

THE SLOVAK
SPECTATOR

CAREER & Employment GUIDE 2006

Exploring Slovak labour market trends and human resources in the wider EU context



Carmakers sound call
for education reform

Decision time for EU on free movement of labour

Losing your job in Slovakia: How expats can prepare for the worst

GENERAL PARTNER: AMROP JENEWEIN GROUP

AJG

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COVER PHOTO: A production worker at the Volkswagen plant in Devínska Nová Ves, February 2006 (Peter Bános)

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The shift from labour cost to skills

THE YEAR 2006 holds several tough challenges in store for the Slovak labour market. After the initial euphoria surrounding the arrival of two large carmakers to Slovakia, the Slovak labour market now has to provide PSA Peugeot Citroen and the Korean KIA with sufficient skilled labour, a far more difficult task than originally anticipated, as the market is currently dealing with a shortfall of about 2,500 auto industry specialists.

The shortage of skilled labour has revealed the shortcomings in the country's education system, and state officials, including Labour Minister Iveta Radičová, admit that Slovakia has been guilty of resting on its laurels and basking in the illusion that it has a well-trained labour force. What the country urgently needs now is a reform of its education system.

As this guide went to print, political parties were getting ready for early elections on June 17, and their platforms were expected to sort the sheep from the goats and show which party is serious about school reform. Of course, declarations in party programmes are one thing, while finding the money to invest in making the system more adaptable to new technologies and the requirements of the 21st century is something else altogether.

While human resources experts say that Eastern European labour is still a wanted "commodity", several of the pre-accession EU members have decided to keep their markets closed to new members, fearing an influx of cheaper but still skilled labour. It seems that eastern labour is only in demand as long as it remains in the east.

In May 2006, the rest of the old EU countries are expected to announce whether they will follow the example of Ireland, Great Britain and Sweden, countries that have opened their arms to new EU workers.

Spain, Portugal and Finland might be sympathetic to EU Employment Commissioner Vladimír Špidla's call for the free movement of workers. Špidla has said that opening labour markets makes economic sense, and that there is no real reason for the EU 15 to maintain their restrictions.

However, Austria and Germany have already signaled that they will play it safe, arguing that once they open their markets there will be no turning back, even if Eastern Europeans take jobs in large numbers.

Human resources experts say that unlocking their labour markets does not necessarily have to be a bad deal for the older EU members, as migrant workers have so far taken mostly supporting jobs that have been rejected by local workers.

However, public opinion often calls the political shots, and Europeans are not generally enthusiastic about the prospect of a free movement of workers from former communist states to their countries. Politicians ignore such mass emotions at their peril.

Meanwhile, with China and India due to become global superpowers in 20 years, these countries too will have a say in global labour market developments as the trend of moving labour-intensive production to cheap labour markets continues.

With competition sure to increase from the east, and opportunity likely to be hard-won to the west, Slovakia will have to make improving the quality of its labour force its priority. Cheap labour is no longer enough to keep the country attractive to investors if it is not combined with the skills that businesses need.

Beata Balogová
Editor-in-chief

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Asleep at the wheel?

Carmakers urge school system to adapt to need for technically skilled labour

BY MARTA ĎURIANOVÁ

Spectator staff

THE NUMBER of people working in the auto industry in Slovakia will grow dramatically in the next few years. Already, the urgent demand for white collar and blue collar workers with a technical education and skills is putting enormous pressure on the Slovak labour market, and competition for such employees will only increase as the new KIA and Peugeot-Citroen factories come on line this year.

The only solution, say carmakers and human resources companies, is to invest into education now. It's a long process that doesn't address current needs, but the good news, the carmakers say, is that Slovaks are willing to learn.

The most recent auto industry investors to arrive in Slovakia, PSA Peugeot Citroen and KIA Motors Slovakia, say they cannot complain about a lack of interest in working in their factories. They say they have no problems filling jobs with lower skills requirements. However, when it comes to supervisory and management positions, the companies say, recruitment is proving difficult.

Nor are the newcomers the only ones with problems. Volkswagen Slovakia, which has had a factory Slovakia since 1991, says that it too is finding it harder to attract employees with a technical education than before the other two carmakers arrived.

Starting again

Not only is Slovakia expected to become the largest per capita manufacturer of cars in the world by 2007, but it will also have one of the largest ratios of people working in the auto industry. Some 100,000 people will be employed in the automotive industry over the next 7 to 10 years.

Miroslav Poliak, a partner with Amrop Jenewein Group (AJG) who specializes in the automotive, manufacturing and engineering and FDI sectors, said that the Slovak labour market was currently able to cover the demand for blue-



TASR

Changing workforce skill and education levels is a long process, but carmakers are encouraged that people are willing to learn.

collar production workers.

