

OCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE IN ROMANIA - AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract: *The work at hand presents the results of an exploratory study whose aim was the supply of necessary background in the creation of a national occupational prestige measurement scheme. There are presented methodological approaches in the selection of the occupation list and the criteria considered by the responders in the ranking process. It has been recorded that success is defined as an accomplishment of family life and the existence of material comfort, success being mainly assigned to internal factors (ambition, perseverance, hard work and education). Management positions and those in the IT field are ranked as being the most needed, whilst occupations in politics and management are considered to be the best remunerated.*

Key words: *occupational prestige, exploratory research, job market.*

1. Introduction

The study of occupational prestige is traditionally subscribed to the issue of social stratification, being poorly approached in the context of organizations management. Nevertheless, we can take into consideration that the measurement of occupational ranking and the degree of social desirability offers useful information in the elaboration of staffing strategies and policies, in the personnel retention and motivation or in the employer brand consolidation. The concept of occupational prestige generated a series of controversy, its need of disambiguation being firstly reported in 1972 [8]. Defined as “the social status afforded by a particular occupation” [5] or as “the higher or lower consideration awarded to an occupation in comparison to another or others” [3], this concept rises a number of questions. Therefore, even

though there is a rich literature, we do not have clear, straightforward answers, at least regarding population in Romania, for a series of vital questions: “what does it mean occupational prestige to Romanians?,” “which are the criteria subjects considered when they are requested to rank occupations?” or “how do you define occupational success?” To these questions adds the great variety of the used indexes in the measurement of occupational prestige: socio-economic status, decision power, the level of qualification, value added to society, initiative and independence, work style, the level of responsibilities, training, education and abilities, personal independence, the degree of importance of a typical professional error, the intelligence level required, the scarcity of the qualified personnel [1, 4, 8-11].

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The measurement of the occupational prestige in Romania has not been conducted systematically, only a single study [3] presenting the results of a research on this matter. Even though there are strong arguments supporting the stability (in time and space) of occupational prestige ranking, [12, 6], there are also authors that emphasize the influence of the local context [2, 13]. Bearing in mind these aspects, we have considered being necessary the conduction of an exploratory study, that would offer some insights and paths to the future studies conducted by the members of the academic community or by the companies interested in this matter.

2. Research Design

The main objectives of the study were: 1) the highlight of methodological aspects regarding the making of the occupational prestige measurement scheme in Romania (the creation of the occupations list, the selection of the criteria considered when ranking the occupations, the national significance of the term „prestige”, etc.) and 2) the identification of secondary elements to the occupational prestige that can be useful to organizations, both for the substantiation of their own studies and for the elaboration of staffing and retention strategies of the human resource: role models and decisive factors of „life success”, perspectives on workplace dynamics, perspectives on well-paid occupations.

The descriptive-explorative study comprised 251 persons, their selection being made on the basis of an improbable sampling scheme. There have been used the techniques of individual interview, semi-structured interview, face-to-face interview, and for the occupational prestige ranking the

method of flashcards [8]. The interview operators were MA students in the field of social science, who were instructed to keep „an operator diary” that would contain methodological and conceptual observations.

3. Results and Discussions

With regard to the methodological aspects, it has been noticed that the use of flashcards method is rather efficient as responders handled easily the 40 flashcards that had been used. They were requested to rank initially 40 occupations depending on the general prestige, as the instruction said: „rank the following occupations from the most prestigious to the least prestigious.” The results of the inquiry are shown in table 1, in comparison with the ranking realised in 1984 [3] conducted on a Romanian population (5400 persons) and the data of the international study conducted by Treiman [12]. Considering the explorative character of the study, the data resulted from it has an illustrative character.

The most important methodological finding regarding the occupational ranking is related to the list of selected occupations necessary to the study. Applying the selection criteria forwarded by Adler and Kraus [1], namely the use of the National Occupational Classification, the selection of general and known occupational titles, the inclusion of jobs done by a considerable part of the population led to the selection of a big number of occupations from the rural area, very much alike considering the job description. Consequently, it is necessary to reconsider the selection criteria and take act of the gap between the diversity of occupational titles and the Occupational Classification in Romania.

Subjects were requested to mention the criteria considered in the process of occupational ranking. Through the encoding of the answers (the identification of the codes, their classification in categories and subcategories) there have been identified the main criteria: studies, income, and the importance of the occupation to society and personal recognition from the others. The following

diverse criteria can be mentioned: the level of responsibilities, the difficulty and complexity of work, the work volume, the effort requested, risk degree, stress level, professional satisfaction, etc. One can formulate the hypothesis that the evaluation of an occupation's prestige is dependent to the individual axiological system.

