

Problems of social and psychological adaptation of university graduates to professional activities

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Abstract. The study raised and considered the issues of social and psychological adaptation of university graduates to professional activities in the context of growing competition in the labor market and the increasing demands of employers for young professionals who are looking not just for candidates for vacant positions, but for employees who would have the ability to quickly immerse into a professional environment and self-realization in it. In their conclusions, the authors rely on the empirical data obtained during the questionnaire and online survey, indicating that university graduates when entering the labor market are poorly adapted to the employment process, experience difficulties and discomfort when establishing interpersonal relationships in teams and processing a significant amount of professional information. In the model of the stage-by-stage implementation of education and training of a young specialist proposed by the authors, it is noted that the issues of socio-psychological adaptation are associated with the development of the graduate's competence and require certain adaptation mechanisms. Given the fact that the adaptation process is dependent on the psychophysical properties of the graduate, the time of its implementation and can be repeated at a new place of work, the authors propose to consider it step by step, in relation to the levels of adaptation (adaptation, partial adaptation, full adaptation) and the criteria for achieving adaptation goals by defining the role of the mentor at each stage of the process. The authors believe that the role of mentoring is related to overcoming the social and psychological adaptation problems of graduates and is a mutually beneficial form of cooperation for the employer, mentor, and young specialist.

Keywords: university graduates, model and mechanisms of adaptation, mentoring, socio-psychological aspects, professional activity

1 Introduction

At present the labor market is undergoing a serious transformation in terms of forming new demands for personnel, especially for young specialists after graduation [1]. The needs in innovative development of economy inevitably cause the needs in such skills of employees, which allow quick adapting to the current requirements of employers, demonstrating high abilities to self-organization and self-learning. In such an environment, the emergence of

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employment relationships for graduates aims not only to obtain initial employment, but also to integrate into these processes, to be able to add value to the company (and society) and to be in demand in various areas of employment. However, this process also reinforces the social and psychological problems accompanying the adaptation of young people to professional activity and concerning the demonstration of professional suitability to the employer, overestimation of professional expectations, lack of real knowledge of the labor market and the desire to be active in the search for the first job.

In the stage-by-stage implementation of education and training of young professionals (Figure 1), the initial impulse to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities is provided by the education system, and the organizations themselves are focused on the earliest possible adaptation of graduates as a guarantee of a successful company policy in the market. Participating indirectly in the education of their employees (unless targeted training by order of organizations is considered), employers can take the main role in the education and improvement of new employees in the process of their adaptation.

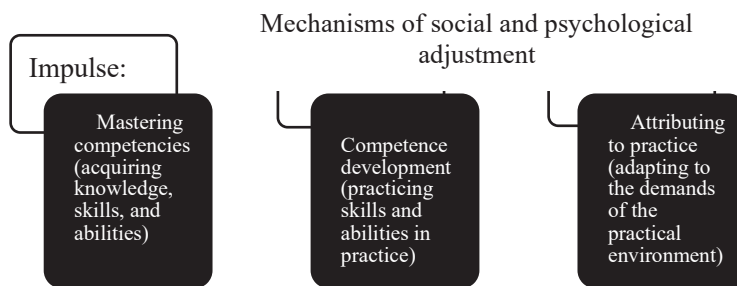


Fig.1. Stages of training and development of a young specialist (Source: authors).

It is quite obvious today that effective adaptation of graduates to the system of professional and interpersonal relations present in the new teams requires new methods and approaches. The search for solutions focuses on the identified social and psychological problems accompanying this process. And since the process of adaptation itself is aimed at transition from one state to a more optimal one, the proposed solutions should be provided with mechanisms realizing the sequence of goals of life success from adaptation to self-development and self-regulation of a personality.

2 Methods

Taking as a basis that professional adaptation is seen both as a continuous process of "active adjustment of the individual" to the requirements of the labor market and as a result of this process from the psychological point of view, the question of participation of employers in adjustment of a young graduate to all aspects of professional activity in order to preserve the internal integrity of personality and ability to self-realization in the external environment is inevitably posed.

