EXAMINATION OF EVALUATING CAREER AND ASSIGNMENTS AMONG UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

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Abstract: *The problem of companies with a lack of talent is currently undeniable. Attracting well-qualified, motivated employees with the willingness to work and develop has an increasing role in more and more corporate strategies. Understanding and mapping the needs and expectations of a young generation leaving universities might put employers in a competitive position and shorten the lengthy process of recruitment. Existence of major financial incentives is an advantage in terms of attracting workforce, but taking into account its retention-related function, it is unlikely that it will have a long-term motivating effect on the most talented employees. A deliberately elaborated career management system begins with the selection process and flexibly changes until reaching the career objective by taking into account the interests of both employee and employer. The possibility of international assignments, coupled with a willingness to mobility, might raise the interest of students entering the labour market. Meeting challenges, and having international work experience makes employees competitive, and an international career becomes achievable. Present study examines the opinion of university graduates in relation with international assignments. It is based on the graduates of the University of Debrecen, Faculty of Economics. They are right before entering the labour market. The data collection was carried out by means of a paper-based questionnaire in autumn 2018; it was completed by 294 people. The questionnaire contains a word association test, multiple choice questions and blocks to be assessed on the Likert scale. According to the findings, it can be stated that the majority of the students of the sample would accept the opportunity of an international assignment before entering the labour market. Correlation between career-related ideas and work experience is indisputable. The willingness to accept an assignment might provide significant information to potential companies, but if expectations do not meet experiences, motivation and interest might show a declining tendency.*

Keywords: *career; university graduates; assignment; intercultural; competencies.*

JEL Classification: *O15.*

1. Difficulties of Assignments, Intercultural Competencies

When determining the value of an organization, human, tangible and organizational capital appear. In the course of internationalization, management of human resources in organizations has become a factor of critical importance (Poór et al., 2018). To increase competitiveness, employees need to be regarded as a value that requires continuous development and training. There are many factors to consider when managing international assignments. Competencies applied in the intercultural environment provide help to prepare the assigned students. If insufficient emphasis

is put on the existence of these competencies in the course of the process, the period spent in a foreign culture may become difficult, ineffective, and the success of the assignment might be jeopardized. The existence of professional and practical knowledge is a fundamental competence, but without deliberate mental preparation, dealing with cultural differences might become a problem (Schneider - Barsoux, 2003).

A classic, modern career can be characterized by the following concepts: stability, linearity, professionalism, strong organizational loyalty. Types of postmodern career types can be described by focusing on change-orientation, professionalism, and individual career objectives. However, the narrower interpretation of career is still primarily connected to professional advancement and organizational aspects (Barsiné Pálmai - Ponácz, 2004). According to the traditional concept of career, it means organizational hierarchy and progression within it. This concept is acceptable in linear-functional organizational structures. However, in recent years, efforts to break down the hierarchy and reduce vertical levels have been observed in many organizations (Dienesné - Berde, 2003). According to the traditional view, career means linear development, upward aspiration within the hierarchy, and involves long-scale thinking. Currently, a career is not necessarily linear and unpredictable; the reason for this might be the change within the market environment, since organizations are becoming increasingly flat and flexible, while individual career paths have changed. Other theories emphasize the importance of parallel careers due to the decreasing advancement possibilities of organizations (Whymark, 1999, quoted by Bodnár et al., 2011, p. 82).

The new understanding of career does not identify with the rise on the imaginary ladder, but discusses the enrichment and competence development of the personality as a whole. This can be interpreted as the widening of professional, methodological, social and human competences. In the course of defining career, terms like improvement and development can be come across in an increasingly wide scope (Dienesné - Berde, 2003, Dajnoki - Héder, 2017).

Big companies expect their employees to be willing to work as members of multidisciplinary or multicultural teams. Consequently, international tasks and responsibilities have to presented towards the employees so that they are aware of the necessary competencies (Braham - Antal, 1994). The question arises: why do people prefer to compete within the global scene as a career step? Multiple factors bear influencing force; these can be economic, political, cultural, family and career objectives. Individuals frequently choose a company or an assignment location based on their preferences and hidden motivations from amongst the above factors (Carr et al., 2005).

