



Research on Administrative Staff of Adult Education Organisations

Work Situation Qualification, Training Needs and
European Dimension.

1st and 2nd Report of the Pro-SAL Project
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Poland

EST Education Centre

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Methodological introduction

The following research procedure consists of two perspectives on its subject, ie: indirect and direct.

The former is of rather metatheoretical character and examine its object through the subject literature or through other kinds of written sources concerning the subject matter. The term empirical is then used in a very particular way as an analysis of existing theory or an investigation that is meant to discover if the theory exists at all.

The latter approach is a direct contact with the subjects of research, ie: the adult and continuous education organisations, their management and the members of the target group.¹ The list of the centers, the researchers have been granted the access into, is presented in Appendix I (p.8). Due to the practical problems and real life conditions the procedure of data/information gathering process took two forms: paper-and-pencil and personal communication. Heads of the adult education centers were interviewed. Members of the target group were asked to fill in an open questions questionnaire. The list of interviewed managers is added in Appendix I. The questionnaire (English translation) is attached in Appendix II (p.9).

1. Administrative, non-teaching support staff

Job titles for non-teaching support staff in Poland (titles in a native language and their English version).²

- a) *Sekretarz administracyjny** (other titles: *sekretarz, pracownik sekretariatu, sekretarka, pracownik biurowy*) - **administrative secretary**. Alternative titles: secretary, office worker.
- b) *Sekretarka** (other titles: *szef biura, asystentka, referentka*) - **secretary**. Alternative titles: chief of the office, assistant, referent.
- c) *Pracownik administracyjny* (other titles: *referent administracyjno-biurowy, pracownik administracyjno-biurowy*) - **administrative assistant**. Alternative titles: administration-office assistant.
- d) *Kierownik działu finansowego i administracyjnego* (other titles: *kierownik finansowy, kierownik działu finansowo-księgowego, kierownik działu kontrolingu*) - **head of finances and administration department**. Alternative titles: financial manager, head of finances and bookkeeping department, head of controlling department.
- e) *Główny księgowy** (subcategories: *księgowy bilansista, księgowy ds. kosztów, księgowy ds. rachuby płac*) - **chartered accountant**. Subcategories: budget accountant, cost accountant, wages accountant.
- f) *Specjalista do spraw rachunkowości* - **accounting specialist**.
- g) *Asystent rachunkowości* (other titles: *księgowy*) - **assistant accountant**. Alternative titles: bookkeeper.

¹ Running ahead of the report conclusions, one can already underline the fact that the subject given in those two perspective may appear slightly different and in fact it does so.

² The following list has been drawn from *Klasyfikacja zawodów i specjalności – opisy grup i zawodów. W: Serwis Informacyjny Urzędów Pracy (2006)*. The administrative character of listed titles is identified on the basis of job descriptions. Titles marked with * are those also found as a result of empirical procedure.

- h) *Asystent ekonomiczny** (other titles: *inspektor finansowy, inspektor kredytowy, referent statystyczny*) - **economic assistant**. Alternative titles: finances auditor, credits auditor, statistician.
- i) *Kasjer* - **cashier**. Alternative titles: cash-accounting clerk.
- j) *Administrator baz danych* (other titles: *administrator systemów bazodanowych*) - **database administrator**.
- k) *Specjalista do spraw szkoleń** - **education and training administration specialist**.
- l) *Kierownik do spraw gospodarczych** - **head of material resources unit**.

The most common expression used to encompass these categories in Poland is **administration**. Alternative titles: **administration/administrative staff**.

There are three levels of education diploma the members of the target group should generally have: MA, BA, post-secondary school diploma, A-levels. Our empirical survey shows that about 60% of them have A-levels as their school leaving certificate, 30% have a post-secondary school diploma and 10% are graduate staff members.

There are no statistical sources (including Statistical Yearbook of the Regions-Poland and sources available from Ministry of Education and Science) indicating the number of administrative, non-teaching support staff employed in continuous education in Poland.