Occupational prestige

Table 1

Treiman, 1977		Cazacu, 1985		Exploratory study, 2010	
Rank	Occupation	Rank	Occupation	Rank	Occupation
1	Doctor	1	Doctor	1	Doctor
1	Judge	2	Scientific researcher	2	University professor
3	Scientific researcher	3	Teacher	3	Lawyer
4	Teacher	4	Judge	4	General manager
5	Officer	5	Engineer	5	Mayor
6	Engineer	6	Actor	6	Minister
7	Economist	7	Schoolmaster	7	Harbour master
8	Schoolmaster	8	Electronic technician	8	Sociologist
9	Journalist	9	Miner	9	Journalist
10	Accountant	10	Journalist	10	Fireman
11	Actor	11	Medical assistant	11	Painter
12	Medical assistant	12	Economist	12	Foreman
13	Electronic technician	13	Engine mechanic	13	Printer
14	Ranger	14	Officer	13	Salesman
15	Technician	15	Foreman	14	Secretary
16	Foreman	16	Operator computer	15	Electrician
17	Computer operator	17	Animal breeder	16	Train conductor
18	Electrician	18	Accountant	17	Chef
19	Tester	19	Metallurgist	18	Driver
20	Engine mechanic	20	Turner	19	Tailor
21	TV/Radio electrician	21	Agricultural worker	20	Agricultural worker
22	Clerk	22	TV/Radio electrician	21	Postman
23	Chemist	23	Technician	22	Miner
24	Metallurgist	24	Chemist	23	Hairdresser
25	Turner	25	Computer operator	24	Customer Assistant
26	Hotel receptionist	26	Agricultural mechanic	25	Butcher
27	Plumber	27	Wine grower	26	Mason
28	Mason	28	Tester	27	Welder
29	Miner	29	Plumber	28	Miller

30	Crane operator	30	Crane operator	29	Poultry grower
31	Hairdresser	31	Mason	29	Gardener
32	Shopkeeper	32	Drafter	30	Birder
33	Agricultural mechanic	33	Driver	31	Pig breeder
34	Driver	34	Clerk	32	Tractor driver
35	Fisher	35	Hairdresser	33	Fisher
36	Drafter	36	Ranger	34	Animal caretaker
37	Animal breeder	37	Hotel receptionist	35	Doorman
38	Waiter	38	Shopkeeper	36	Shepherd
39	Wine grower	39	Waiter	37	Laundress
40	Gardner	40	Fisher	38	Maid

With regard to the perception on the needed jobs in the actual socio-economic context (table 2), responders considered that leadership jobs (manager/director), IT jobs (especially those related to software

applications and programming languages), the occupation of doctor and those in the field of sales are the most present in the labour market.

Needed Jobs

Table 2

Needed Jobs	Frequency
manager/director	41
IT specialist	40
doctor	25
salesman	20
lawyer	20
politician	19
economist	13
engineer	6
banking consultant	5
accountant	3
others	54
NA	5
Total	251

It is noted as well the presence of a functional role (as politician), the occupation the most associated with it being that of a Member of the Parliament. All occupations considered as 'needed' on the labour market require higher education, with the exception of the salesman, which generally requires secondary education. Manual labour occupations are mentioned

only by three of the responders, all of them from the construction industry (house painter, mason and constructor).

The list of the best paid jobs in Romania (table 3) looks quite different showing the separation of the politician functional role with its specific occupations (MP – 19, mayor – 6, president – 4). If some of the occupations are considered needed (IT

specialist, doctor, salesman) they are not perceived proportionally as well paid. Occupations that require law school (lawyer, magistrate, notary) are considered to be occupations well remunerated.

Best Paid Jobs

Table 3

Best Paid Jobs	Frequency
politician	63
manager	43
lawyer	39
IT specialist	27
doctor	17
magistrate	12
notary	10
banker	8
economist	4
others	27
NA	1
Total	251

Not in the last place, a 10-year projection indicated a different distribution of these rankings (table 4). The majority of the responders considered that occupations in the IT field (especially that of programmer and IT specialist) will be the best paid. It is

remarkable that the occupation of engineer even though missing from the current best-paid jobs top is considered to be the best paid occupation in the next 10 years by 24 of the respondents.

Best Paid Job in 10 years

Table 4

Best Paid Jobs in 10 years	Frequency
IT pecialist	55
doctor	45
engineer	24
lawyer	17
politician	17
manager	13
economist	p
priest	6
sales rep	5
construction worker	4
arhitect	3
agricultural worker	3
banker	3
NS/NR	11
Others	38
Total	251

Another item whose analysis may provide useful information in future studies was aimed at the identification of the factors that determine success in life. Further, the data have been coded and grouped into categories and subcategories.

