

A study on the profile of knowledge, skills, abilities and other key requirements necessary to the new personnel in positions with attributions in the field of continuous professional training

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Abstract: The profile of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and other key requirements necessary for a profession or an occupation is frequently defined distinctively by the employers, by the providers of professional training services, as well as by the structures that deal with professional regulations, by other actors that have an influence in the field (such as unions, employers, central public administration bodies, the National Council for Adult Vocational Training (NCAVT)) or by members of the respective community. The present study is centered on the comparative analysis of the way in which key knowledge, skills and abilities are defined by the “trainer” occupational standard – the only relevant one that was elaborated in the field of adults’ or continuous professional training – and the ones defined by the recruitment ads posted on the most important Romanian on-line recruitment sites in the periods August – November 2007 and 20 August 2008 – 12 January 2009 (eJobs: 3,05 million de visitors a year; BestJobs: 6,1 million visitors a month; MyJobs: 550000 visitors a year). We have used as a main research method the content analysis, with mixed quantitative and qualitative techniques. The content analysis was made on a number of 105 on-line ads, destined for a number of 155 vacant positions in the field of continuous professional training, as well as the description of the trainer occupational standard published on the NCAVT site.

Keywords: job requirements, “trainer” occupational standard, continuous professional training

1. Introduction

Professional recruitment ads, published on specialized web sites or in the media, have a set of headings relatively standardised as format, from which the *job requirements*, also called *requirements for occupying a position* or *personal specifications* cannot miss, representing a mandatory heading.

The job requirements usually contain a description or short presentation of the set of knowledge, skills, abilities and other key requirements (indispensable from the perspective of guaranteed professional success – such as a driver’s licence, being willing to travel) for occupying a position or a category of positions, as they are established by the employer. These are usually made based on an analysis of the job or on a complex analysis of the work in the respective field of activity. The job requirements reflect, more or less directly, the human resources strategy of the organization, and even the business strategy for which the organization is built, the general values and the policies of the structure that contains the respective position. From the perspective of PhD study the main benefit of the recruitment ads content analyses and, especially, of the job requirements, consists in the fact that they reflect the “updated” roles adopted in the field of professional training, their degree of modernity and complexity, as well as, partially, the training or professional development policies adopted by organizations.

Because of the reasons presented above, we removed from the sample of documents initially selected in the period of reference (20 August 2008 – 12 January 2009) the ads that did not have the presentation of at least one requirement or condition for obtaining the job that could be placed in the category of knowledge, skills, abilities or other key criteria.

1.1. The research

The list of requirements for obtaining the jobs we studies is quite heterogeneous, with a relative standardization of these ones, only in several ads of the same employer.

Still, there are a few categories of common requirements, respectively a series of “cores”, around which secondary requirements, from the same category or field, are crystallizing. Also, when making an

inventory of the job requirements in the ads sample, we took into consideration for the same item its signification, regardless of the employer requiring “abilities of x”, “competencies of x”, “capabilities of x”, “excellent capabilities of x”, “to have x”, “a good x” or “with x”.

The list of knowledge, aptitudes, skills and other inventoried key requirements in the ads sample is, under these circumstances, very wide. As a result of the primary content analysis we have identified, after the general area covered, six major categories of requirements referring to:

- a) general abilities (not related to a certain profession);
- b) the required behavior and attitude;
- c) communication, social or group competencies;
- d) mental skills;
- e) psycho-pedagogical and methodical knowledge and abilities;
- f) other requirements, not classified in the previous categories.

1.2. The required behaviour and attitude

Contrary to initial expectations, in the assembly of the sample the widest range of expressions that describe requirements of occupying the vacant positions in the field of continuous professional training are in the **behaviour and attitude** category (see Annex no. 4). Thus, the candidates must be, according to the requirements published on the specialised web sites, “responsible” (this can be found in 7 ads), “punctual”, “consistent”, “honest”. In other words, the employers are looking for people “with character” and, in the case of certain ads, the character traits have priority compared to the specialized knowledge.

Also, they are looking for people who are “diplomat”, “tactful”, “adaptable”, “dynamic”, “energetic” (the last two expressions were appreciated as having a similar meaning – they can be found in 9 ads), with “initiative”.

According to the ads in the sample, the future occupants of the analyzed positions are supposed to also be “open to change” or “adaptable to change”, to have a “positive attitude”.

Other requirements refer, more or less directly, to temperamental traits that simultaneously exclude one another, totally or partially, respectively to the capacity of being “dynamic” or “energetic”, “patient”, “spontaneous”, “perseverant”. These descriptions partially exclude each other, as they refer to introvert as well as extrovert people, with a sanguine or even choleric and phlegmatic temperament.

