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PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY AS A FACTOR OF COMPETITIVENESS ON LABOUR MARKET

Abstract

The present paper raises issues relating to the choice of target form of professional activity. The author has focused mainly on factors determining this choice and on main questions related to starting and running business activity (sector, legal form, when the activity will be started – how long after graduation). The analysis was carried out on the basis of answers given by full-time students from selected countries of East Central Europe. Furthermore, the results of international survey on entrepreneurship (SES 2006).

Introduction

The present paper is aimed at analyzing the factors that determine the choice of target form of professional activity in the group of full-time students. In order to achieve the main objective established, answers to the following supporting questions were sought:

- Are respondents willing to establish their own firms?
- What determines the choice of the form of professional activity?
- In which sector respondents would like to fulfill their professional plans?
- What attitudes respondents have toward the time horizon during which they would like to start business activity and in which form they would like to conduct such an activity?

The present paper has a theoretical-empirical character. The sources referred to are the hitherto existing theoretical material found in the literature on issues raised. International survey on entrepreneurship conducted in 2006 in which a group of full-time students took part (SES 2006) was the main source of empirical data.

Entrepreneurship – theoretical aspects

Entrepreneurship is a multi-dimensional and heterogeneous category, which stems from the following facts:

- examining the entrepreneurship in the context of social sciences:
 - economics – in the case of which the behaviour of an entrepreneur on a micro- and macro-scale is being analyzed,
 - psychology – in the case of which much attention is paid to personality traits and character of enterprising person,
 - sociology – which estimates the influence that social and cultural factors have on undertaking the entrepreneurial activity (Kunasz 2008a, 65); (Kraśnicka 2002a, 187); (Gaweł 2005, 16)
- examining the entrepreneurship in the context of many phenomena, namely:
 - creation, management and barriers to the development of economic entity where the owner performs the function of capital supplier as well as managerial functions

(decision-making, leadership, management, organization and coordination) (Hebert, Link 1982, 108); (Rutka, Czerska 2005, 495),

- effective allocation of resources (classical perspective) or reallocation of resources (i.e. different use of available resources – contemporary perspective) in the process of creative destruction of market equilibrium connected with innovation introduction or looking for new market opportunities for entrepreneurial profit (Schumpeter 1960); (Kirzner 1979); (Mikosik 1993),
- increasing the risk connected with uncertainty (Karkowski 1999, 7),
- creation of wealth, value and growth (Morris, Lewis, Sexton 1994, 17-20); (Kunasz 2008b, 27).

Hence, one may come across many definitions in the literature on the subject. These definitions can be divided into the following homogenous groups (Piasecki 1997, 33); (Kraśnicka 2002b, 14):

- definitions presenting entrepreneurship in the functional context,
- definitions presenting entrepreneurship in the subjective context,
- definitions treating entrepreneurship as a way of performing managerial functions.

As far as the first group of definitions is concerned, entrepreneurship is treated as the process of initiating and introducing changes once new possibilities have been noticed. These possibilities enable one to produce a positive effect though it may be necessary to act in conditions of uncertainty (whether the action will be a success). Definitions from the second group point to the subjective character of entrepreneurship and describe this phenomenon from the angle of personality traits and character of enterprising person in various areas of activity (not only economic activity). As for the third group of definitions, entrepreneurship is treated as a specific way of taking managerial actions understood as taking chances beyond currently controlled resources (Kłosowski, Bagiński 2003, 34); (Bratnicki, Strużyna 2001, 39).

The development of economic thought has resulted in a number of model and definitional presentations and hence there is no one theory that would present this multi-faceted and multi-dimensional phenomenon in an explicit and acceptable way. Drucker, who has devoted a number of his dissertations to entrepreneurship, claims that there is much confusion in this respect (Drucker 1992, 30).