The definition of intercultural competence by Berardo (2005, p.4) is generally accepted, according to which "Intercultural competence is the ability to effectively and appropriately contribute to various intercultural situations, successfully utilizing our own intercultural resources (e.g. knowledge, skills and attitudes)"

Integration into a foreign culture as a process can be divided into three stages. In the first phase, the employee experiences enthusiasm and optimism. In the second stage, frustration can be observed, while the last one is characterized by gradual acclimatization. These three phases can certainly be avoided, they do not appear to everyone, but the mentioned emotions are common. Their intensity depends on the motivation of the individual; the role of the family and the degree of uncertainty of work and daily subsistence also appear as additional influencing factors (Brett et al.,

1992, Rudnák, 2009). The second stage is considered particularly critical, as individuals face cultural differences the most extensively at that time. Problems and unexpected situations that occur within interpersonal and workplace environments become visible and perceptible. Some individuals require more time to adapt to the changed environment, while others need only a shorter period (Rudnák - Garamvölgyi, 2016).

In addition to coping with new culture and challenges, many factors make the process even more difficult:

- the mediating role of the expatriate (internationally assigned person) between the two cultures and the two organizations
- loyalty to the parent company and the local company – central instructions might violate local interests
- willingness to apply new methods instead of the regularly used ones
- isolation from or integration to the local culture
- distribution of responsibility and power: in spite of the assigned responsibility, achievement of the objectives depends on the local workforce (Rudnák, 2009).

Cultural intelligence can be described as the ability of an individual to effectively control and perform tasks in situations that can be experienced under cultural diversity (Ang et al., 2007). Various intercultural competencies are required for the efficiency of working abroad, which also facilitate integration. However, it has to be pointed out that every individual possesses these competencies to a different extent.

◊ Social skills: they support the integration into social life; they facilitate cooperation and building a network of contacts and trust. With this skill, missing information might be obtained, which reduces the level of stress.

◊ Linguistic skills: they have a role in making contact. The objective is not to perfectly learn the other language, but to achieve openness and communication. Good linguistic skills are a way to build a relationship with the host nation while refusing to use the language of the host country might have a negative impact.

◊ Cultural curiosity: motivation to work in the host country. Interest towards the other culture might be a selection criterion, as those who are not motivated will feel poorly in the foreign culture in the end.

◊ Tolerance of uncertainty: In the course of familiarizing with a new culture, there are often situations in which we do not possess all the necessary information. However, decisions have to be made despite unpredictability, which is a difficult task without sufficient confidence and instinctive adaptation.

◊ Flexibility: adaptation to unexpected circumstances.

◊ Patience and respect: in various cultures, scheduling of processes might be different as well; gaining experience is a time-consuming process.

◊ Cultural empathy: it is deeply rooted within the personality of the individual, a less modifiable property. The assigned person understands the perspective of the other person as well as the reasons behind different perspectives.

◊ Strong self-consciousness: In the case of its existence, the person is able to integrate into to other culture without losing his/her own identity, negative factors are considered experiences and the ability to resist stress improves.

◊   Sense of humour: it is important due to integration and making contacts. It reduces uncertainty, frustration and desperation (Schneider – Powley, 1984., Rudnák 2009).

Analysis of the sense of humour also appears in the scope of creativity research. In the results of Gergely et al. (2017) obtained amongst students, the analysed individuals attached less importance to sense of humour. However, in the scope of their self-assessment, they evaluated themselves to be on a higher level than the one they consider expectable for high performance.

Adaptation of the global perspective is supported if the employee works in a group consisting of different nationalities. In the research results obtained amongst the managers of large companies operating in Hungary, Rudnák (2009) describes that during the selection process, the theoretical and professional knowledge of the assigned managers was the more important aspect opposed to their managerial, contacting, empathic competencies. According to the results of the study, the majority of the Hungarian managers of the analysed companies agreed that the possibility of working abroad attracts young graduates.

Intercultural competencies and family status are generally not decisive elements in terms of assignments, however, research results show they largely contribute to a successful outcome and the lack of their support might lead to failure (Arthur – Bennett, 1995).

In their study, Hunter et al. (2006) placed global skills above intercultural competencies. The concept was created in consultation with intercultural experts, summing up human openness, understanding of the cultural norms and expectations of others, and the effective application of the subsequently acquired knowledge in a foreign environment. The employee, leaving his or her own country and environment, in which he/she has been socialized, will face various challenges. Their successful or unsuccessful integration may leave a mark in their personality, self-image, physical and mental health. In their research, Ang et al. (2007) and Earley - Mosakowski (2005) defined the underlying causes of the problems of people working together in international groups; according to them, these problems are often explained by the concept of cultural intelligence. Even if the most successful experts of a certain field are in the same group, their cooperation might fail, due to certain competencies that could have been measured and developed earlier.