In the conducted empirical study, the hypothesis was accepted that social and psychological problems of graduates' adaptation are determined by the lack of support from the organization which is the place of work immediately after graduation from the educational institution.

The first stage included a focus-group study (2 groups of 7 people each), in which graduates of the State University of Management (Moscow) took part. The research was

aimed at identifying the main problems accompanying the process of adaptation. The method of logical analysis was used to form a problematic research field.

At the second stage of the study, an online questionnaire built on the platform of Google Forms was conducted to identify the nature of difficulties in the social and psychological adaptation of graduates to professional activities. The total number of the sample (N=100) was represented by the residents of Moscow, Moscow region (73 people) and some other regions (27 people). Analytical study of the data obtained was performed using the methods of statistical, structural and dynamic, and comparative analyses. Part of the conclusions was reached using the methods of analysis and synthesis, as well as analogy and comparison.

3 Results

The most significant result of the first stage of the research conducted by the focus-group method was the identification of the main problems of social and psychological adaptation from the perspective of graduates. The formed problem field was analyzed for cause-and-effect relations and expertly assessed in the Likert scale. Individual matrices were processed and summarized by the median method.

The data obtained showed that the main social and psychological reasons for violation of personal effectiveness during the period of adaptation at the workplace are “transition to a new workplace (department, organization)” and “transfer to another position”. Discrepancy between the young professionals’ own expectations from the place of work; awareness of the possible gap between theoretical knowledge and professional requirements to perform tasks; new relationships in the team and lack of understanding of the features of organizational culture should be considered as the reasons for this choice. The next research stage was structured in such a way.

The online questionnaire survey conducted in the second stage of the study revealed that most respondents (38%) consider getting used to the new workplace to be the main difficulty of social and psychological adaptation (Figure 2).

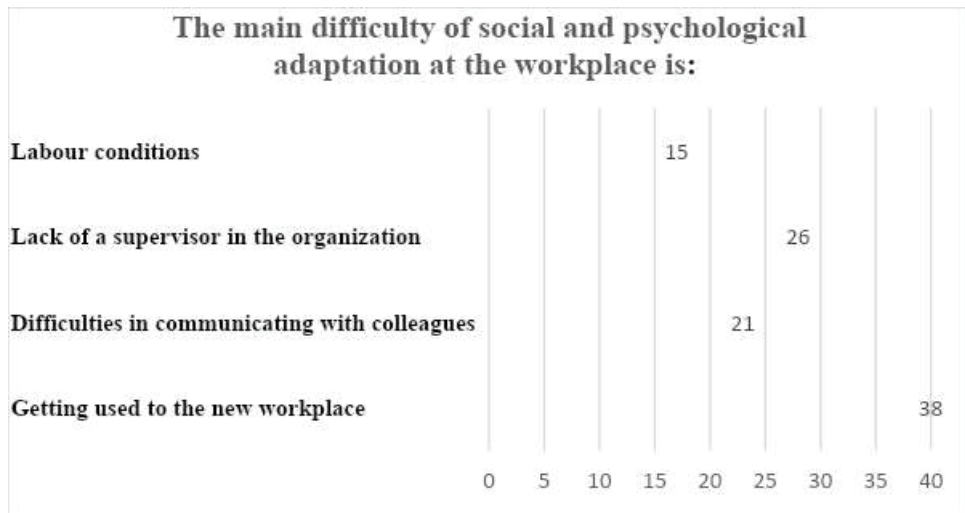


Fig. 2. Distribution of respondents’ answers to the question “Specify the main difficulties of social and psychological adaptation at the workplace”, number of people (Source: authors).

The absence of an adaptation program and a special mentor for graduates in the organization was also noted by 44% of the respondents. Only 39% of the respondents could

count on the voluntary help of their colleagues or supervisor. Seventeen percent of graduates reported minimal help from a mentor in the absence of an onboarding program.