When required to name a person whom they consider to be successful in life, respondents think mostly of people close to their entourage. Most of them are relatives: my husband, my father, my parents, my sister/brother, my cousin, my sister-in-law, my godfather or a relative. Also, answers like *a friend, family friends, acquaintances*, but mostly *my work colleague* or *my boss* come up. References to the following occupations also appear: *a director, a judge, doctors, a minister, a member of the parliament, the country president or the priest in my parish*.

There are also subjects who think of themselves as successful or subjects that answer that they cannot think of an individual but rather *groups of sportsmen, TV presenters/producers, actors*.

A small part of the subjects think of public figures: Barack Obama, Monica Columbeanu, Adrian Porumboiu, Monica Tatoi, Adrian Nastase, the Founder of the IKEA Group, Tantareanu, Octavian Petre, Ion Tiriac, Andreea Esca, Ilie Nastase, Catalin Maruta, Victor Ponta, Naşul, Bill Gates, Mugur Isarescu, Monica Pop, Mihaela Radulescu, Mircea Lucescu, Mircea Cartarescu, Daniel Udistanu, Bear Grylls, Dinu Patriciu, Andy Szekeley, Elena Basescu. The majority of subjects who replied naming a public figure chose Nadia Comaneci as an example of a successful person.

The majority of the public figures mentioned are athletes, business people, politicians or TV people and most of them

are known nationwide; as well, all the people mentioned are contemporary.

These people can be grouped into two categories: people who the subjects really consider as successful in life, they admire and respect their work, effort and intelligence, etc. and people who the subjects considered to have succeeded only because of theft, opportunism and connections. It may appear that the interviewed subjects build the image of the person successful in life with the help of TV presented information (the people that appear frequently, that are praised or dispraised on TV). People like scientists, inventors, writers, poets, (with the exception of Mircea Cartarescu), composers, artists, are all missing from these replies. The contemporary successful public figure seems to be a celebrity (not only due to its achievements), fashionable, who appears very often in TV shows or is being talked about on TV; apparently, the mentioned successes are just temporary: is wealthy, in a power position, runs a business or has a favourite TV show, etc.

To the question – why do you think the person mentioned has a successful life – the majority of the responders formulate some answers regarding the „achievement” or the „fulfilment” (mostly „on all levels”). The representation of success in life is extremely simple: the accomplished person is ordinary as responders’ aspirations (and probably Romanians’) are not very bold – they seem to aspire to being ordinary (the accomplished person has a family, children, a house, a car, enough money to have no limitations and a good workplace: *she is happy because she has a family, she managed to buy a car and a piece of land where she plans to build a house; has a good job; has a nice – and above all a healthy – family; has a successful life*

because s/he has a big house, a personal business and manages to combine the professional life with the personal one successfully).

Therefore, a person who succeeded in life has a happy family (*the children are accomplished at their own homes, a close family, a beautiful family, a harmonious family*) and works where s/he wanted (*works what always wanted, has a cool job, has a good profession, managed to get a job in the field of study, holds a good position, does the work s/he loves*), or has a personal business (*has reached a turnover of multi million Euros, runs a business that s/he loves*). What is the most important, s/he has plenty of money (*has a good salary enough for the daily life, has financial stability, is in pretty good financial conditions, has an important income so that s/he can afford anything, is very rich, has a big fortune*), has anything s/he desires (*s/he can afford anything, s/he doesn't lack any elementary things, lives a quiet life with no worries, won't complain about tomorrow, has a prosperous life and doesn't lack anything, can afford any trifle, will not worry as we do about tomorrow's food, can spend the money on anything s/he wants*).

According to responders, those who dared to become famous live a successful life (*s/he managed to become popular, s/he created a brand of itself*), to be respected (*has become trustworthy, is prestigious*), and admired or appreciated (*is publicly admired, the work is appreciated both by the superiors and colleagues, he is loved by the audience, has become a person who is appreciated in the field*). Successful people live a good life because they achieved what they had aimed for (*s/he achieved her/his goals whatever they were, s/he achieved her/his goals*), they have become what they have always wanted

(*s/he followed her/his dream, s/he is among the few that enjoy their work, a successful life is the one that is exactly like the one you've always wanted*). References to the feelings of a successful person are very few (it seems as it is not the way you feel that labels you as "successful in life"): *he feels good being himself, he is proud of his fortune, she is at peace with herself and is happy*.

