

THE CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYABILITY OF MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract

Based on summarizing the results of the authors' pilot questionnaire survey on the challenges of employability of management students of the College of Regional Development in Prague and the Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies of the Czech Technical University in Prague, the goal of the paper is to define and discuss challenges faced by management students in terms of their professional knowledge and skills, work and social habits, development potential and personal aspirations that make them more likely to succeed on the labour market and get a desired job that will benefit themselves, the organization, and the society. From the perspective of common job requirements, the authors' survey results support the assumption that the management students should have a good chance to succeed on the labour market due to the possibility to acquire broader knowledge, skills and abilities, but they should be prepared for continuous learning and should not expect rapid career. The survey was conducted from February to April 2016. The relevant data were obtained from 374 students.

Key words: employability, higher education, management, labour market

JEL Code: I21, J21

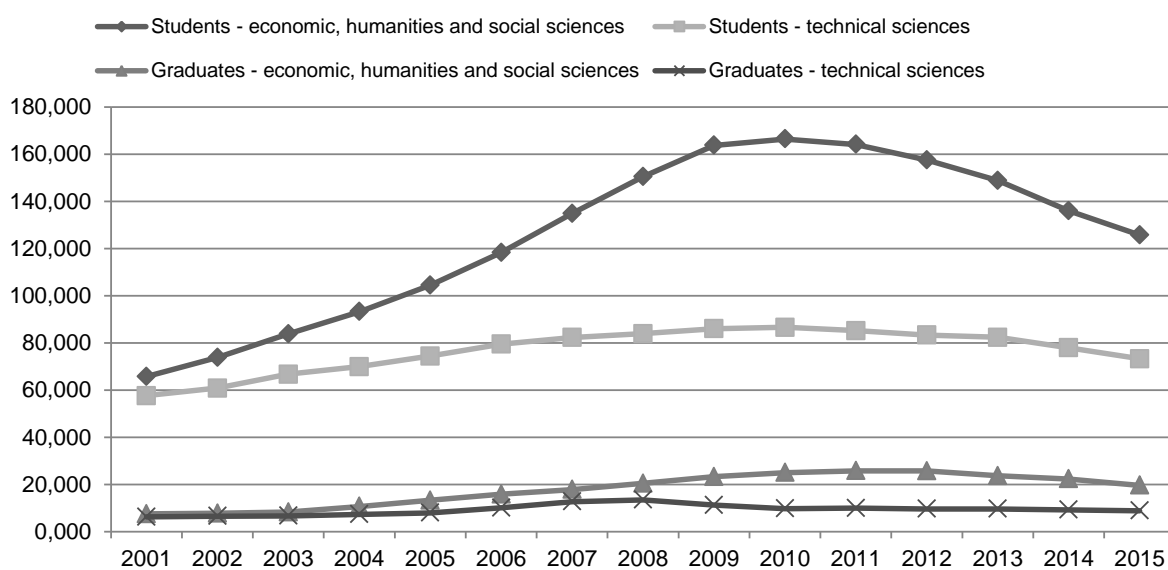
Introduction

In today's developed countries, people with higher education are seen as the most important source and the greatest wealth (Kucharčíková, 2013). The higher education in most developed countries is focused on the efficient formation and development of professional and personal skills of specialists in various technical, economic and humanistic professions (Pavlin & Svetlicic, 2012). Through the development of effective higher education systems, people are systematically prepared for a successful life and a professional career in the society (Cotterill, 2015). The effectiveness of higher education affects the employability and competitiveness of graduates in the labour market (Schaeper & Wolter, 2008). Well educated and motivated people determine the future prosperity and competitiveness of the society (Pavlin & Svetlicic, 2014). People with higher education significantly increase their chances

on the labour market to reach a satisfying and rewarding career (Livanos & Nunez, 2016). However, the competition among graduates is strong and the requirements of employers are high (Mocanu, Zamfir & Maer-Matei, 2014).

At present, according to the data of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic (MEYS, 2014), there are 26 public, 44 private and 2 state universities in the Czech Republic that offer higher education in various economic, humanities, social and technical fields of study on bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. The Fig. 1 shows the number of students and graduates of economic, humanities, social and technical sciences in the Czech Republic from 2001 to 2015. The data show that the number of students and graduates of economic, humanities and social sciences is consistently higher than the number of students and graduates of technical sciences.