"With these jobs, the required qualifications are not so high and regions of Slovakia with high unemployment can provide plenty of labour for blue collar positions. Even in western Slovakia, where unemployment is much lower, it is possible to find people for these positions," he told *The Slovak Spectator*.

But when it comes to skilled employees, such as engineers, technicians, quality controllers, logisticians, components buyers, and maintenance workers - especially when they must have relevant work experience and knowledge of at least one foreign language - the situation is far worse.

"This is why the demand for some positions is greater than the number of candidates on offer. Sometimes companies have to compromise [on their requirements] to fill the positions. This puts greater emphasis on training and investments into Slovakia's regions," Poliak said.

One of the problems with the auto industry is that the generational turnover is still not

complete. Slovakia, with its heavy armaments industry under communism, has a tradition of manufacturing excellence, but today faces a shortage of young, qualified candidates - trained in new technologies and processes and speaking a foreign language - to take over from their fathers.

Poliak said that Slovakia should aim to increase the skills and qualifications of its labour force to such a level that foreign investors would not want to leave even if countries further to the east were able to offer lower production costs.

To achieve this, he said, the education system had to be rewritten to meet the needs of the labour market in practice, and to produce enough skilled graduates to fill the positions available.

The Slovak labour market is also strongly affected by the country's demography and the low mobility of labour.

A decade ago, 10,000 students a year graduated from elementary schools in the Bratislava region. In 2005, this figure was only 6,399 students. As the number of young people in Slovakia falls, so does the

potential number of auto industry employees.

Slovaks also have strong family ties and resist moving for work. These traits, while admirable in themselves, complicate matters for major investors setting up factories in less populated regions.

HR experts say there are several tools that can be used to increase labour mobility.

"Financial stimuli are mostly used at the middle and upper management levels. Incentives usually cover the cost of moving for an employee and his family. The company may also cover an employee's travel expenses, if he travels far to and from work. With local blue collar workers, providing company transportation is often a solution," Poliak said.

He explained that three HR processes are crucial for the car industry: recruitment and selection, training, and motivation schemes.

Large automotive companies prefer to develop talent from within, which is why junior management positions are usually given to candidates with the potential to grow. For top

management positions, the services of executive search companies are often used.

According to Poliak, auto companies focus training courses largely on technical positions in middle and upper management. Training sessions deal with new technologies, equipment and machinery maintenance, logistics, and just-in-time systems of production planning and management.

Training is delivered mainly through internships at the mother company abroad, or through having foreign employees of the mother company stage training sessions in Slovakia. The services of other companies are rarely used for technology training, but more often when it comes to managerial skills and languages.

Motivation and salaries at car companies tend to be based on detailed studies of what the market and the competition is offering. Turnover in blue collar jobs is a great problem in the car industry, and companies often use other forms of motivation besides money, such as social programmes, to retain staff.

KIA: People willing to be trained

For KIA Motors Slovakia, the recruitment process began in 2004. To date, the company has received about 15,000 applications, and expects that interest in jobs will continue.

So far, the company has hired more than 1,000 people. Out of this number, 800 are already at work in its plant in Žilina, while the rest should begin in the first half of 2006. Over 200 are white collar employees in non-production, managing or engineering positions.

Currently, recruitment is continuing for production positions as well as supervisors (group leaders) in all production halls: the pressing, frame, painting, assembly and engine production halls.

"We are looking for the largest number of people for the assembly and painting halls and the quality control department," KIA Motors Slovakia spokesman Dušan Dvořák told *The Slovak Spectator*.

In terms of white collar positions, KIA is currently hiring for its IT, financial, component buying and development, and production management



Courtesy of Volkswagen

VW Slovakia has seen an impact on labour since the arrival of new auto factories.

departments.

"KIA Motors Slovakia plans to employ about 3,000 people in total. The recruitment process should be complete in 2009 when we reach our full projected number of employees working three shifts as the plant achieves full operation. Of this number, over 300 should be white collar positions and about 2,700 should be blue collar jobs," Dvořák said.

While most applications for blue collar positions have come from Žilina region, the company has received interest in all other positions from across Slovakia, and to a limited extent the Czech Republic and Poland as well.

The company's web page, www.kia.sk, which carries regular updates on vacancies, proved to be an effective tool for collecting applications. An on-line form allows candidates to submit their basic data and mark the positions they are interested in. KIA collected more than 3,000 applications via its web page.

Currently, the company is experiencing a shortage of suitable candidates for its IT positions, especially SAP consultants and ABAP programmers. Quality control and car component development and buying are also departments for which it is difficult to find employees. "Currently, for example, we are having problems filling the position of engine quality control," Dvořák said.