To the question – what was the thing that made the person you thought about successful – most of the answers are related to ambition (sometimes with extreme variations: *had an incredible ambition, had a „sick” ambition*), perseverance and hard work (mostly: *a lot of work and s/he worked very much*). Success is mostly assigned to internal (personal) factors – „s/he succeeded on his own.” Among those mentioned appears education (*was a good student, went to lots of schools, studies, the knowledge s/he acquired during her/his life, the perfection of her/his professional training, s/he likes to study a lot, has the custom to say that „a day passed without reading or learning something new is like a year taken from my life,” continuous learning/perfection*) and intellectual abilities (*she was smart, she was intelligent, intelligence*).

Success was also assigned to external factors – „s/he succeeded because s/he was in the right place at the right time.” Answers like luck (most of the times emphasized as if were not for it, the success would have never existed or if it is not the key component of success, it is an indispensable part of it: *had the luck, had a bit of luck*), chance (*s/he knew to take advantage of the chances s/he got, succeeded in life mainly because s/he had the chance*), parents' help (*s/he received a good education and guidance from her/his family, benefited from family support,*

because s/he comes from a family with high values, s/he was born in the right family), financial situation (financial support, he had the chance to have wealthy parents who were able to send him to study abroad and offer him a house, a car and anything he needed, enjoyed the benefits of the adequate conditions and means to succeed, she had someone to support her financially), connections (relations, influent connections) or any kind of help, more or less vague (had possibilities, benefited from state's help, astrological positioning, joined a political party so he was „launched” by that party, she benefited from some circumstances, he was noticed by the right people).

The answers to the question – what did one do to become successful in life – are very diverse. It appears that there is no exact recipe for success. Responders enumerate attributes, actions and sacrifices that one needs to make in order to become successful. One has to be serious, calm, sincere, modest, fair, conscientious, a fighter (*s/he struggled*), an optimist (*positive attitude*), willing, to have determination, to be tenacious, a strong character, self-trusting (*the trust in her own capacities made her succeed*), have „a lot of creativity and imagination”, a practical mind, talent but also gut-feeling (*I think that person succeeded because of it's boldness*), courage (*the courage to express own ideas, the courage to put to risk*) and patience. One has to get involved (*s/he got involved in what s/he did, s/he got involved in many projects, s/he totally got involved in what s/he does*), to prioritize (*s/he knows to establish her/his priorities, he prioritized the things that interested him*) and to be able to make sacrifices (*s/he gave up some hobbies, s/he sacrificed the time allotted to family, sacrificed her/his time, life and family*).

Even though there is no recipe, it seems to be vital that someone “must wish” to succeed (*s/he knew exactly what s/he wanted and fought for it, s/he wanted to succeed, the wish to become someone helped her succeed, they started by wanting something, he had wished to become an important man, told me once that s/he wanted to succeed and not be the simple man s/he saw every morning in the bus station*), establish a goal (*s/he made a purpose in life, always worked with the purpose of reaching a finality*) and then be passionate about what one does (*I think s/he succeeded because s/he was passionate, he knew how to make money out of a passion: football, his passion for writing made him successful*).

Successful people tend to bear the characteristics of businessmen: *knew how to make business, to make transactions, to negotiate, to speculate certain situations and, in general, to invest in something to start with and grow bigger, she is capable to handle due time projects, has the power of decision, has the ability to speculate the fields the most required in the market at the moment of the business launch, made a profit from each opportunity*. They risk: *s/he risked and won, assumes all kind of risks, and they manage very well their money: manage the finance very well, they've planned their resources for each accomplishment, used the money wisely*. They also seem to excel in relationships: *s/he has good communicative and relationship qualities, the stickiness to the audience, she is charismatic, has the power of persuasion*.

There are also people who succeed through means less correct from a moral point of view (*s/he took advantage of the confused system, s/he stole from people's wealth, s/he took advantage of people and stole as much as s/he could, in the right*

time s/he resourced to scams, managed to scam the state), because they manipulate, lie, “forget about the moral values and honesty”, they compromise, are opportunist, have no manners or they are crooks.

Therefore, the subjects had chosen as examples of success public figures or familiar figures (seen on TV or from the personal entourage); these have accumulated an amount considered “sufficient” in Romania that leaves the impression of plenty and they did not succeed by following a clear recipe, but by profitably combining all kinds of abilities and favourable circumstances.

4. Conclusions

The exploratory study emphasizes the possibility of reconsidering the use of standardized scales in the measurement of occupational prestige in Romania. Even though the cross-national analysis is undoubtedly necessary and useful [7], a series of elements specific to the Romanian social environment highlight the need of elaborating local measurement schemes. The main methodological aspects that have been noted and that can be useful to future national studies target the selection of the occupations list and the construction of measurement indexes by aggregating at least four indicators (studies, income, the importance of the occupation to society and the recognition one gets from the others).

It can be mentioned again the idea that the issue of occupational prestige is subscribed to the individual axiological system which requires a broader investigation of each individual’s „life story.”

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