The analysis of the perception of the first days of work showed that 91% of the respondents faced different kinds of discomfort: from stress and uncertainty to skepticism of the new colleagues.

A study of the impact of the amount and content of external information received related to the direct performance of professional duties found that the greatest number of respondents (42%) noted the inadequacy of initial information in terms of the content of the functions performed (Figure 3). A certain discomfort in the form of anxiety emerged among the respondents when they received information from their colleagues, but not from their direct supervisor.

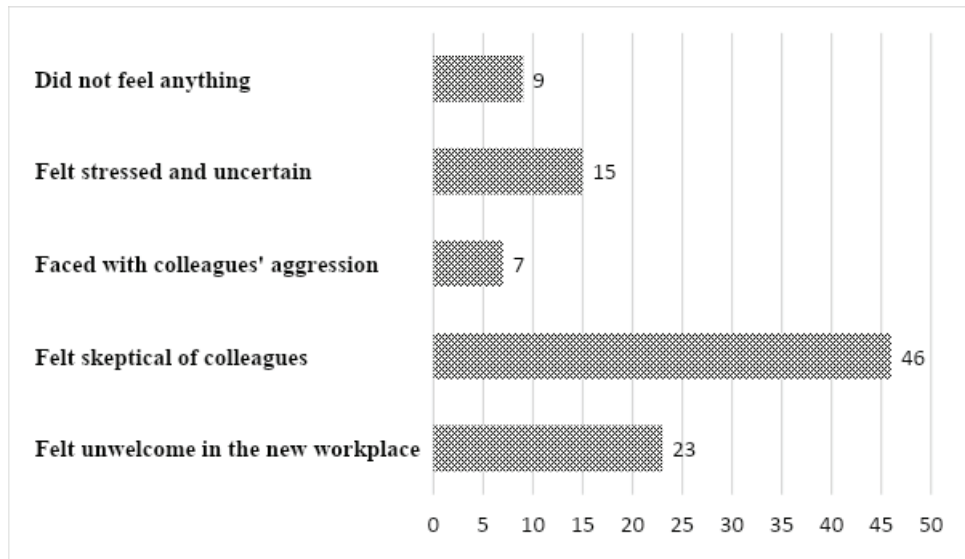


Fig. 3. Distribution of respondents' answers about the completeness of the information, number of people (Source: authors).

In general, the current generation of graduates shows a high ability to process information data, and the speed of information perception depends on the psychophysical characteristics of their personality. An interpretation of the model of adaptation to learning provided in [2] is proposed to reveal the type of this dependence. The authors consider the growth of new knowledge at time t as a difference between the amount of knowledge available in a young specialist and the information received during training (during adaptation at the workplace), considering the information perception coefficient. The dependence has the form of a first order differential equation. It is possible to state that during the growth of external information flow ability to master new knowledge and, consequently, the achievement of social-psychological adaptability state to a new place of work for further development of young specialist professionalism is possible due to the adaptation process period and adjustment of information perception coefficient by social events. Those should include motivation, mentorship, and training.

4 Discussion

The issues of adaptation to the professional environment of young specialists have always been in the focus of attention of both Russian and foreign authors. It determines the sufficiency of the diversity of its understanding in the social and natural science areas. An overview of research concepts of adaptation in the context of classical theories on the origin and essence of social institutions and social order is presented in [3]. Sociological studies act as a methodological basis for the process of adaptation in [4]. Evaluation of career adaptation in terms of the "adaptability, adaptation and adaptability" triad is proposed in [5].

Based on the interpretation of adaptation as the ability to adapt to the external environment, the positions of researchers [6, 7], who consider professional adaptation of young people as a procedure of their incorporation into the organization system in its professional environment and work processes should be recognized as valid. This movement triggers the formation of relations between the organization itself and the graduate's capabilities in the form of actions to prepare for the fulfillment of their job duties on the part of a young specialist and mutual actions aimed at overcoming a possible gap between the requirements of the organization and the real potential of a new employee. Both sides have a social and psychological background.