2. Material and Method

A career path based on foreign employment is attractive to young people, as it does not only challenge them but they might gain significant experience as well (Poór et al., 2012). The sample which present study is based on was provided by the graduates of the University of Debrecen, Faculty of Economics, right before entering the labour market. Data collection was carried out by means of a paper-based questionnaire in autumn 2018; it was completed by 294 people.

The primary data source of the research is the own questionnaire compiled on the basis of technical literature, which – besides basic identification data – deals with career, work experience, the importance of intercultural competencies and the role of potential assignments in the choice of a workplace. After a career-related word association test, multiple choice questions and blocks to be assessed on the Likert scale follow each other. Likert scale statements have 6 points, which allows for slightly wider differentiation compared to the 5-point scale and it avoids the 5-stage

classification used in the school system. Reliability of the questionnaire used to explore career- and assignment-related opinions is supported by the 0.73 value of Cronbach-α.

The results were analysed using Microsoft Excel 2016 spreadsheet software and IBM SPSS Statistics 22.

3. Research Results

The questionnaire was completed by 294 respondents. 58.16 % of the involved students are women (171 students), and 41.84 % are men (123 students). In terms of age, they mostly belong the 20-25 year age group. Respondents are distributed between BSc and MSc courses as shown in Table 1; there are 229 students in the former category and 65 students in the latter. The students represent eight BSc and six MSc courses. Students of the Business and Management course are represented with the highest proportion within the sample.

Table 1: Ratio of student's majors

BSc courses		MSc courses	
Business and Management	19.04 %	Human resource consultant	6.46 %
Agricultural economist and rural development engineer	11.22 %	Agricultural economist	1.70 %
Information technology and public administration agricultural engineer	4.76 %	Logistics management	3.74 %
Commerce and marketing	7.48 %	Accounting	4.42 %
International business management	11.22%	Business development	3.74 %
Finance and accounting	9.52 %	Management and organization	2.38 %
Sports organizer	11.56 %		
Tourism and catering	2.72 %	n=294	

Source: Own data collection and editing (2018)

Convenience sampling was applied for the study. Completion of the questionnaires was paper-based and took place in autumn 2018, voluntarily and anonymously. 41.2% of the respondents indicated a county seat as a place of residence, 40.5% a city, 18.3% a village or township. More than half of the respondents consider the financial situation of their families satisfactory; they are even able to accumulate savings from their income. As for the question related to how they evaluate their linguistic skills (irrespective of language certificates), 23.5 % replied high level, 64.3 % medium and 12.2 % replied that their skills are low and need to be improved.

In the course of word association, the task of respondents was to answer the following question: „What terms come to your mind, what does it mean to you when you hear the word „CAREER"? List your first 3 thoughts!" The keyword here was career. Processing of the evaluated responses was carried out through categorisation. Sample size: 294 people. Figure 1 demonstrates the terms listed at first place and their categorisation.
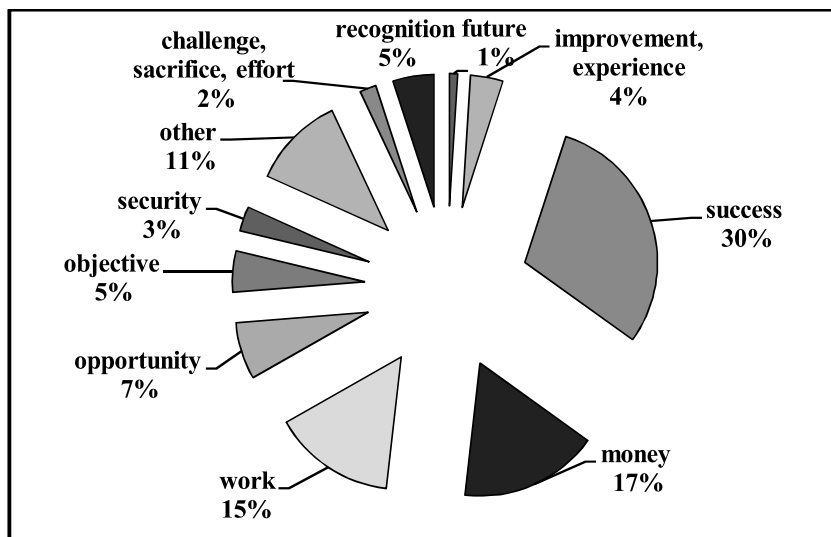
Figure 1: Career word associations listed at first place
Source: Own data collection and editing (2018)

Most respondents put success at the first place (30%). 17% of the involved students put money at the first place. Following success and money, work (15%) and opportunity (7%) reached the highest proportion. The other category included concepts, which were indicated by only a few students, for instance: low amount of free time, insufficient amount of sleep, fear, doubt, anxiety, female roles, invested time, satisfaction. Improvement, experience and opportunity are conceptual definitions, which give a carrier a new direction.