From the analysis of entrepreneurial and innovative behaviour it follows that entrepreneurship can be treated as a characteristics that determines the current functioning of both a firm and human being. Furthermore, entrepreneurship is a driving force behind the development of entity and thus its functioning in the future. Entering another level of development requires the creation of value added which can be done only via the development of entrepreneurship.

In this context, it seems crucial to conduct literature and empirical research that will allow to systematize and broaden knowledge of this economic category.

The survey presented in another section of the present paper has become a part of this context. Full-time students represented statistical community that participated in the survey. It was carried out in six countries, namely Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and Hungary. The time horizon covered the period from May 2006 to November 2006. The partial method was employed and data needed was collected via questionnaires that were distributed among individuals admitted to the sample. Respondents were chosen randomly. From 600 (Russia) to 603 (Poland) questionnaires were analyzed.

The results of the questionnaire survey

At the beginning, respondents were asked to select the target form of future professional activity. They could choose from the following three options:

- employment in state-run institution/state-owned firm,
- employment in private firm,
- establishing one's own firm.

Table 1 shows the structure of answers given by respondents.

Table 1. Target form of professional activity

	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Russia	Ukraine
employer	20.3	26.3	24.7	26.9	14.0	40.4
employee	54.3	50.8	58.9	48.9	73.3	37.7
civil servant	25.4	22.9	16.4	24.2	12.7	22.0

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire survey.

Taken answers offered by respondents into account, it should be stated that Ukrainian students turned out to be the most enterprising as 40.4 % of them would like to start their own business activity. A burst of entrepreneurship (obviously, the declared one) that is observed among Ukrainian young people seems to be a response to recent changes that take place in socio-economic sphere in Ukraine. The lowest percentage (14 %) of such declarations was registered among Russian students. As for students from the remaining countries, extreme percentages could be found as well yet with reference to another option mentioned (employment in private firm). 37.7 % of Ukrainian students would like to take up employment in a private firm in the future. Russian students declaring they would like to find a job in a private firm represent 73.7 % (i.e. two times higher percentage) and a considerable disproportion can also be observed in this case as Lithuanian students, who occupied the second position, constituted 58.9 %. Therefore, it is no surprise that Russian students are those who do not want to find employment in state-run institution/state-owned firm. Such declarations constituted 12.7 %. Two times higher percentage of students who wanted to work in state-run institution/state-owned firm was reported in Hungary and Poland, i.e. countries that once belonged to the USSR.

Which factors determine the decision about target form of professional activity then? Respondents could choose from the following determinants:

- a certainty of the employment and the pay
- higher earnings
- fast-track possibilities
- higher prestige
- good atmosphere on-the-job
- narrower duties and responsibilities
- wider duties and responsibilities
- self-realization and satisfaction
- risk of capital loss
- non-standardized working hours
- possibility of improving one's qualifications

Data was analyzed in a global perspective and also for each group of respondents distinguished on the account of target form of future professional activity (employment in

state-owned firm, private firm, self-employment). Each option was placed in a hierarchy and the percentage of students who had chosen a given variant was presented as well (data presented in brackets). Furthermore, weighted average was also employed in the presentation of data in international perspective, namely:

- average position of a particular option in the ranking,
- median of structural indicators.

At the beginning, the ranking was analyzed from a global perspective. Table 2 shows a detailed collation.