Another set of requirements for occupying the positions advertised through the ads in the sample can be classified, according to our analysis, in personality traits, in the general sense, respectively “open to change”/“adaptable to change” (together with the requirement of being adaptable can be found in 14 ads, which is a lot reported to the size and structure of the sample), “proactive attitude” (11 ads), “positive attitude”, “result-oriented”, “oriented towards problem solving” (the last two in 12 ads, cumulated).

Each of these requirements appears, generally, in a relatively small number of ads (usually 3 - 5), but the quasi majority of the ads contains at least one requirement that could be included in the “behaviour and attitude” category, and the number of descriptive expressions in this area is quite large. In conclusion, there are required, in a large variety of expressions, candidate who must, first of all, have character and positive personality traits.

1.3. Communication, social and group competencies

The most frequently inventoried requirement for occupying vacant positions in the field of continuous professional training, for the field of reference,, refers to the “communication” skills and abilities, respectively in 65 ads from the total of 105 that are in the analysed sample. Since the following skills and abilities nominated as frequency (if we exclude computer skills – Microsoft Office operating skills) have a significantly smaller share, we can consider communication a key characteristic of the professional profile for this field of activity.

With a significant share (23.8% of the ads) there are also nominated the “presentation” abilities, distinct from the communication abilities, which means that in these situations a rather particular set of communication skills, not very clearly defined, with an accent on the “technical” capabilities in the field, are taken into consideration. The “persuasion” skills or “capacity of conviction” which are, in our opinion, a particular form of the general abilities of communication, are also taken into consideration.

Among the *social and group* competencies inventoried by us, the largest share is represented by the “relationship capacities” and the “interrelationship capacities” (21.9% in total for the two expressions), followed by the “capacity of working in a team” – “teambuilding

abilities” (11.4% in total for the two expressions), “interpersonal abilities”, “social abilities”.

“The capacity to moderate”, the abilities to “solve the conflicts”, “the spirit of negotiation”/“the capacity to negotiate” could be considered social as well as communication abilities.

1.4. General abilities

Besides the specific knowledge, skills and abilities more or less correlated with the professional success in the field of the continuous formation (which represent “the core” of the requirements regarding these occupations), the recruitment ads in our sample contain a set of general knowledge as well. The “organization abilities” or “organizational spirit” are the most required in this category, since they can be found in approximately 1/3 of the ads, for all job categories and for employers in all the fields of activity in the sample.

Then it is required the capacity/skill of “creativity and imagination” (in 16.2% of the cases – recorded as only one wish), the capacity/ability of “analysis” (in 15.2% of the cases) and the capacity of “synthesis” (in 9.5% of the cases), as well as the existence of a “logical thinking” or “structured thinking” (the two, that have similar significations, have been in total registered in 7.6% of the announcements).

There are also required a series of managerial skills, more or less detailed, and not only for the position that are listed as “managerial” in the ads. Thus, the “managerial capacity”/“leadership skills”, with no further details or description, are required in 10.5% of the ads, and the “leadership” and “time-management” skills (time, usually work time, management skills) each in 3 of the cases.

Other requirements in the same category inventoried by us are the capacity/ability of “working independently”/ “autonomously” or “with very little supervision”, “the capacity of working in more projects in parallel”, the capacity of “accomplishing multiple tasks”, “the capacity of quick decision making”.

1.5. Psychical skills

For the personnel that has continuous professional training attributions there are also required, according to the recruitment ads that

we analysed, a series of psychic skills, among the most frequently listed being the one of “emotional balance” (in 7.6% of the cases). We have classified the requirement of “resistant to stress” in the same category of requirements.

There are also required “distributive attention” skills, “attention to details” or “meticulousness” (the last two inventoried, with close significations, can be found in 9.5% of the announcements), “the capacity of concentration”, but also, not expected by us, “intuition” (the last two in 4.8% of the ads).

1.6. Psycho-pedagogical and methodological knowledge, skills and abilities

The necessary knowledge and abilities for the immediate fulfilment of the job attributions are not currently listed among the job requirements (respectively the job specifications or personnel specifications), but in the heading referring to the job description. Otherwise, only 21 out of 105 ads listed under *job requirements* the description of attributions or capabilities of fulfilling the respective attributions. As a consequence, we appreciate as not representative the inventory of this category of knowledge, abilities etc. under the “job requirements” heading. The category of relevance is, however, quite high if we take into consideration the level of generality and imprecision of certain concepts used by employers, respectively the fact that the existence of “pedagogical abilities” is required in 15 cases (14.3% of the ads), without further details. Which is actually an indicator of the at least questionable professionalism shown by the authors of the job requirements or of the recruitment ads, since we cannot identify what the employers really want to measure, by pedagogical abilities one understanding, actually, a very large and heterogeneous set of cognitive and psychomotor abilities, and often attitudes, with different comprehension from an author to another.

Another approach is the one that requires “experience” in the field of continuous professional training, without making concrete nominations of the set of (psycho)pedagogical and methodical skills and abilities, thus demonstrating their existence (and development). 61% of the ads require such an experience, which in many situations is easy to check and measure, without having to apply selection tests which can hardly predict the future professional success in the trainer profession.