The process of social perception comes to the forefront in the process of professional adaptation, which helps young professionals to harmoniously complete the process of assimilation of norms, rules, subculture, traditions at the new workplace [8, 9] by developing such a construct as emotional intelligence. It allows using emotions not only in communication, but also in solving professional tasks, which in author's opinion is one of the most important characteristics of successful social and psychological adaptation of graduates [10].

The observed contradictions between graduates' needs and employers' expectations can be resolved by implementing a mentoring system in the organization to help young people obtain new work skills, accelerate their learning and adaptation to the team. The system is mutually beneficial for all participants: mentor, young specialist, and employer.

Foreign research practice testifies to a variety of successes in this area [11-14]. Russian practice does not have such extensive research in this area, but it recognizes the role of mentoring in the process of working with young professionals.

The mentoring process itself at different stages of the graduate's adaptation in the company is aimed at solving a variety of tasks and can be implemented step by step. At the first stage of professional adaptation the plan of the mentee's professional development is created. It determines the adjustment to the desired professional results. The mentor's role at this stage is reduced to observation and minimal assistance in developing of the plan. In this case, the process of partial adaptation is systematically implemented in order to ensure the individualization of the graduate's time of adaptation to the new place of work.

At the second stage, the independent training of the young specialist acquires a special role. The mentor's role is now limited to assistance in non-standard situations and maintaining the mentee's motivation. The goal of this stage is to improve the quality of functions performed by maximizing the amount of new acquired knowledge.

At the third stage, when adaptation level of young specialist in the company is already high enough, the process of self-realization and self-development starts. The role of mentor is in social-psychological support of the process of search for a source of knowledge or ways to solve arising problems. This is not yet a complete adaptation, but there is a dynamic increase in the level of motivation with the growth of accumulated knowledge and skills.

At the final stage the evaluation of the result of professional adaptation performed by a young specialist is necessary. The mentor's role is reduced to the analysis of mistakes made during the self-assessment. This kind of reflection is necessary because it relates to the graduate's social-psychological acceptance of himself as a part of the labor collective and

understanding of his role in it. It is an impulse for further implementation of the self-realization and self-development process, providing a state of full adaptation.

The completion of the adaptation process is the graduate's ability to independently confidently solve professional tasks and build communications with colleagues, as a result of which the organization receives a positive effect in the form of increasing the effectiveness of its work and reducing staff turnover.

5 Conclusion

Effective adaptation to professional activity of a young specialist is one of the most important conditions for the successful building of his/her future professional career. The difficulties accompanying this process are of social and psychological nature and are generated by the problems of entering professional activity. The study revealed several difficulties associated with getting used to a new workplace, with the establishment of effective communication and interaction with colleagues, with working conditions and the perception of a large flow of professional information. The need for a high level of emotional intelligence has been established, which greatly facilitates the professional adaptation of the graduate in the organization, allowing him/her to actively enter the professional environment and be in demand by it [15].

The most successful way to solve the social and psychological problems that arise during the adaptation period of a young specialist to a new place of work is the introduction of a mentoring system in the organization. Since the process of adaptation is related to individual characteristics of the graduate and can be repeated at a new place of work, the type of interaction with young professionals in the mentoring process can vary depending on the degree of adaptation difficulties encountered: from permanent, structured mentoring to non-structured support of the graduate. The time of the adaptation – partial adaptation – full adaptation cycle shortens with the acquisition of socialization skills and the development of emotional intelligence.

When attempting to realize an effective personnel policy, organizations can gain undeniable benefits from implementing a mentoring system. They can use it as a mechanism of social and psychological adaptation of young professionals, providing them with opportunities to pass all stages, establishing a balance between the ways of interaction with the mentor, and supporting graduates in the process of self-realization and self-development.

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