The survey has not found any research and development activities concerning the target group³

2. Work and tasks of the target group.

As one can deduce from the above findings, there is no clear and precise written definition (similar to this from Eichhorn et al) addressing this kind of work in general (Francuz, 2006, personal communication). It is possible though to reconstruct some essence of administrative activities on the basis of written formal job descriptions that fall under the category and the empirical procedure.

Administration is a range of office functions undertaken to make sure the basic activities within an organization run smoothly. These functions can be performed at various levels ranging from simple office activities through to upper management. Administrative/administration staff may perform the following tasks:

- supervise and coordinate activities of staff
- interview job applicants
- conduct orientation programs for employees
- administer salaries and work out leave entitlements
- be involved in staff training and development, the preparation of job descriptions, staff assessments and promotions
- prepare annual estimates of expenditure, maintain budgetary and inventory controls and make recommendations to management
- maintain management information systems (manual or computerised)

³ The survey consisted of literature review, interviews with an expert in the field of adult and continuous education Władysława Maria Francuz PhD, the head of The Center of Pedagogy and Psychology at The University of Technology in Kraków and other managers of the adult and continuous education organisations and members of the target group.

- locate suitable accommodation and negotiate reasonable leasing agreements
- provide and maintain accommodation and other facilities including plant and equipment
- review and answer correspondence
- provide secretarial or executive services for committees.

In addition to this list of activities conducted by administration staff by and large there are some tasks and duties typical for education organisations such as: organise and conduct recruitment procedure or course booking, arrange course schedule, course information service, giving id cards, diploma or id and diploma duplicates, assistance with equipment and other learning resources, support for trainers.

There are formal job descriptions that define the fields of responsibility - ascribed duties and tasks. The exception - identified on the basis of empirical research - is a range of activities ascribed to administrative secretary/secretary/administrative assistant but only at the education centers.⁴

a) administrative secretary/secretary/ administrative assistant

- operate office equipment such as photocopiers, facsimile machines, switchboards, computers
- screen telephone and personal callers
- make and record appointments
- file correspondence and other records
- receive and process incoming and outgoing mail
- draft letters and reports on behalf of the organisation
- transcribe shorthand notes or data from audio tapes into letters and reports using a computer
- store and retrieve data on computers
- talk to clients
- prepare agendas or programs for meetings
- attend and take minutes of meetings, both in the office and at other locations
- organise business itineraries, travel arrangements, conferences, meetings and social functions
- maintain budget and account records
- purchase office supplies.

In addition – as mentioned above – secretaries who work at education centers also perform the following activities:

- organise and conduct recruitment procedure or course booking

⁴ The list of jobs in chapter 1 encompasses those titles that fall under the heading administrative staff by and large. There are however some of them that are directly linked to teaching and training processes as the main tasks of adult's and continuous education organisations. These are as follows: administrative secretary, secretary, administrative assistant, education process administration specialist. The target group consists of the individuals who are in those positions and that is why they are the subject of further concern

- arrange course schedule
- course information service
- giving id cards, diploma or id and diploma duplicates
- assisting students, teachers and trainers with equipment and other learning resources
- other kinds of assistance for teachers and trainers

b) Education and training administration specialist/training administrator

- Prepares courses and directs training programs as an education offer of the organisation
- Formulates and designs procedures to determine if program objectives are being met
- Evaluates data obtained from study and prepares narrative and statistical reports for dissemination to school administrators
- Conducting full information service concerning annual courses and training program
- Prepares budget requests for education programs, orders school supplies, and prepares records and reports.
- Keeps the record of students' performance, fees and institution incomes
- Develops in-service training program for staff
- May plan budget.
- Administer EU structural funds and other European projects

3. Training needs of administrative, non-teaching support staff

Since the aim of the project is to develop a training course for the target group, the focus is still on these administrative positions found in adult and continuous education centers.

