

Employers' surveys as a tool for identification of skill needs

Draft concept outline



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Macro trends...

- Technological development and innovation
- Growing competition on global markets
- Increased labour force mobility
- ‘Europeanisation’ / ‘internationalisation’ of certain jobs and sectors
- Environmental change
- Demographic development – aging workforce

...affect micro level: changes at a workplace

- The work contents is more demanding
- New ways of management and work organisation
- Culturally more heterogeneous workforce
- Increased corporate responsibility for social and environmental issues

Such changes cause

- emergence of new skill requirements,
- higher skill-level requirements,
- alteration of skill and competence composition of occupations,
- multiskilling / multitasking,
- emergence of new and hybrid occupations,
- generic / core / social skill requirements,
- skill shortages,
- skill gaps.

Consequences of skill gaps and skill shortages

- Damage productivity, turnover and profitability
- Affect company competitiveness
- May have greater negative effect on economy at local, regional, national and European level

Skillsnet activities since 2002

- Comparison of methods and information systems for early identification of skill needs proved that holistic approaches are the most efficient
- Absence of reliable and comparable data on future skill requirements at European level
- A number of data gaps and weaknesses detected in the first mid-term forecast of occupational needs in Europe
- The forecasts cannot and will not provide qualitative data on changing skill and competence needs

Questions:

- How can these changes and requirements be identified?
- Are purely quantitative methods alone suitable here?
- How can they be identified in a comparative way at European level?

New initiative of Cedefop's network Skillsnet

- explores possibilities of employers surveys as an analytical tool which may help to reveal qualitative changes in the demand for skills;
- identifies existing employers surveys in the EU Member States and at EU level;
- joins efforts of country experts to achieve comparability of information;
- looks for feasible ways to achieve comprehensive, and comparable analysis of skill requirements at company level in Europe.

Beneficiaries and target groups

- policy making and civil service at various levels and in various fields
- administrators,
- trade unions,
- employers' associations,
- counselling and guidance services,
- enterprises,
- education and training providers,
- researchers
- individuals and a broader public at national and European levels

Strengths and weaknesses of employers surveys

Strengths:

- a first-hand information on skill needs;
- an 'insight' to 'demand';
- possibility to get qualitative information on skill and competence requirements, their changes, skill gaps among specific categories (occupation, education, graduates);
- a chance to verify and understand the processes.

Weaknesses:

- time and resource consuming
- companies' exhaustion from being surveyed,
- subjectivity of information,
- inflated/deflated data,
- limited capacity of employers to look beyond presence,
- lack of broader contextual awareness among respondents.

How to overcome such weaknesses?

- limited number of questions in the questionnaire
- carefully selected questions – driven by the specific survey objectives!
- additional focus groups and expert panels,
- regularity in surveying,
- holistic methods,
- cautious treatment of results,
- combination of results with other sources for analysis.

Employers surveys are not a panacea but just one of tools, yet very useful!

Objectives of the first Skillsnet workshop on the employers surveys' initiative (Bucharest, 21-22 June 2007)

- mapped existing surveys at European level with the view of their potential usage for skill needs analysis,
- compared approaches to employers surveys among EU Member States with the view of their potential comparability and compatibility,
- discussed future steps towards feasibility of a common approach to employers surveys to analyse skill needs at European cross-country level.

Surveys at European level

- Eurostat surveys (CVTS, Eurostat vacancy survey, and Innovation survey),
- European PES Vacancy Monitor (DG Empl),
- Establishment survey, Eurofound, Dublin,
- Survey by European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Bilbao,
- PIAAC survey (JRA module), OECD,
- Harmonised Skill Monitoring Survey in the UK and Ireland,
- others.

Comparison of employers surveys in the EU Member States:

- Comparison of answers from country experts based on the template provided by Cedefop
- 16 MS participated in the 1st phase: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and UK (England only)

Some results

- All (!) MS concerned conduct some kind of employers surveys relevant to a broader subject of identification of skill and training needs;
- But (!) surveys differ greatly in their objectives, regularity, sample sizes and in a range of questions covered in questionnaires.