Table 2. Factors determining the choice of the form of professional activity

Options	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania
a certainty of the employment and the pay	2 (14.7)	6 (9.4)	5 (7.5)
higher earnings	1 (17.8)	1 (16.6)	1 (18.2)
fast-track possibilities	3 (13.1)	10 (4.5)	9 (5.2)
higher prestige	10 (2.3)	4 (10.2)	6 (7.2)
good atmosphere on-the-job	6 (10.0)	4 (10.2)	4 (12.9)
narrower duties and responsibilities	7 (7.0)	11 (2.8)	11 (4.0)
wider duties and responsibilities	11 (2.0)	7 (7.0)	10 (4.4)
self-realization and satisfaction	4 (12.9)	2 (16.4)	2 (15.2)
risk of capital loss	9 (2.9)	9 (5.1)	7 (6.3)
non-standardized working hours	8 (6.0)	8 (6.6)	8 (5.3)
possibility of improving one's qualifications	5 (11.3)	3 (11.1)	3 (13.9)
Options	Poland	Russia	Ukraine
a certainty of the employment and the pay	4 (12.2)	4 (9.9)	1 (17.3)
higher earnings	2 (16.9)	2 (15.1)	2 (15.0)
fast-track possibilities	7 (6.3)	7 (7.6)	5 (12.0)
higher prestige	5 (8.1)	6 (8.6)	6 (8.6)
good atmosphere on-the-job	8 (6.0)	5 (8.9)	7 (7.5)
narrower duties and responsibilities	9 (3.8)	11 (2.6)	10 (3.5)
wider duties and responsibilities	11 (2.7)	8 (5.1)	8 (4.7)
self-realization and satisfaction	1 (18.5)	1 (19.0)	3 (12.6)
risk of capital loss	10 (2.9)	9 (5.0)	9 (3.7)
non-standardized working hours	6 (7.0)	10 (4.4)	11 (2.9)
possibility of improving one's qualifications	3 (15.6)	3 (13.7)	4 (12.2)

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire survey.

The analysis of data allows to state that while making their choices, respondents were guided mainly by the following factors:

- higher earnings (average position in the ranking 1.5, median of structural indicators 16.8 %, this factor was placed first by Hungarian, Lithuanian and Latvian students),
- self-realization and satisfaction with a job (average position in the ranking 2.2, median of structural indicators 15.8 %, this factor determined choices made mainly by Polish and Russian students),
- possibility of improving one's qualifications (average position in the ranking 3.5, median

of structural indicators 13 %),

- a certainty of the employment and the pay (average position in the ranking 3.7, median of structural indicators 11 %, this factor was placed first in the ranking created on the basis of Ukrainian students' declarations).

The least important factors determining the choice of the form of future professional activity are as follows:

- narrower or wider duties and responsibilities,
- risk of capital loss.

Subsequently, rankings created for groups of students choosing particular forms of professional activity were analyzed. Table 3 shows a collation of factors determining the choices made by respondents who would like to find employment in state-run institution/state-owned firm.

Table 3. Factors determining the choice of the form of professional activity (employment in state-run institution/state-owned firm)

Options	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania
a certainty of the employment and the pay	1 (20.4)	1 (18.0)	2 (14.1)
higher earnings	2 (17.9)	4 (10.8)	3 (11.6)
fast-track possibilities	5 (10.2)	8 (4.1)	10 (4.0)
higher prestige	8 (3.6)	2 (16.6)	5 (10.0)
good atmosphere on-the-job	4 (11.5)	6 (9.6)	3 (11.6)
narrower duties and responsibilities	7 (7.9)	9 (3.8)	6 (9.6)
wider duties and responsibilities	9 (2.3)	7 (5.8)	9 (5.2)
self-realization and satisfaction	6 (8.4)	4 (10.2)	7 (8.0)
risk of capital loss	10 (2.8)	10 (3.5)	8 (6.8)
non-standardized working hours	11 (1.0)	11 (1.7)	11 (2.0)
possibility of improving one's qualifications	3 (14.0)	3 (16.0)	1 (16.9)
Options	Poland	Russia	Ukraine
a certainty of the employment and the pay	1 (32.2)	3 (11.5)	1 (27.4)
higher earnings	8 (4.0)	8 (6.6)	4 (9.6)
fast-track possibilities	5 (6.1)	9 (4.9)	4 (9.6)
higher prestige	3 (10.1)	1 (19.2)	3 (12.2)
good atmosphere on-the-job	7 (5.2)	5 (9.3)	6 (7.0)
narrower duties and responsibilities	5 (6.1)	10 (2.2)	8 (5.5)
wider duties and responsibilities	10 (1.8)	7 (7.1)	9 (2.9)
self-realization and satisfaction	4 (9.5)	2 (18.7)	7 (6.7)
risk of capital loss	9 (3.4)	11 (1.1)	10 (2.6)
non-standardized working hours	11 (1.2)	6 (7.7)	11 (0.6)
possibility of improving one's qualifications	2 (20.2)	3 (11.5)	2 (15.7)

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire survey.