In production there is a shortage of qualified and experienced painters and supervisors. The company is looking for candidates with

leadership experience in production as well as skills in specific production areas.

However, KIA says it is not having significant problem filling other positions, and that its recruitment timetable is not in jeopardy.

The company claims it has received plenty of candidates for specialist positions, although the English language requirement has narrowed the field substantially.

KIA's Slovakia factory will use modern production technologies, which is why it is looking for people willing to be trained.

"The car industry, and the machinery sector in general, has a long and strong tradition in Slovakia. Despite this, there is a general shortage of qualified candidates in the car industry. We are able to train all workers who come to our plant, but machine and equipment maintenance, for example, requires several months of training.

"The positive thing is that candidates want to be trained. The willingness of young people especially to commute to work or to move is definitely a positive thing. People are now more flexible than they were in the past," Dvořák said.

PSA Peugeot Citroen does not see a great shortage of candidates

The French carmaker PSA Peugeot Citroen currently employs 1,674 people at its Trnava facility in western Slovakia. Production workers make up the biggest

share, around 60 percent. PSA has signed 533 technical workers and 128 management staff.

Barbora Šípošová, human resources director of PSA Peugeot Citroen, told *The Slovak Spectator* that it was a case of so far, so good in recruitment. "Our present needs in the recruitment process and the number of people employed is in keeping with the current phase of production at the PSA Peugeot Citroen plant. From the beginning of 2006, PSA has been in pre-serial production mode. Serial production will begin in the first half of this year."

The average age of PSA employees is 30. Of its current workforce, 16.79 percent are women, but the company expects to reach 17 to 20 percent by the time the recruitment process is over.

PSA has received 40,000 job applications so far. Each application is put on file, and even if the company does not hire a candidate, it can still do so later, once a suitable position opens up, Šípošová said.

The greatest interest in jobs has come from Trnava region, although PSA has also received applications from other Slovak regions. The company offers accommodation in boarding houses to people who live in other locations, and in future may also offer them apartments.

"At the beginning of this year we stepped up the recruitment process. We planned to hire more than 200 people in February, and we will keep up this pace until August. In this phase we are hiring mainly for blue collar positions. This year we will hire almost 650 technicians, management staff and skilled workers, and 1,247 production workers," the HR director explained.

Information on current positions can be found at the PSA website, www.slovakia.psa-peugeot-citroen.com.

The recruitment process is expected to be completed in 2007 with a total of 3,500 employees. However, this number is only sufficient to staff PSA's first plant.

"In accordance with the PSA Group statement from December 2005, we intend to build a second plant in Trnava. In 2010, when the [second] plant reaches full capacity, another 1,800 people will find jobs there," Šípošová said.

PSA says it intends technology

See TECHNOLOGY page 32

TECHNOLOGY: Car industry demanding

Continued from page 8

at its Trnava plant that is so advanced it has not been used so far in Slovakia. Naturally, experience with such technologies is lacking, requiring an emphasis on training for each position. "In the recruitment process we are looking for people who are able to learn and who are willing to try new things," Šípošová said.

The HR manager admitted it was taking more time than expected to fulfil certain positions, but said this was par for the course. "We cannot say that Slovakia currently has a shortage of suitable people in any of the areas we are looking for," she said.

Šípošová said that PSA had decided to come to Slovakia only after thoroughly analyzing the labour market, and had come to the conclusion that there was enough qualified labour in Slovakia to meet the needs of the car industry.

However, Šípošová said the low mobility of Slovak workers, especially less educated people, and abuse of the welfare system continued to create problems for the Slovak labour market.

"We also have to deal with the fact that some people are registered [as unemployed] at labour offices and at the same time

are earning income from seasonal work, which is more advantageous for them than having a full-time job," she said.

From its beginnings in Slovakia, PSA Peugeot Citroen has declared its intention to cooperate with Slovak schools. This cooperation was anchored in an agreement on education signed in May 2005 by PSA's top brass, the Slovak and French ministries of education, and the Bratislava and Trnava region administrations.

"The agreements aim to integrate experiences from the European system of special education with the Slovak special school system. Based on the agreements we provide training to Slovak lecturers, who in turn pass it on to future car plant employees, and later other Slovak students as well," Šípošová said.

Under the terms of the education project PSA cooperates with four schools in Trnava and Bratislava. The company has invested €3.3 million in school equipment and teacher training.

Volkswagen Slovakia feels the difference

Volkswagen Slovakia is one of the largest employers in Slovakia,

with a workforce of about 8,000. Volkswagen produces four types of car in Slovakia, as well as transmissions and other components that are exported around the world.