The linked concepts also include negative terms related to career, like sacrifice, effort and the above-mentioned elements of the other category (low amount of free time, anxiety and fear).

In their study, Bokor et al. (2006) also examined the unfavourable aspects career in the scope of a similar word association process. In the research, 740 employees were involved in a questionnaire survey. The results included sacrifice, high amount of work, stress, and ambition. According to the authors, career is a dual meaning term, referring to both success and sacrifice at the same time.

Similar results were obtained by Karcsics (2006) and Gergely (2016) in the scope of their research. In their case, success was also the first and money had the second place. Karcsics (2006), showed a downward tendency in the tangible assets supporting the career, as nobody mentioned anything relevant to this factor in the first place; this is confirmed by Gergely (2016) and the present study as well.

It may be related to career-linked terms whether the individual has work experience and if so, what type of work experience.

As for the question about the existence of work experience ("Do you have work experience?"), respondents had the opportunity to give multiple replies. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Work experience (number of replies)

Answer option	*„I have not worked yet"*	*„Yes, professional practice through student jobs"*	*„Yes, through a lasting workplace"*
Number of replies	44 pcs.	214 pcs.	58 pcs.

Source: Own data collection and editing (2018)

Most of the respondents have previous work experience due to professional practice or student jobs. The number of replies of lasting work position might be explained with the special nature of the dual master courses, in which the weekly schedule of students is divided between classes and a workplace.

The next question of the questionnaire dealt with the willingness of accepting an assignment in the future, should the company offer one. There were three options; Table 3 shows the received replies.

Table 3: Willingness to accept the assignment (n=294)

Answer option	*Number of replies (students) in the case of BSc courses*	*Number of replies (students) in the case of MSc courses*
„Yes, I would accept it even without work experience."	95	28
„Yes, but only with some work experience"	95	27
„No"	38	11

Source: Own data collection and editing (2018)

Prior to the question represented in Table 3, the questionnaire included the following statement: „International assignment: The company assigns the employee to a different country with the aim of work and knowledge improvement for a period of 1-3 years." The statement served the purpose that respondents are able to identify themselves with the thinking of the creator of the questionnaire and to associate the same example. This important, because an assignment is different from deliberately working abroad, which is a situation initiated by the individual.

Based on the findings, it can be stated that the majority of the students of the sample would accept the opportunity of an international assignment before entering the labour market. The number of students who would face such challenges with and without work experience is nearly identical. According to forecasts, 75% of the global workforce will be constituted by younger generations in the near future (Deloiette, 2014), thus analysing the expectations of students when entering the labour market as well as their opinion of the value of their own knowledge might be especially justified (Kőmíves – Dajnoki, 2015). Based on the research of Csehné (2014) and Rudnák – Garamvölgyi (2016), individuals who underestimate themselves on the labour market are more willing to accept international jobs later in the future. According to Vroom (1964), there can be higher expectations toward an individual that is motivated and requires improvement than an employee that is not motivated, but possesses the proper skills. One of the most important objectives of international assignments is the adaptability of the knowledge and experience acquired by the assigned employee into the organization. In order for the experience and knowledge acquired abroad to be incorporated into the company, the assigned employee is

required to have lingual competencies and techniques, which support knowledge transfer (Cabrera, 2003).

To the question, which asked whether they find a company, which involves assignments into its career management system attractive, the following results were found (Table 4). The question was evaluated on a 6-point Likert scale, where the two ends of the scale mean: 1-it is not attractive at all, 6- it is very attractive for me.

Table 4: The attractiveness of the assignment

Mean (value)	Relative standard deviation (%)
4.61	29.93°%

Source: Own data collection and editing (2018)

The mean value received based on the 6-grade scale (4.61) can be considered good, but the standard deviation (1.38) and relative standard deviation values should also be taken into account. Distribution of the replies is nearly extreme (29.93%), therefore the mean value does not represent well the statistical population.

Evaluation of the competencies is presented in Table 5. The question dealt with how much the respondents consider the listed competencies significant in the case of an assignment. The two ends of the scale mean 1- not significant at all, 6- very significant.