The following qualifications are needed for administrative secretary/secretary/ administrative assistant position both on the basis of *Klasyfikacja zawodów i specjalności – opisy grup i zawodów* and as identified through direct empirical procedure:

- at least A-levels, preferred post-secondary school diploma in the field associated
- sound organisational and interpersonal skills
- can work under pressure and meet deadlines
- able to work both independently and in team
- aptitude for working with computers
- good grooming and presentation
- able to act with tact and discretion.

The following qualifications are needed for education and training administration specialist/training administrator position both on the basis of *Klasyfikacja zawodów i specjalności – opisy grup i zawodów* and as identified through direct empirical procedure:

- MA or BA degree in pedagogy, psychology or sociology is recommended in formal job description. Yet some of the interviewed individuals appear to have A-levels or post-secondary education diploma
- sound organisational and interpersonal skills
- able to work both independently and in team

- aptitude for working with computers
- one of most popular European language knowledge

It seems likely that in jobs described above aptitude for working with IT, ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines, flexibility which means interdisciplinary, foreign language knowledge, changing law expertise (particularly in new UE countries that are working to adapt and unify their legal systems), knowledge and ability to administer EU structural programs and basic psychological knowledge will become more and more essential and necessary.

The investigation procedure has shown that training needs that can be reconstructed as a conclusion of the above two issues overlap with the training needs named by the management and members of the target group. That is why it is reasonable to proceed to the next point.

There are two general categories of training needs named by the members of the target group. They also vary in terms of group differences. The first category would be called direct professional needs. These needs are tightly connected with the basic tasks and duties that are to be performed as the basic job. In answer to two key interrelated questions of the questionnaire which was the basis of the empirical survey – *“What training subjects would you indicate as useful and what kind of training would you like to take part in?”* and *“What are your professional needs?”* the respondents usually listed a number of specific needs directly referring to their work. The answer would in most cases look like: “training in human resources management, tender procedures in ESF, specialised training in the field of structural funds”. Thus, on the basis of the investigation of all the responses we identified the necessity of further education and training in the field of:

- a) information technology: operate various systems of IT, follow up hardware and software development, use IT as communication medium, electronic data record strategies.
- b) legal issues: tax and insurance law knowledge, the public commission law system knowledge, the labor law knowledge, knowledge in the safety and hygiene of work law
- c) English language
- d) administration of EU funds and projects

The second category of training needs named by the members of the target group would be called indirect professionals needs. These are not directly connected with the formal job tasks and duties but condition the performance and are therefore essential for the worker as the individual and as the system factor. Thus, the subjects identified the necessity of further education and training in the field of:

- a) organisation stress coping: as the staff members face the pressures of doing more work with fewer resources, more stressful deadlines and workplace demands on personal time, they are likely to find themselves in situations where it is critical to identify and control their emotions. So, the training should provide the participants with the ability to understand the connection between emotions and workplace stress, learn how to balance the physical, mental and emotional aspects of functioning in the organization and – in so doing – create work environment in which emotions can be controlled and positive interactions in teams and work groups can be achieved.

- b) burnout syndrome coping: burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. Among the causes of burnout are: doing the same type of work with little variation, giving a great deal personally and not getting back much in the way of appreciation, lacking a sense of accomplishment and meaning in work. Apart from the training needs identified above the participants should learn how to vary work routines and stimulate their motivation.
- c) assertiveness training including working with difficult client and in-organisation relationships: assertion means standing up for what is believed it is right. Stating needs clearly. It means expressing opposition. It means confrontation and it takes courage. Some find it harder than others because of their natural easy-going style and therefore they need practice to require this ability. The participants should find the following benefits from attending the training: increased confidence handling difficult behaviour in others, managed time more effectively and enjoyed greater self-esteem, felt more in control of their daily activities, increased work effectiveness and productivity. An extreme case when assertiveness is necessary is dealing with aggressive and angry clients or hostile behavior from colleagues. The participants should therefore learn how to develop specific strategies for conflict resolution, recognise profiles and personality types of difficult people and strategies to handling them, deliver negative feedback to colleagues or subordinates, give positive feedback.
- d) interpersonal communication skills: communication is the basic act that condition all above aspects and make the organization run smoothly. A training course should help the participants to express themselves more effectively, have more influence with their colleagues and appear more approachable and confident in front of others.