Even though it has been present in Slovakia since 1991 and has had time to refine its workforce needs, the company has still felt the impact of PSA and KIA's arrival on the availability of skilled labour.

"Our production process uses sophisticated technology, and requires employees to have the relevant qualifications," Volkswagen Slovakia spokesperson Silvia Nosálová told *The Slovak Spectator*. Currently, Volkswagen is feeling movements in the labour situation, such as a shortage of electronic and technical engineers, due to the arrival of the new carmakers in Slovakia. In the past, the situation was simpler."

Volkswagen receives hundreds of applications, mainly for blue-collar positions. So far, it has not seen interest from abroad, but that could change if the domestic labour situation gets any tighter. "We do not rule out selecting employees from abroad as well in future," Nosálová said.

In its recruitment process Volkswagen focuses on technical

skills and human qualities such as a sense of responsibility, and an ability to learn, work in a team and actively solve problems.

Volkswagen Slovakia cooperates with several secondary schools and universities. It also has its own practical training centre where it prepares about 20 students a year as mechanical-electronic specialists. The goal is to prepare graduates according to the needs of the car industry.

VW has identified an increasing shortage of graduates in the technical professions, and would like to see greater emphasis placed on trade and apprentice education at the secondary school level.

"We do not support enlarging the academic school network at the expense of technical secondary schools and colleges," Nosálová said.

"The interests of parents [in seeing their children complete the more rigorous academic course] should not determine the labour market. On the contrary, companies and the way the Slovak economy is developing should have a greater say. The education system currently needs more planning and a more methodical approach. If the situation does not improve, the deficit in technical school graduates will deepen." ■

Vážení obchodní partneri,

po roku opět přišel čas, keď AJG – Amrop Jenewein Group v súlade so snahou o vybudovanie dlhodobého, otvoreného a obojstranne prínosného partnerstva so svojimi klientmi predstavuje stručný prehľad výsledkov minuloročnej práce celého svojho tímu.

Ako integrovaná poradenská skupina špecializovaných personálne a kapitálovo prepojených poradenských spoločností, ktoré sa zameriavajú na oblasť ľudského kapitálu a európskych záležitostí, AJG na slovenskom trhu pôsobí od roku 1990. Krátko po vzniku sa jej podarilo v poskytovaní poradenských riešení získať vedúce postavenie na trhu, ktoré si dlhodobo udržiava.

Základom nášho úspechu je efektívna kombinácia sektorovej a funkčnej špecializácie, hlbokej znalosti lokálneho trhu, medzinárodného know-how a neustáleho kontaktu s najnovším vývojom a trendmi v oblastiach aktivít našich klientov.

V tejto súvislosti bolo pre nás v minulom roku významné najmä medzinárodné The 2005 CEE Executive Search Forum, ktoré sme pri príležitosti 15. výročia Executive Search poradenstva na Slovensku zorganizovali v Bratislave a ktoré nám a mnohým ďalším odborníkom priblížilo budúcnosť tejto služby v dynamických ekonomikách strednej a východnej Európy.

Naše aktivity, dosiahnuté výsledky za rok 2005 a získanie prestížneho medzinárodného certifikátu ISO 9001:2000 sú konkrétnym potvrdením skutočnosti, že AJG dokáže v najvyššej možnej miere, kvalite a etike poradenských služieb naplňovať stanovenú víziu – pomáhať podnikateľskému sektoru, medzinárodným inštitúciám a štátu zlepšovať ich výsledky a pripravenosť na úspešné zvládnutie nových trhových príležitostí a výziev prostredníctvom zvyšovania kvality ľudského kapitálu a efektívnosti jednotlivých činností.

2005 ANNUAL REVENUE

Dear Partners,

Another year has passed, and it is time for AJG – Amrop Jenewein Group to present a short summary of last year results of the effort of the whole team. As a group of specialized Human Capital and EU Affairs personally and capitally integrated companies, AJG has been present on the market since 1990. Shortly after that, AJG has succeeded in assuming leading position in providing consulting solutions on the market.

The basis of our success is the effective combination of sector and functional specialization, deep insight into local market, international know-how and regular contact with latest development and trends in the areas of our client's activities.

With regards to that, especially important for us was The 2005 CEE Executive Search Forum, held on the occasion of 15th anniversary of Executive Search Consulting in Slovakia. This event outlined the future of Executive Search service in dynamic economies of Central and Eastern Europe.

Our activities, achieved results for year 2005 and awarded ISO 9001:2000 certificate provide the evidence that AJG is on the top level of quality and ethics in consulting services, able to fulfill its vision – to help business sector, international institutions and government to improve results and readiness to successfully deal with new market opportunities and challenges through the improvement of quality of Human Capital and effectiveness of individual processes.

