance placed by employers on several groups of skills and competencies;
- estimating the levels of the skills achieved in some Romanian universities;
- contentment survey related to other services provided by the higher education institutions in Romania.

The analysis sample is composed of 268 companies represented by the senior staff involved in the recruitment and selection of personnel.

The difference between the number of respondents who have filled in the first questionnaire and those who have filled in the second is explained by the fact that the two questionnaires have been distributed at different times and the number of participants has been fluctuating.

Firstly, after assessing the importance of skills and the degree of meeting the requirements for each skill and skill group we can appreciate the degree of adjustment of the educational services quality to the employers' needs. Based on the importance placed on each group of skills we can achieve a ranking of the skills from the employers' point of view. We find that the average level of contentment regarding the adjustment of educational services to the demands and expectations of employers is less than 75% for all the skills, ranking at a very low level within the group "involved in the execution of their tasks" (such group being on the 2nd place in terms of importance).

**Table 2: Degree of Meeting Requirements, in terms of Graduates Skills**

Place	Groups of Skills	Importance factor	Degree of meeting	Degree of not meeting
1	Interpersonal relationships	0,0938	62,34	37,66
2	Involvement in fulfilment of tasks	0,0897	36,4	63,6
3	Communication	0,0889	60,72	39,28
4	Other skills	0,0885	74,22	25,78
5	Teamwork	0,0862	67,46	32,54
6	Adaptability	0,0859	53,96	46,04
7	Systemising skills	0,0857	37,2	62,8

Place	Groups of Skills	Importance factor	Degree of meeting	Degree of not meeting
8	Initiative	0,0839	49,92	50,08
9	Mode of work	0,0815	64,28	35,72
10	Foreign Languages	0,0776	59,66	40,34
11	Results Presentation	0,0692	67,58	32,42
12	Knowledge	0,069	58,02	41,98

In order to adjust skills to the employers' needs, it is necessary to:

- a) analyse the skills in order of importance or in order of increasing the degree of contentment provided to employers. For instance, in the skills group "involved in the execution of their tasks" have been included:
  - identifying new methods for achieving goals
  - finding solutions to reduce costs
  - finding solutions for reducing the time for reaching a goal
  - finding solutions to improve quality
- b) if we consider the skills included in this group, afterwards we have to see, separately per fields and specializations, which are disciplines that contribute to the achievement of the respective skills and what improvements should be made to such disciplines in order to meet employers' expectations.

Secondly, following a survey among employers it has been revealed that there are several fields of activity and specialization for which they face difficulties in finding higher education workforce, namely:

- Technical
- IT Programming
- Business
- Management
- Finance
- Trade – Sales
- Administrative
- Communication – Public Relations
- Marketing
- Accountancy

Thirdly, we have identified the core skills which the University has to focus on in the educational process of its graduates, namely: communication, practical skills, management, IT, teamwork, analytical thinking, etc.

Distinctly, one has also to consider the improvement of collaboration of universities with the business environment by involving specialists in consulting activities.

The second part of the research aimed to identify the employers' contentment with the quality of graduates from several universities, reflected by the extent to which graduates meet the requirements specified above. The following universities are under study:

- "Gh. Asachi" Technical University of Iași
- "A.I.Cuza" University of Iași
- "Gr. T. Popa" Iași University of Medicine



- West University of Timișoara
  - Academy of Economic Studies București
- Employers' contentment reflects, in fact, the degree of adjustment of educational services provided by universities to the needs and requirements of employers.

**Table 3: Summary of the assessments on ensuring the graduates' skills**

Skills	Importance factor	Percentage of the employers who consider the group of skills as being very important and important (%)	Degree of ensuring the required skills (%)				
			Technical University "Gh. Asachi" Iasi	"A.I. Cuza" University of Iasi	Iasi University of Medicine	West University of Timisoara	AES Bucharest
<b>Knowledge</b>	0,069	42,7	72	46	83	80,8	8,3
<b>Systemising skills</b>	0,0857	53	50	51,2	0	73	11,8
<b>Mode of work</b>	0,0815	50,4	60,8	56,5	100	90,1	14
<b>Involvement in fulfilment of tasks</b>	0,0897	55,5	50	38,7	0	83,3	10
<b>Initiative</b>	0,0839	51,9	50	35	100	58,1	6,5
<b>Adaptability</b>	0,0859	53,1	50	38,1	100	71,7	10
<b>Communication</b>	0,0889	55	25,3	65	100	83,3	30
<b>Interpersonal relationships</b>	0,0938	58	50	51,9	100	83,3	26,5
<b>Teamwork</b>	0,0862	53,3	50	47	100	83,3	57
<b>Results Presentation</b>	0,0692	42,8	50	53,6	100	80,2	54,1
<b>Foreign Languages</b>	0,0776	48	50	55	100	83,3	10
<b>Other Skills</b>	0,0885	54,7	82	68,7	100	91,7	28,7
			53,03	50,92	72,9	82,33	22,5

#### 4. Conclusions

General appreciation of the quality of higher education in Romania is above average at the universities that provide a general or technical education, but the appreciation is different for public and private education, at the expense of the latter.

Regarding the importance placed on the staff selection criteria, motivation ranks the first, followed by the criteria that reflect the quality of the person and then the work engagement.

Although 54,55% of the respondents say that their company offers jobs for fresh graduates, many companies have difficulties in finding personnel with higher education in the following areas: technical (30,77%), IT programming (30,77%) and Business (25,64%).

When selecting graduates, it is placed great and very great emphasis on: candidate's behaviour at the interview, quality of the educational institution attended, grades during studying years, knowledge, skills and experience. It is placed less importance on the diploma of master.

More than half of the respondents (51,11%) consider that in the selection process, the salary required by the candidate is an important and very important criterion.

There are also very important: conscientiousness and reliability, self-control, candidate's optimism, honesty and confidence, willingness to learn new things, openness to change, and communication and negotiation skills.

We have also identified the core skills which the University has to focus on in the educational process of its graduates, namely: communication, practical skills, management, IT, teamwork, analytical thinking, etc.

The academic world stays still concerned with its own financial survival, in a continuous search for ways and milestones related to the orientation of graduates

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