It is interesting and important to mention that this kind of needs have been named in interviews with the managers and the experts in adult education. They have not been pointed out by the target group members. The following quotation from an interview with a director of an education centre substantiates the above findings: "People here work under pressure. Changing regulations, workloads of paperwork growing with each new project, necessity to work overtime which results in hostility towards managers and clients, grave misunderstandings among the staff, especially at the interface between regular employees and management. The result is tension, friction, stress. Can Pro-SAL provide us with a substitute for Prozac? Or more seriously, can you set up workshops to help people deal with their emotional problems at work? Obviously, one or two sessions is not sufficient so perhaps you are not in a position to offer real help but psychological training is definitely relevant for staff of educational facilities, especially those who, like us, try to take the opportunities which open with new EU programmes." One may conclude from this interview and other similar statements that the need for a variety of trainings of psychological nature is essential to raise professionalism and efficiency of the project target group.

4. Training for administrative non-teaching support staff

The research survey (Francuz and other adult education organisations heads, 2006, personal communication) has not detected trainings provided for the target group. The

adult education administration staff members reported they had participated in various kinds of trainings and courses in IT, legal systems or languages. These were however organised and meant either for administration and office workers by and large or were open for participants of all professions.

Conclusion on the national basis of information on the topic (in reference to the specific Pro-SAL pre-requisites questions)

1. The survey has not found research activity or other kinds of projects concerning the target group in the last five years.
2. As above
3. As above
4. As above
5. The only statistics providing the information on AE are Statistical Yearbook of the Regions-Poland and Ministry of Education and Science web service.
6. The national AE statistics show how many AE organisations exist in Poland. Statistical Yearbook of the Regions-Poland says there were 3602 schools for adults in 2003/04 school year in Poland. Ministry of Education and Science web service inform there are 142 adult and continuous education organisations that have accreditation of the Ministry.
7. There were 5 interviews carried out with the managers. 40 target group members were subjects of the questionnaire. 1 expert was interviewed.

Appendix I

Name of the organisation	Address	Manager(s) of the organisation
Europejskie Centrum Kształcenia Zawodowego/ZDZ	Ul. Dietla 38, Kraków	Dyr. Józef Banach
Małopolskie Centrum Zdrowia Publicznego w Krakowie Ośrodek Doskonalenia Kadr Medycznych	Ul. Krupnicza 11a, Kraków	Dyr. Krystyna Kinga Stanach Pajerska
Zespół Szkół Zawodowych dla Dorosłych	Ul. Rzeźnicza 4, Kraków	Dyr. Wincenty Janowiak
Centrum Kształcenia Praktycznego	Ul. Krupnicza 42, Kraków	Dyr. Prędko
Zespół Szkół Ekonomicznych	Ul. Miechowity 6, Kraków	Dyr Tadeusz Zarawski

dla Dorosłych		
Centrum Pedagogiki i Psychologii	Ul. Warszawska 24, Kraków	Dyr. Dr inż. Władysława Maria Francuz

Appendix II

The questionnaire for administrative staff members

1. What title would you give to your job?
2. What kind of school had you graduated before you were given the current position?
3. Have you taken part in any kind of training provided to develop your professional skills since you started working in this organisation (in case you have, please indicate its subject and duration)?
4. Can you briefly describe your job (your everyday duties and field of responsibility)?
5. What training subjects would you indicate as useful and what kind of training would you like to take part in?
6. What are your professional needs?