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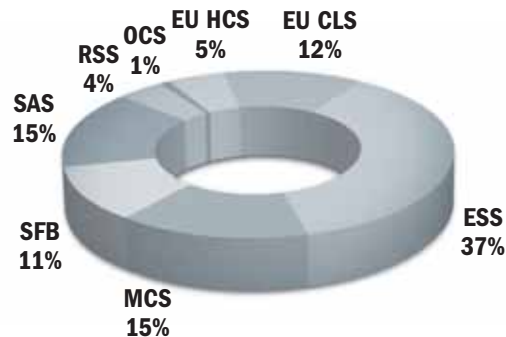
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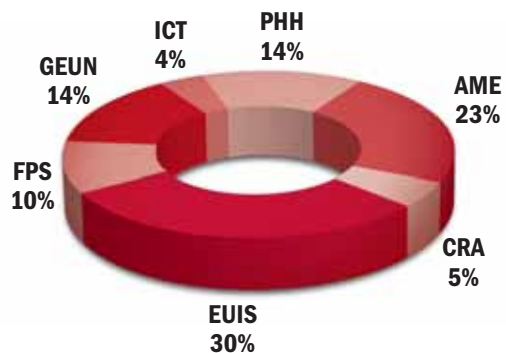


Podiel Služieb AJG na obrate v roku 2005
AJG's Professional Practices Annual Revenue Share 2005

Služby

Professional Practices

ESS – Executive Search Services
MCS – Management Consulting Services
SFB – Services for Boards
SAS – Strategy Advisory Services
RSS – Recruitment & Selection Services
OCS – Outplacement Consulting Services
EU HCS – EU Human Capital Services
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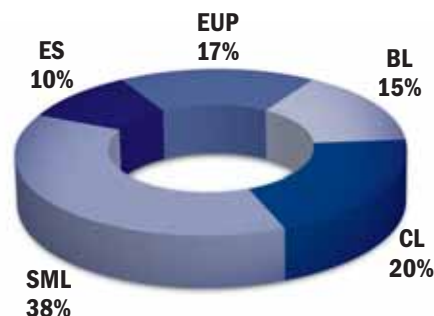


Podiel Sektorových skupín AJG na obrate v roku 2005
AJG's Sector Practices Annual Revenue Share 2005

Sektorové skupiny

Sector Practices

AME – Automotive, Manufacturing & Engineering
CRA – Consumer, Retail & Advertising
EUIS – Energy, Utility & Infrastructure Services
FPS – Financial & Professional Services
GEUN – Government, EU & Not for Profit
ICT – Info-Communication Technologies
PHH – Pharma, Healthcare & Hospitality



Podiel Funkčných úrovní AJG na obrate v roku 2005
AJG's Functional Practices Annual Revenue Share 2005

Funkčné úrovně

Functional Practices

BL – Board Level
CL – C-Level
SML – Senior & Mid-Level
ES – Experts & Specialists
EUP – EU Practice

Rank	Company		Phone	Fax	www	Riaditeľ Telefón E-mail	Chief Executive Officer Phone E-mail	Rok založ. / poč. pobočiek / priemerný čas vyhľadávania (týždne) / Year Founded / # of Branches / Avg. Search Time (Weeks)	Vyhľad. metódy: Priame vyhľad. / Inzercia / databáza / Search Methods: Direct Search / Advertising / Database	Poč. umiestnení v 2004: vyšší manažment / stredný manažment / Total Placements 2004: Upper Management / Middle Management	Training Offered / Zaškolenie	Telecommunications / Telekomunikácie	Hotel, Tourism / Hotelierstvo, turizmus	IT / Infotechnológia	Finance, Banking / Financie, bank.	Pharmaceuticals / Farmaceutický priem.	Automotive / Automobilový priemysel	Sales / Predaj	Marketing / Marketing	Energy Sector / Energetika	Advertising / Reklama	Media / Média	Management / Manažment	Health Care / Zdravotníctvo	Insurance / Poistovníctvo	Administrative / Administratíva	Clerical / Uradníci	Secretarial / Sekretárky	Personnel Leasing / Personálny leasing		
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Compiled by Nina Turčanová, The Slovak Spectator.

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Leaders are motors of success

How, where and why to search for talent

BY MARTIN KREKÁČ

Special to the Spectator

THERE is and will always be a substantial shortage of people whose words and deeds decide whether a region or a country joins the winner's circle or lags behind with those defeated. Although managers in general should possess certain leadership qualities, the most successful companies hunt for Premium leaders who, along with the general management experience and qualification are also able to offer visions and successful strategies for the future development of their company.