Fig. 1: The number of students and graduates of economic, humanities, social and technical sciences in the Czech Republic



Source: authors based on the data of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS, 2016)

The increasing quantity of students and graduates of economic, humanities and social sciences raises questions about their professional and personal qualities, especially in relation to the needs of the labour market and the requirements of employers. As the Czech economy has grown and the unemployment has fallen since 2015, many Czech employers have experienced a serious shortage of skilled workers in technical professions. The problem is that the professional and personal qualities of applicants often do not meet the requirements of employers. From the perspective of common job requirements, suitable job applicants must demonstrate relevant professional knowledge and skills, suitable work and social habits, and

appropriate development potential and personal aspirations for successful performance, professional growth and career advancement (Šikýř & Bušina, 2014). However, to find such job applicants on today's labour market is not easy. A common problem of employing students and graduates is that they usually have better theoretical knowledge than practical experience (Stanciu & Banciu, 2012). Many students and graduates often lack relevant professional skills and social habits (Cutillas, Monfort & Tortajada, 2011). Some students and graduates also have no real idea about their future career, but often require positions that do not match their abilities, just to get a job promising them high earnings and rapid career (Garcia-Arical & Van der Velden, 2008). This leads to the fact that employers tend to hire experienced workers than students and graduates with inadequate experience and unreal expectations.

The authors' analysis is focused on the motivation to study at university and the ideas about the future career of management students of the College of Regional Development in Prague and the Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies of the Czech Technical University in Prague. The College of Regional Development in Prague was established as a private higher education institution in 2003. The authors' analysis is focused on students of bachelor's fields of study Urban and Regional Development Management and Security and Safety Management in Regions. The Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies was established as a self-contained academic unit of the Czech Technical University in Prague in 1992. The authors' analysis is focused on students of bachelor's fields of study Personnel Management in Industrial Enterprises and Management and Economy of an Industrial Enterprise. These bachelor's fields of study are relatively attractive and the management students should have a good chance to succeed on the labour market due to the possibility to acquire broader knowledge, skills and abilities. However, they should be prepared for continuous learning and should not expect rapid career.

1 Goal and method

The goal of the paper is to define and discuss challenges faced by management students in terms of their professional knowledge and skills, work and social habits, development potential and personal aspirations that make them more likely to succeed on the labour market and get a desired job that will benefit themselves, the organization, and the society.

Achieving the goal of the paper is based on both the analysis of available secondary data (especially the empirical data available in the scientific literature and the statistical data provided by the Czech Statistical Office and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic) and the results of the authors' pilot questionnaire survey on the challenges of employability of management students of the College of Regional Development in Prague (Urban and Regional Development Management and Security and Safety Management in Regions) and the Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies of the Czech Technical University in Prague.

The authors' pilot questionnaire survey was conducted from February to April 2016. The questionnaire included twenty two multiple choice questions focused on the motivation to study at university and the ideas about the future career. The questionnaire was distributed to bachelor's students. The relevant data were obtained from 374 students. The respondents were characterized by gender (30% male, 70% female), age (6% less than 20 years, 75% 20-24 years, 5% 25-29 years, 4% 30-34 years, 8% 35-49 years, 1% more than 50 years), years of work experience (49% less than 1 year, 22% 1-2 years, 13% 3-5 years, 5% 6-10 years, 4% 11-15 years, 3% 16-19 years, 4% more than 20 years), form of study (80% full-time, 20% combined), and year of study (50% first year, 31% second year, 19% third year).

The data analysis was based on the calculation of relative frequencies and the evaluation of the dependence of responses on gender and year of study using contingency tables, chi-square tests of independence and sign schemes.

2 Results and discussion

The results of the authors' survey are summarized, discussed and applied in three parts, focusing on 1) the motivation to study at university, and 2) the ideas about the future career.

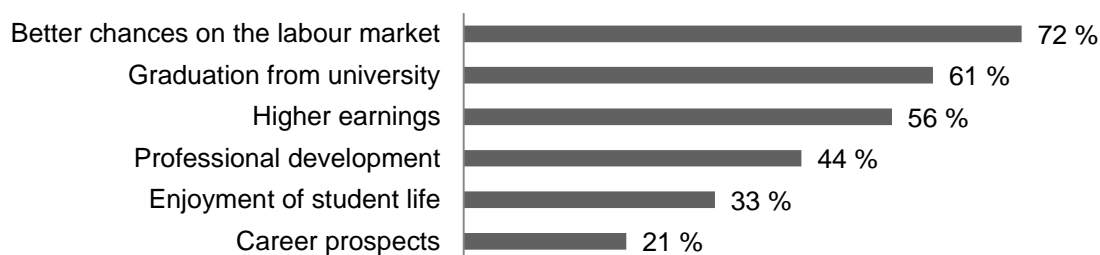
2.1 The motivation to study at university

One of the important conditions for successful and beneficial graduation is definitely the purposeful, intensive and persistent intrinsic motivation of students to study at university. The students themselves must want to learn and adopt necessary professional knowledge, skills and abilities.