Table 5: The evaluation of the intercultural competence

Short name of the competence	Mean (value)	Relative standard deviation (%)
Contact making competence	5.34	16.80
Linguistic competence	5.49	14.79
Cultural interest	4.36	26.59
Tolerance of uncertainty	4.11	28.81
Complex problem solving	5.06	19.02
Flexibility	5.17	17.93
Creativity	4.76	22.67
Emotional intelligence	4.53	24.98
Self-confidence	5.36	15.48
Critical attitude	3.70	33.50
Awareness of responsibility	5.04	19.33
Patience and respect	5.10	19.44
Acceptance of other cultures	5.10	21.20
Learning from mistakes	5.00	21.53
Demand for learning and performance improvement	5.17	18.61

Source: Own data collection and editing (2018)

Findings of competencies applied in the intercultural environment are shown in Table 5. The evaluation of the 6-point Likert scale shows that the mean values are not particularly differentiated. The highest average value (5.49) belongs to linguistic competence, which also has the lowest relative standard deviation (14.79%) among the competencies. However, this value is also moderately variable, similar to self-confidence (15.48%), contact making competence (16.80%) and flexibility (17.93%). Values of the relative standard deviation show a more accurate picture for the

interpretation of the data. According to the evaluation by students, the lowest mean value is shown by the critical attitude (3.70) and the highest relative standard deviation (33.50%) also appears here, which is highly variable, thus the population cannot be characterized properly with this mean value.

The lower standard deviation shows the necessity for linguistic competences and language skills for assignments. The ability of making contact can also be included here, because in the absence of this competence, it is difficult for the assigned person to integrate into a foreign culture and integration.

In the case of adaptation to uncertain situations and flexibility, opinion of the population cannot be well described with the mean value. This may be due to the idea that decision-making responsibility with insufficient information rarely occurs in the well-planned assignment programme of the company, however according to the technical literature, this is a frequently occurring situation (Brett et al. 1992, Rudnák, 2009). The high standard deviation value of cultural interest might be explained by the internal motivation that is also discussed in technical literature (Carr et al., 2005). There are people for whom one of the motivating factors is the interest in a desired culture, while for others it is ranked lower in terms of their preferences.

It is worth observing the correlation between the existence of work experience and competencies (Table 6).

Table 6: Correlation of work experience and competencies (n=294)

Answer options /Competencies _„I have not worked yet"_	Contact making skills	Critical attitude
Number of replies	44	
Mean value of replies	5,14	3,91
„Yes, professional practice through student jobs"		
Number of replies	214	
Mean value of replies	5,38	3,72
„Yes, through a lasting workplace"		
Number of replies	58	
Mean value of replies	5,45	3,60

Source: Own data collection and editing (2018)

Contact making and critical attitude are two highlighted competencies. It can be seen from Table 6, that if the respondent has work experience, he/she then considered the contact-making skills more relevant. However, the value of the critical attitude is higher for those respondents who do not have work experience. Tasks experienced during professional practice and student jobs do not necessarily require the daily use of a critical attitude and expression of opinion; this might have influenced the lower mean value of existing work experience, as opposed to the lack of work experience. Correlation between career-related ideas and work experience is unarguable. The willingness to accept an assignment might provide significant information to potential companies, but if expectations do not meet experiences, motivation and interest might show a declining tendency.

4. Summary

The impact of globalization on the labour market is continuously increasing. Attracting talented employees and encouraging loyalty has become a key factor from a corporate standpoint (Meyskens et al., 2009). There is a need for labour retention systems that result in the increased loyalty of employees to the company (Bonneton et al., 2017).

Schein (1978) suggests to all companies, which have a large number of human resources, that it is worthwhile to conduct a careful examination; to map the skills, abilities, previous experiences of employees working in different fields and departments to gather information about their career goals and planned direction. He emphasized that if corporate and individual objectives can be coordinated by the management along the available information, it might gain a more loyal workforce base. Schein's findings justify carrying out a career anchor test before entering the labour market, as this can be decisive in terms of the direction students choose after graduation.

The research is of foundational nature and raises several aspects of future research. For the corporate side, it might be interesting to see the expectations of graduates when entering the labour market, and how many of them are interested in the opportunities offered by international assignments. We can assume a higher willingness to accept an assignment in the case of people who do not focus on starting a family, as the family does not appear as a holding back or stress factor. If large companies on the global scene are aware of the needs of new generations, they can apply tools for their retention that will meet both individual and organizational goals.

Acknowledgements

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