Change in perception

In their pursuit of success, companies and organizations must change their perceptions of "leadership" as quickly as possible. Leadership not only concerns a company's top management, but also the wider company culture, and new views of what the term involves have begun to affect Slovak companies as well. By defining leadership as a term and creating a leadership profile, companies can help to identify and diversify styles of management, and can gain an understanding of how to use human capital to benefit even from less than positive situations.

The state plays a significant role in creating an appropriate system and effective tools to support leadership and talent in both the public and private sectors. If the state performs this role, either alone or in cooperation with the private sector (Public Private Partnership), it not only ensures the development of current leaders, managers and talent, but it also helps to identify new leaders and talent who, in cases of urgent need or merely during the natural changeover of generations, will ensure that companies and institutions function as smoothly as possible. Support for leadership and talent also helps to increase employment, competitiveness and long-term growth in the economy.



TASR

Slovakia's Minerva project unified political leaders for the goal of making the country's economy knowledge-based.

How not to waste talent

Slovakia has designed a project inspired by the European Union's Lisbon strategy, known as Minerva-Slovakia's Competitiveness Strategy to 2010. The plan aims to develop a knowledge-based economy in the country, and flows from the hypothesis that for small countries like Slovakia, the effective management of leaders and talent is the best possible foundation for long-term success in both the European and global environments.

In the world's most developed knowledge-based economies, moreover, talk of "the talent driven society" is becoming ever more frequent. Countries that intend to keep pace with the most developed nations must, over the long term, create and use a means of identifying and developing talent that has been demonstrated in practice at every level of society.

Minerva does not aim to transform the Slovak standard of living into one comparable with that in other countries. Instead, it is a strategy that promotes the creation of a knowledge-based society, which in turn voluntarily and naturally progresses faster than other societies. It is an original strategy

that has no role models, but which will become a role model for others.

Main tasks for the present

In terms of identifying and developing leaders and talent, we will all have to do far more in future than we have done so far. Over the next five or ten years, organizations in many parts of the world will lose half of their top managements. The loss of such a large group of experienced managers will be a natural consequence of the ageing of the baby boom generation from the second half of the 20th century. In combination with the significant decline in birth rates in many countries, this will create a huge vacuum in the sphere of human capital.

Planning for a replacement generation of managers and talent will thus become crucial. It will help not only in plugging the immediate holes in a company's managerial structure or in the selection of and search for managers, but also in identifying the knowledge, skills, talents and personal profiles that organizations will likely need in the coming years.

In terms of strategies for developing human capital in an organization, the coaching and

mentoring of younger managers who have demonstrated strong abilities will also become far more important. If they are to be properly integrated into an organization, as well as motivated and retained, they will have to be given access to life-long education, new experiences and increasing opportunities.

The most frequent advisors of the most successful organizations in the commercial sector are consultancy and advisory firms which have extensive professional experience gained through projects in the sphere of management appraisal and executive search, where leadership is one of the key criteria. However, not only top managers of companies, but also representatives of state organizations and the third sector should make an effort to ensure that their human capital is flexible and adaptable, and that their employees are able both to handle the coming challenges and to take advantage of the potential opportunities.

Martin Krekáč is the president of the Business Alliance of Slovakia, head of the advisory board of the European Partnership for Personnel Policies, a European think-tank, and founding partner of the AJG-Amrop Jenewein group.

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Firms getting over age bias

Over-50 generation can contribute, but may be challenge for younger managers

BY MARTA ĎURIANOVÁ
Spectator staff

FOLLOWING the collapse of the communist regime and its deformed labour market, companies began to give preference to hiring young people. These new employees may have had less experience than their older peers, but were more likely to have the basic skills the new times called for, such as a knowledge of foreign languages and technology.

This youthful bias lasted throughout the 1990s as young people continued to dominate the Slovak labour market. People who lost their jobs in their 40s or 50s found it almost impossible to get hired anywhere else, especially in regions of high unemployment.

These older employees were condemned either to retire early or to accept long-term unemployment. The phenomenon deeply affected the psyche of the older generation of workers whom the revolution and the subsequent changes caught unawares.

Although a preference for young employees still exists, human resources specialists agree that the situation is finally changing for the better.

People in their 40s and 50s now tend to have experience under market conditions, and if they are willing to learn, they have a chance of finding a place on the labour market.

Investors looking for skills

Igor Šulík, a partner with the Amrop Jenewein Group (AJG), said the bias towards younger hires after 1989 was linked to the overall rejection of communism.

Foreign investors preferred to hire young people not marked by communist thinking, and whom they could educate according to their needs.

"Many organisations avoided hiring older people out of the conviction that they would bring customs from before the revolution into an organisation and have a bad influence on the young

people," Šulík said.

Investors also found it far more difficult and expensive to re-train older people, Šulík continued.