The analysis of data presented in Table 3 suggested that respondents who had chosen the aforementioned form of professional activity were guided mainly by the following factors:

- a certainty of the employment and the pay (median of structural indicators 19.2 %, this factor was placed first by Hungarian, Latvian, Polish and Ukrainian students),
- possibility of improving one's qualifications (median of structural indicators 15.9 %, this factor occupied the top position in the ranking created by Lithuanian students),
- higher prestige of a job (median of structural indicators 11.2 %, this determinant was considered important mainly by Russian students).

Now, what determines willingness to work in a private firm in the future? Table 4 shows the specification of determinants.

Respondents who had chosen the aforementioned form of professional activity were guided mainly by:

- possibility of having higher earnings (median of structural indicators 16.8 %, this factor was regarded as the most important by Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish students),
- possibility of improving one's qualifications (median of structural indicators 15.2 %),
- self-realization and satisfaction with a job (median of structural indicators 15.1 %, this factor determined choices made mainly by Russian students).

The fact is that the same factors play minor role in the case of employment in state-run institution and private firm – respondents do not pay much attention to the following determinants:

- narrower or wider duties and responsibilities,
- risk of capital loss,
- non-standardized working hours.

Which factors determine the choice of self-employment as a target form of professional activity then? Table 5 shows answers given by respondents who have chosen the aforementioned model of professional career.

Table 4. Factors determining the choice of the form of professional activity (employment in private firm)

Options	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania
a certainty of the employment and the pay	2 (16.0)	5 (8.3)	5 (7.8)
higher earnings	1 (16.7)	1 (16.8)	1 (18.4)
fast-track possibilities	3 (15)	10 (4.5)	8 (6.0)
higher prestige	11 (1.1)	6 (7.9)	7 (6.2)
good atmosphere on-the-job	5 (11.0)	4 (11.7)	4 (13.5)
narrower duties and responsibilities	7 (8.0)	11 (3.6)	9 (3.8)
wider duties and responsibilities	10 (1.8)	8 (6.2)	11 (3.1)
self-realization and satisfaction	6 (10.4)	2 (16.3)	3 (13.8)
risk of capital loss	8 (3.5)	7 (6.6)	6 (7.5)
non-standardized working hours	8 (3.5)	9 (5.4)	10 (3.3)
possibility of improving one's qualifications	4 (13.0)	3 (12.6)	2 (16.8)

Options	Poland	Russia	Ukraine
a certainty of the employment and the pay	6 (7.0)	4 (11.4)	1 (16.9)
higher earnings	1 (20.7)	2 (16.2)	3 (14.6)
fast-track possibilities	5 (9.3)	6 (8.6)	2 (15.7)
higher prestige	4 (9.7)	7 (7.1)	7 (5.1)
good atmosphere on-the-job	7 (5.8)	5 (8.9)	6 (7.6)
narrower duties and responsibilities	8 (4.3)	10 (2.8)	9 (3.6)
wider duties and responsibilities	11 (1.6)	9 (3.5)	10 (3.2)
self-realization and satisfaction	3 (16.3)	1 (17.5)	5 (12.4)
risk of capital loss	10 (3.7)	8 (5.5)	8 (3.7)
non-standardized working hours	9 (4.0)	11 (2.6)	11 (2.9)
possibility of improving one's qualifications	2 (17.6)	3 (15.9)	4 (14.4)

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire survey.