According to the authors' survey results, 72% of students stated that they are motivated to study at university by an effort to increase their chances on the labour market (see Fig. 2). In this context, 92% of students agreed that higher education gives them more chances to

succeed in the labour market. On the other hand, 72% of students stated that they see their chances on the labour market as medium. They are afraid of the strong competition and the lack of work experience. The data analysis showed a significant difference between male and female students ($p < 0.05$). The male students estimated their chances on the labour market as much higher than the female students.

Fig. 2: Motives of students to study at university



Source: authors

The feeling of the lack of work experience affects the interest of students in studying. 55% of students stated that they are interested in the selected field of study, but it does not meet their expectations. Students complain of theoretical subjects without obvious connections and practical applications. 68% of students stated that the quality of teaching at the university is so-so. The data analysis showed a significant difference among students from different year of study ($p < 0.05$). The third year students evaluated the quality of teaching at the university as much worse than the other students. They evaluated the knowledge from the university as less usable than the other students and they would change the field of study more frequently than the other students. The potential problem is that students usually share their experiences with each other (especially through social networks), which can significantly influence their attitudes to the study.

The general dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching can reduce the motivation of students to study. The attendance of students is generally poor. Students do not attend the university to learn something new, but to take the test or pass the exam. Many students go to work rather than to school. 83% of students (39% of the first year students, 27% of the second year students, and 17% of third year students) stated that they work during the academic year. On the one hand, they can earn money and get experience, but on the other hand, it is not easy for them to study and work at the same time. Students do not focus on their study because of their work. This is a big challenge for universities to change the attitude of students. The universities should be able to persuade students that the adoption of theoretical knowledge is

important, but at the same time they should be able to provide students with enough practical applications, ideally in collaboration with potential employers. The higher education should be directed to the development of both professional and personal qualities of students, who must gain relevant theoretical knowledge, practical skills and social habits.

2.2 The ideas about the future career

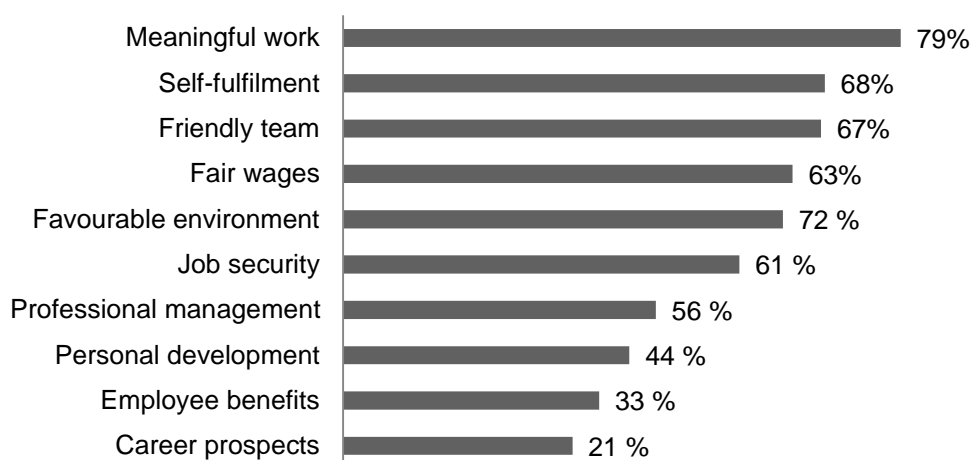
As mentioned above, students are afraid of the strong competition on the labour market and the strict requirements of employers. The common problems that students and graduates meet on the labour market are related to the following points:

- **Professional skills.** Students and graduates lack relevant professional skills, even if they worked during their studies, but every employer has specific requirements. 83% of students stated that they work during the academic year to earn money and get experience, but only 22% of them stated that they work in the field of study. Of course, every work is good to get needed work and social habits, but in some cases it is better to focus on the study than on the work that has no added value. The data analysis showed no significant difference between male and female students.
- **Starting position.** Students and graduates do not want to start from scratch, overestimate themselves and require positions that do not match their abilities. 65% of students stated that they want to be managers (manage people), which is normal when they study to become managers, but they forget that it is a long way and that they have a lot to learn. The data analysis showed no significant difference between male and female students.
- **Hard working.** Students and graduates do not have needed work and social habits and are not ready for the hard work at the beginning of their career, including learning and adopting necessary professional knowledge, skills and abilities. 57% of students stated that they want to work in the field of study and 80% of students stated that they are ready for further education in the field of study. The data analysis showed a significant difference between male and female students ($p < 0.05$). The female students wanted to work in the field of study more frequently than the male students.
- **Commuting.** This is a specific problem of many people who are not willing to commute to work. 50% of students stated that they want to work in their place of residence, 34% of students stated that they are willing to commute to work, and 16% of students stated that they are willing to move for work. The data analysis showed no significant difference between male and female students.

- **Wage level.** The starting expectations of students and graduates are usually higher than the real wage that an employer can offer to a newcomer with the lack of relevant work experience. 55% of students stated that after graduation they expect the net monthly income between CZK 20,000 and CZK 29,000 (approximately between EUR 740 and EUR 1,072). According to the data of the data of the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO, 2016), in Q4 2015, the average gross monthly nominal wage was slightly more than CZK 28,000 (approximately EUR 1,035). The data analysis showed a significant difference between male and female students ($p < 0.05$). The male students expected a higher net monthly income than the female students.

The Fig. 3 shows what students expect from work. It includes meaningful work, self-fulfilment, friendly team, fair wages, favourable environment, job security, professional management, personal development, employee benefits or career prospects. It is obvious that expectations of students are great and that it is relatively difficult to fulfil all these expectations in one job or at one company.

Fig. 3: Expectations of students from work



Source: authors

Despite all the expectations, students are aware of the fact that the success on the labour market is determined by their abilities. According to students, the most important abilities necessary for the success on the labour market include the ability to communicate with people (79%), the ability to solve problems (76%), the ability of team work (57%), the ability to apply own knowledge (57%), or the ability to acquire new knowledge (55%).

Specifically, the management students should continually improve their knowledge of foreign languages, their computer skills or their knowledge of management, economics, psychology, sociology, marketing, informatics or law.

Conclusion

The paper summarizes the essential results of the authors' pilot questionnaire survey focused on the challenges of employability of management students of the College of Regional Development in Prague and the Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies of the Czech Technical University in Prague. The survey represents the authors' first step in the research on the motivation of management students to study at university and their ideas about their future career. The results should bring proposals to improve the education of future managers at universities.

Although the current results of the pilot questionnaire survey do not allow us to draw general conclusions, they confirm main findings of earlier studies cited above and they show some interesting tendencies in the students' attitudes to the study that should be well analysed and discussed. These tendencies lie in the fact that students complain of theoretical subjects without obvious connections and practical applications. This dissatisfaction can reduce the motivation of students to study. The attendance of students is generally poor. Students do not attend the university to learn something new, but to take the test or pass the exam. Many students go to work rather than to school to earn money and get experience. We believe that this is a big challenge for many other universities to deal with similar problems.

The increasing quantity of various management students and graduates raises questions about their professional and personal qualities, especially in relation to the needs of the labour market and the requirements of employers. From the perspective of common job requirements, a common problem of employing students and graduates is that their professional and personal qualities do not meet the requirements of employers. They lack relevant practical skills and social habits, but they want great earnings and rapid career.

The authors' survey results support the assumption that the management students should have a good chance to succeed on the labour market due to the possibility to acquire broader knowledge, skills and abilities, but they should change their attitude to the preparation for the future career. The students are afraid of the strong competition and the lack of work experience. These fears may be justified, but the way is not to replace the study by the work during the academic year that has no added value. Instead, the way is to focus on the

systematic development of necessary professional knowledge, skills and abilities, including knowledge of foreign languages, computer skills or leadership abilities.

The management students should be ready to start from scratch. They should not overestimate themselves and require positions that do not match their abilities. They should be ready for the hard work at the beginning of their career. On the other hand, the universities should be able to provide students with relevant theoretical knowledge and practical applications, ideally in collaboration with potential employers. The employers should learn to create appropriate and attractive employment opportunities for students and graduates to ensure the effective development of their potential.

These issues open up new possibilities for further research in the field of the employability of management (and other) students. The intention is to use the results of the authors' pilot questionnaire survey and extend the survey to the partner universities.

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