According to Ingrid Grebecová, executive director of Trenkwalder Management Partners, the post-revolution period reflected the skills needs of restructured Slovak companies and the foreign companies that started to access the Slovak market.

"Firms expected people to have specific skills, such as a knowledge of foreign languages, especially English and German, PC skills and personality and work habits. These traits were possessed mainly by young people."

Mariana Turanová, managing consultant of Target Future in Slovakia, said that employers were also looking for personal traits.

"Foreign investors were looking mainly for people with drive, flexibility, and a willingness to work hard," she said.

Young employees tended to be able to travel frequently, and were willing to work overtime and to go abroad for training, said Reinhold Hofmann, managing director of HIC Slovakia.

Another factor favoring younger employees was that when foreign investors arrived, the initial jobs on offer were in sales and IT, areas where no one had experience, young or old. The primary focus of employers thus became not skills but attitude.

"They were looking for a capitalist attitude rather than a socialist attitude. Young people were therefore preferred, since Western experience had shown that the behaviour of young people can be altered much more easily than that of older people," Hofmann said.

"If you have been skilled for 15 years, it is difficult to change your approach to work."

Gerard Koolen, managing partner with Luger&Makler, noted that the older generation tended to speak mainly Russian and some German as its foreign languages. Younger people more often spoke English.

"When western companies entered the Slovak market, English-speaking employees were in great



TASR

Older employees can make a contribution in positions like training and teaching.

demand. Furthermore, the older generation tended to be very stuck in the old ways of doing business. Western companies introduced new work methods which required a different work mentality, and it was assumed that older people would have more trouble adjusting to the new ways - wrongly so, in my opinion," Koolen added.

Employment chances for older workers

The bias towards youth is not just a problem in post-communist countries. Koolen said he has seen the trend in every country where his firm has offices, including Western countries.

"Many employers prefer younger to older employees, which always surprises me. Employers usually only change their mind when they cannot find young people to fulfill their vacancies. In Slovakia it is also very common, although you see many older people working in factories. The reason is that industry is not able to attract as many young employees as it needs. And there you see that these older people do great work," Koolen said.

Šulík from AJG noted that a difference had to be drawn between the over-50 older generation and the over-40 middle generation.

Regarding the older generation, those who are now in management positions tend also to have been managers during communism. Some, although not many, were able to adjust to the transition and currently provide real leadership in the highest positions. They pass on their experience to the younger generation, and are trying to locate successors as their retirement draws ever closer.

Those who were unable to adjust can have real problems finding a place on the labour market. Very often, the middle generation was able to leapfrog them and occupies higher positions in a company's organisational structure.

Older people are often at a disadvantage on the labour market because they lack knowledge of foreign languages, and must accept jobs that are beneath the level of their education. They often work in smaller and less successful firms, and have little chance of success in the international environment.

The situation is slightly different for people in their 40s, Šulík said.

This generation had only little work experience before 1989 or were still in school when the revolution happened. They gained the best positions just after the Velvet Revolution, and currently form the backbone of the managements of the most

successful firms.

"They may have been employed before 1989, but they were able to accept the economic and social changes very quickly. They tend to know at least one foreign language, thanks to which they often gained positions that people of a similar age in Western economies could only dream of," Šulík said.

The analyst said that age is no longer as important a criterion in the hiring process as it was, although in some cases it is taken into consideration.

"Gradually, age requirements are reaching parameters that are typical of Western countries. Apart from the fact that age discrimination is prohibited by law, employers' main requirements are now based on quality, professionalism, knowledge of foreign languages and personality," Šulík said.

According to Turanová, if her firm is looking for a manager to supervise a team, clients prefer candidates with more work experience.

"Still, these candidates must be able to communicate in a foreign language, must have managerial experience in an international company, and an ability to accept a changing environment. If someone in this age category has worked only for Slovak firms to date, their chances are not so good," she added.

However, Turanová believes that a general distrust of candidates older than their 40s still prevails, with firms afraid that they will not be able to adjust to the company culture.

Reinhold Hofmann of HIC agreed, and said the preference for young people would continue as long as supply still existed on the labour market.

What older employees offer employers

Older employees can offer a wide range of advantages even if they do not hold managerial positions, Šulík explained.

"Older people in general are more mature and considerate, and they have a lot of experience, both positive and negative. This helps them handle crisis situations better than young people."

Šulík said that older people are often more willing to work because they are grateful for the chance.

"Older workers are not as

demanding as young people. They like to feel secure and stable. Older people can be more advantageous in terms of turnover as well. At the beginning of their careers, young people with at least average ambitions usually do not stay in one position for more than a few years, and sooner or later get promoted or leave for a different position. Older employees are more likely to be loyal, stable and efficient."