Table 5. Factors determining the choice of the form of professional activity (self-employment)

Options	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania
a certainty of the employment and the pay	6 (4.4)	8 (4.0)	10 (2.6)
higher earnings	2 (20.8)	2 (21.4)	2 (22.1)
fast-track possibilities	4 (11.6)	7 (4.8)	8 (4.1)
higher prestige	7 (4.1)	5 (9.1)	5 (7.7)
good atmosphere on-the-job	5 (5.3)	6 (8.1)	3 (12.6)
narrower duties and responsibilities	8 (3.1)	11 (0.5)	11 (1.0)
wider duties and responsibilities	10 (2.5)	4 (9.3)	6 (6.9)
self-realization and satisfaction	1 (24.8)	1 (22.2)	1 (22.8)
risk of capital loss	11 (1.3)	10 (3.8)	9 (3.1)
non-standardized working hours	3 (18.9)	3 (12.8)	4 (11.8)
possibility of improving one's qualifications	8 (3.1)	8 (4.0)	7 (5.4)
Options	Poland	Russia	Ukraine
a certainty of the employment and the pay	7 (5.3)	11 (0.9)	3 (12.1)
higher earnings	2 (20.9)	2 (16.9)	1 (18.4)
fast-track possibilities	9 (0.5)	8 (5.0)	5 (9.7)
higher prestige	8 (2.9)	6 (7.3)	4 (9.9)
good atmosphere on-the-job	5 (7.1)	5 (8.7)	7 (7.7)
narrower duties and responsibilities	11 (0.3)	10 (1.8)	11 (2.4)
wider duties and responsibilities	6 (5.6)	3 (11.4)	8 (7.2)
self-realization and satisfaction	1 (30.7)	1 (26.9)	2 (16.0)
risk of capital loss	9 (0.5)	7 (5.5)	10 (4.2)
non-standardized working hours	3 (18.0)	4 (10.5)	9 (4.3)
possibility of improving one's qualifications	4 (8.2)	8 (5.0)	6 (8.1)

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire survey.

Students who would like to establish and manage their own firms were guided mainly by:

- self-realization and satisfaction with a job (median of structural indicators 23.8 %, this factor was considered as the most important by all the groups of respondents apart from Ukrainian students),
- possibility of having higher earnings (median of structural indicators 20.9 %, this factor was placed first in the ranking created by the group of Ukrainian students),
- non-standardized working hours (median of structural indicators 12.3 %).

Respondents who would like to set up their own firms regarded the following factors as the least important:

- narrower duties and responsibilities,
- risk of capital loss.

Subsequently, the following issues were addressed:

- sector in which respondents would like to be professionally active,
- forms of business activity (one-man or partnership),
- time from graduation to establishing one's own firm.

Respondents were asked to choose a sector (industry, finance, service) in which they wanted to be professionally active (as an employee or employer). Table 6 shows the structure of answers given.

Table 6. Sector in which respondents would like to build their professional career in the future

	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Russia	Ukraine
service	56.3	46.3	53.9	64.9	51.1	48.7
finance	21.4	39.1	28.7	27.3	40.9	32.6
industry	22.3	14.5	17.4	7.9	8.0	18.7

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire survey.

Taken global perspective into consideration, nearly half of respondents would like to pursue professional career in service sector. Almost every third student would be satisfied with a job in finance sector and 16 % of respondents wanted to function professionally in industry sector. As for answers given by students from particular countries, it ought to be stated that the highest percentage of respondents who would like to build professional career in service sector was reported in Poland. Lithuanian students represented a 20 percentage-point lower proportion. The largest percentage of respondents who wanted to work in finance sector was recorded in Russia whereas the smallest – in Hungary where, relatively speaking, students wanted to pursue their professional career in industry sector (40.9 % and 22.3 % respectively). Polish and Russian respondents constituted the lowest percentage of people declaring they would like to work in industry sector (7.9 % and 8 % respectively).