1.7. Other key requirements for occupying the positions in the field of continuous professional training

One of the abilities that the employers require most for the personnel in the continuous professional training is related to working on the computer in general, or to applying the Microsoft Office package or an application for text processing, usually Microsoft Word, which we find in 52.4% of the cases. Which does not mean that the other employers consider these competencies unimportant or irrelevant for fulfilling the professional attributions, a part of them considering, probably, that their existence is implicit, at least for the generation that went to school in the years 2000, for whom the high school curricula ensures the acquiring of a basic set of skills in that field.

Another significant set of requirements for occupying the vacant positions, according to the ads in the sample, is “the willingness to travel” (listed in 24 out of 105 ads). This requirement is listed by most of the employers in the following fields: retail, sales and distribution, pharmaceutical, auto, banking, as well as marketing, and is associated with jobs with attributions of direct training, training or coordination of the trainers. In each of these cases having a B category driver’s licence is also required.

Among the “exotic” requirements it is worth mentioning the “physical shape”, required in 2 ads.

The qualitative analysis of the training companies generates worrying remarks. Thus, the amplitude, the degree of complexity and coherence differ a lot, with maximum positive as well as negative levels. At the same time, in the recruitment ads posted by the training companies it is usually used a more limited and unspecific set of requirements for occupying the positions that are advertised. One of the possible explanations is that the ad is sometimes for a pre-selection, as the companies are trying to attract as many candidates as possible, with diverse competencies, skills and abilities, in order to constitute a supply of human resources useful for further use. Another explanation for which we also have enough arguments is that sometimes, some representatives of the employers, training companies, show a disarming amateurism and they simply cannot establish the requirements for the jobs at their orders. For instance, one of the companies excluded from the sample requested for the candidates only that the respective person is “responsible and credible” and another company that had as target “to

be one of the first five important players in our market in the next three years”, specified the fact that “the training schedule will not be imposed, but discussed first”. Another company, which “organizes courses in different fields of activity”, considers that it is “preferable” that the future trainers are “graduates of a trainers’ course”.

By comparing the employers’ requirements for the recruitment of personnel with the ones in the “trainer” occupational standard, mandatory requirements for attesting the training program for trainers, we notice significant discrepancies. First of all, the number of variables that describe the “capacities, attitudes and skills” necessary so that one person is declared “competent” for each of the eight competency units that form the trainer occupational standard is quite small and they belong to more limited areas than the ones established by the recruitment ads. Then, the knowledge required at the evaluation of the 8 competency units describe synthetically the range of activities that the people must master at the end of the training program, which is normal for this instrument, and they can be used only in a small measure with the purpose of recruiting the candidates for occupying vacant positions.

The skills, abilities and attitudes required by the trainer occupational standard, grouped by us according to the general competency area, are the following:

- a) regarding general abilities
 - analysis (for each of the 8 competency units);
 - objective interpretation and decision (8 of 8);
- b) communication, social and group competencies:
 - persuasive communication (4 out of 8), communication (1 out of 8), join the target group (3 out of 8);
 - information and communication using modern technologies (1 out of 8);
 - presentation (5 out of 8);
 - editing (7 out of 8);
 - reporting (1 out of 8);
- c) other requirements:
 - space orientation (1 requirement, in the unit of Organizing the training programs and courses).

Taking into consideration the fact that the occupational standard is mandatory for receiving NCAVT certification for the trainer course, as well as the fact that the evaluation of the course participants (qualifying

them as “competent” or, if it is the case, “not competent yet”) is based on this, we come to the conclusion that these requirements are in fact mandatory in the specialization course. The provider of professional training services can, eventually, follow the accomplishment of certain supplementary requirements, but the occupational standard is the standard according to which the graduation certificate is given.

Conclusions

From the content analysis of the recruitment ads for occupations in the field of continuous professional training we come to the conclusion that the work market in Romania requires competent personnel that is able to have a wide range of occupations which are not listed in the COR (even if we think of the person in charge of the formation as trainer) and of fulfilling roles and attributions which are not required, explicitly or implicitly, by the trainer occupational standard (by the *competency units* it contains) or by the titles of the other occupations in the field we analyzed.

What is very different from one employer to another, according to the recruitment ads in the sample analyzed by us, is the profile of the job requirements, respectively of the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and other key requirements necessary for occupying a certain position.

Although the announcements have from one to over twenty requirements, and for some of them it is specified that they are more important than others, as the employers mainly require certain categories of competencies or capabilities, we finally notice that there are some patterns regarding the profile required by the work market from the specialists.

This profile is different from the one implicitly set by the trainer occupational standard, which is more concise and focused rather on professional knowledge than on cognitive or other type of abilities – except for the ones referring to communication (editing and presenting), organization, objective decision making and interpretation – or on skills or attitudes.

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