Hofmann of HIC said that typical complaints regarding older employees mentioned inflexibility, more frequent absences, and an unwillingness to work overtime. On the other hand, older people are often less demanding in terms of salary, as they tend to have already paid off their big purchases like housing. They may have hidden reserves of time and energy because their families have left the house.

"Their children are often adult and they have an option of starting a second career. They have time to spare, and some may even have their own small businesses," Hofmann said.

Koolen said that complaints about older workers were often based on assumptions rather than facts, and that employers tended to take their experience of life and work for granted.

"It is said that older people are not flexible and cannot learn new things. This is just not true. We have placed candidates who are more than 50 years old at multinationals in a wide variety of jobs, from production to middle and upper management, and these candidates were as successful as any others," Koolen said.

Where older is better

An older employee's chances of finding a new job depends on many factors, including what other candidates are available, what the professional requirements for the vacancy are, and what region the firm operates in.

Obviously, employers will not prefer older people when the position requires good physical condition, or where the training costs are so high that it would not pay to train an older worker, Šulík of AJG explained.

"Currently, thanks to the growing number of foreign investors and new vacancies, every quality candidate is able to find a job - age is not as important. However, new jobs are connected with a certain level of mobility, a

willingness to look for new possibilities and not to rest on one's previous education, experience, profession, etc."

But if there are two candidates of equal ability for one position, Šulík continued, an employer will always opt for the younger candidate.

According to Hofmann of HIC, older employees can make a rich contribution in positions requiring experience such as training and teaching, environmental protection, sales, project management, and administrative jobs where an employee has to handle several cases a day.

"All areas where an employee receives immediate feedback on his or her performance [are suitable for older workers]. Through this the older employee can demonstrate to the company that it is working out, and that he or she can provide added value to a company."

Hofmann believes that companies can eliminate the "risk" of hiring older employees if they pay on the basis of performance, such as sales closed, project results achieved, training or teaching days

performed with acceptable levels of student satisfaction, or cases handled per day.

However, older workers are less easily cowed and can challenge management in ways that young leaders are not always willing to accept.

"I believe there are plenty of older people out there, including early retirees, who can contribute to today's companies. However, they pose a challenge to management, and many young managers are not up to the challenge of discussing strategies with much older people. In such cases they may prefer to hire a less skilled but less experienced younger person," Hofmann said.

Koolen said he was confident that the older generation could still be successful in jobs that use their life experience and involve a lot of interaction with other people. But he emphasized that stereotypes on both sides were harmful.

"I would never generalize about older people. We have to judge every person individually. Are they willing to learn and adjust to new conditions, new work methods? If so, age plays no role." ■

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Life philosophy: I am not old and experienced enough to have a credo.**Marcela Králiková**

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Life philosophy: If you have a target, you can achieve anything you want.*Work credo:* Do my best.**Martin Krekáč**

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Life philosophy: Being old does not mean refusing to learn from one's grandchildren.**Radomír Mako**

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Life philosophy: Life is like sailing a boat: It's not enough to hold the tiller and row. It doesn't become a real boat until you are sailing.*Work credo:* Be thoughtful, courteous, and unselfish. Behave in such a way that you will not have to regret what you have done.**Ján Menkyna**

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Life philosophy: To live in such a way that I am not ashamed of my feelings, thoughts, words, or deeds.*Work credo:* Work hard but enjoy the rest.**George Miklas**

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Life philosophy: Life is about creating a balance between a healthy mind and body, adding constant growth to relationships, and making a beneficial contribution to the social, economic, and political environment.*Work credo:* Be a good listener, and use innovative thinking while considering all the options, and selecting the solution in order to meet mutual success.**Lisa Mink**

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Life philosophy: I try and approach everything with a strong desire to have a positive impact and be a positive influence.**Martin Novotný**

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Life philosophy: Life taught me to accept success and failure with the same grace.



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Life philosophy: If you really want something, you will achieve it.



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Life philosophy: Life consists of a lot of details.
Work credo: With the right people around me I enjoy my life.



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Life philosophy: To live my life in truth.
Work credo: With belief in character, competence, commitment and teamwork to strive for excellence.



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Life philosophy: Never underestimate or mishandle anybody. Everybody is unique and knows something better than me so I should be happy to learn it.

Work credo: To be a positive example for others and show that things can be done!



Darina Vrbová

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Life philosophy: Give someone a fish and you will feed them for a day; teach them how to fish, and they will feed themselves as long as they live.

Work credo: Stephen R. Covey - "Without principles you cannot lead."



Klemens Wersonig

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Life philosophy: Change the world with a positive mind!

Work credo: Be the best in whatever you do!



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Life Philosophy: Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.