Furthermore, issues relating to the form of business activity were raised as well. In this case, the question was addressed only to students who had declared they wanted to start business activity. Taken the specificity of legal regulations concerning this issue that have been adopted in particular countries into account, two forms have been distinguished, namely 'independently' and 'with a partner(s)'. Table 7 shows the structure of answers given by respondents in this respect.

Table 7. Form in which respondents would like to conduct business activity

	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Russia	Ukraine
doesn't matter	28.1	35.0	35.1	38.3	28.2	33.9
with a partner(s)	45.6	47.9	36.6	41.6	57.7	35.7
independently	26.3	17.1	28.2	20.1	14.1	30.4

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire survey.

Taken global perspective (analysis based on median of structural indicators) into account, 43.6 % of respondents would like to conduct business activity with a trusted business partner(s). 'Independently' was chosen by nearly every fourth respondent however, 'it doesn't matter' was selected by every third respondent. Carrying out the analysis with respect to particular countries, attention should be paid to extreme cases that are represented by Russian students (only 14.1 % of whom would like to conduct business activity independently, and 57.7 % of whom wanted to cooperate with a partner(s) in this scope) and Ukrainian students (in the case of whom as many as 30.4 % of respondents declared they wanted to manage a firm all by themselves, and only 35.7 % would like to work with a partner(s); similar proportions can be identified in the case of answers given by Lithuanian students).

Another issue under consideration was time from graduation to starting one's own business activity (ultimately). The following two options were taken into account:

- establishing one's own firm right after graduation (why waste time?),
- establishing one's own firm in a few years after graduation (once one has gained professional position and experience).

Students could also choose another variant, namely that they already have their own firms. Table 8 shows the structure of answers given by students.

Table 8. Time from graduation to establishing one's own firm

	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Russia	Ukraine
in a few years after graduation	61.9	64.5	69.0	58.2	53.8	55.8
right after graduation	30.1	25.5	23.0	38.4	33.8	36.6
I already have my own enterprise	8.0	9.9	7.9	3.4	12.3	7.6

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire survey.

The highest percentage (12.3 %) of respondents who declared they had their own firms was reported in the group of Russian students. Polish students can be placed at the other extreme as only 3.4 % of them own a firm. Nevertheless, Polish respondents represent the largest percentage (i.e. 38.4 %) of persons declaring they would like to establish a firm right after graduation. Lithuanian students turned out to be the most restrained in this scope. As many as 69 % of these respondents want to set up a firm in a few years after graduation once they have gained experience, and 23 % of them will probably decide to start an enterprise right after graduation.

Summary

To sum up the above discussion, taken the questions posed at the beginning of the present paper into account, it can be stated that:

- The majority of respondents would like to pursue professional career in a private firm. Every fourth student wants to establish his/her own firm (Ukrainian students stand out positively in this case) or work in a state-run institution/state-owned firm (Hungarian students represent the highest percentage of respondents declaring they would choose this form of professional activity). Students want to build their career in service and finance sectors.
- Making their choices, respondents were guided mainly by the possibility of having high earnings (factor important in all the rankings created for particular forms of professional activity), self-realization and satisfaction with a job (mainly once one has established a firm or found employment in a private firm), possibility of improving one's qualifications (factor important in the case of forms of dependent activity), a certainty of the employment and the pay (particularly in a state-run institution/state-owned firm). Possibility of having non-standardized working hours was a crucial factor that determined the choice of self-employment as a career path.
- The majority of respondents would like to establish a firm in a few years after graduation once they have gained professional experience. They are going to manage their firms with a partner(s) (not independently). Nonetheless, it doesn't matter to every third respondent. As far as the question under discussion is concerned, opinions held by students from particular countries differ considerably. Polish students stand out in this case. As a rule, they do not own an enterprise yet but want to establish one (relatively more often compared to other countries) right after graduation. Finally, Lithuanian students declare they would like to set up their firms in a few years after graduation.

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