Objectives of employers surveys:

1. Design of policies in the field of initial and continuing education and training;
2. Design of training programmes, vocational training standards;
3. Identification of skill deficiencies according to level and type of education/training;
4. Work organization, operating environment, business and technological changes and their impact on company's skill and training needs;
5. HRM/HRD and recruitment practices and problems, skill gaps and labour shortages.

In practice surveys pursue more than one objective and in many cases it is a combination of several of above mentioned objectives.

Level / coverage

- 11 countries conduct surveys in specific sectors / industries / occupations or territories;
- Some surveys are particularly targeted at SMEs;
- Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and England have conducted or conduct now national surveys.

Regularity / continuity

- 9 countries have *regular* employers surveys of varying periodicity (monthly, annual, biennial)
- 5 more countries plan repeating surveys in future (subject to support, interest and funding)
- 13 countries aim at continuing enterprise surveys in future

Methods and tools

- All countries use structured questionnaires.
- 6 conduct face-to-face interviews;
- others use a combination of on-line, postal, email and telephone interviewing techniques.

Response rate

Depends on the surveying method:

- face-to-face interviewing enjoys around 80% response rate;
- postal, telephone and on-line interviewing brings between 20-50% of responses

Unit of analysis and respondents

Unit of analysis:

- Establishment (9 surveys)
- Entire enterprise/organization (8 surveys)
- in Greece and Romania different surveys apply both approaches.

Respondents:

- HR managers/officers,
- in smaller companies - owners, directors or top managers,
- sometimes surveys are complemented by focus groups or additional surveys among social partners and other stakeholders (e.g. regional/local representatives),

Surveys among employees:

- only 6 MS cover in the same survey or run a complementary survey among respondents-employees,
- of which 4 have results matched with responses by employers.

Sample size and sampling method

- Depends on objectives pursued and level of detail needed.
- In general seek to provide a good coverage of the segment under scrutiny (e.g. sector, profession, region etc.).
- Many MS survey a large number of enterprises (e.g. 27 thous in England, 16 thous in Germany, 15 thous in France) aiming at covering a large proportion of the labour force.
- Most MS use targeted or non-targeted sampling stratified / weighed by type and size, sector and region.

Classifications in use

- MS widely use international classifications, such as NACE, ISCO-88 and ISCED.
- Only 3 MS use national classification systems either linked or not to the international ones.
- This, under certain conditions, provides some grounds for potential comparability.

Responsibility and funding

Responsibility:

- ministries and their research bodies,
- private or public research institutions,
- consulting companies,
- universities.

Funding mostly combines a number of resources:

- 12 countries enjoy funding from ministries and public employment services,
- 4 countries (Finland, Luxembourg, Poland and Romania) report (co-) funding from EU sources (ESF, Leonardo da Vinci, Eures, Phare, ETF),
- 2 countries (Finland and the Netherlands) had support from social partner organizations and/or their training funds,
- Länder support in Germany.

Is a comparable approach to enterprise surveys needed? Countries' opinions

- All participating MS expressed their willingness and preparedness to discuss and to look for possibilities to make their results comparable to other similar surveys in other countries.
- Even countries with a long-established tradition of employers surveys expressed readiness to make some sacrifices of comparability over time for the sake of comparability over European space.

What next ?

- Subject to discussion and further collaboration with EU MS experts and EU institutions. **Options:**
 - Modifying / enriching questionnaires and surveys already existing or planned at European level;
 - Choosing core questions and adjusting national surveys in selected / volunteering countries to achieve comparability of results;
 - European-wide employers survey.
- **Feasibility study** by Cedefop-Skillsnet.
- Putting together efforts of the network, national and EU authorities, research and data collection institutions to improve the situation on the transparency of skill needs in Europe and to add on the quantitative forecast results.
- The European labour market requires European monitoring! The political momentum is here.