Performance Assessment and Personality Evaluation When Starting a Career

By Garai Anna[1]

Abstract

For the young generation about to start a career it is vital to get a joint or independent assessment on performance and personality. Compared to previous generations the young people's attitudes towards assessment and evaluatuion processes are completely different. Older generations have got the experience of the firm and unflexible assessment systems at education and workplaces. They were ready to accept these decisions, although not only the performance but also the performer was evaluated. The process of value judgement is the most contraversial and problematic human function, as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong is a basic criterium of human existence, and a clear warning in each period in the history of culture: do not judge. Is it possible to make an assessment without any evaluation? We must assume that young career entrants are aware of this dichotomy. They see the importance of distinguishing between good and bad performance but they find it possible only by excluding judgement on personality. Our aim is to examine career entrants' attitude in the frame of a survey study.

1. Research Goals

Individuals have to face various forms of evaluation and assessment of performance in many fields of life where the results also appear in formal documents. In the present research we focus on people's attitude to evaluation of performance and personality as a student and later as a career entrant.

Each human activity requires feedback both on individual and community level and it is obviously present in all interactions (Nádai 2005). Benefits and pleasure of the success of completed work can only be experienced and enjoyed as a result of acknowledgement of the environment, that is, feedback is of motivating character which is vital for individual development and efficient group/teamwork in long term, too.

Performance evaluation can be defined as an essential and basic field of social cooperation, which is embedded in the process of socialization and prevails in the course of life. It is the schoolyears when you first have to encounter the necessity and inevitabiltiy of measure and evaluation systems concerning studies. These are evident and accepted from the young age as children must spend most of their time in educational institutions. Thus, the role of the good and clever student develops quite early, who is, moreover, popular among other pupils of the same agegroup. This phenomenon keeps prevailing at the workplace: a good worker is regarded a good person and popular among colleagues. On various levels of education different assessment systems are present firmly, which is mainly dominant in individualistic and competitive cultures, often in an overstressed version. This way it determines and rules young generations' lives, also in everyday practices. Assessment of performance is a

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[1]Associate Professor, Széchenyi István Egyetem, Department of International Studies and Communication, Győr, Hungary

constant practice at workplaces (Ablonczy-Mihályka 2013, Kovács, Reisinger, Szőke 2015), right at the start of a career in forms of plenty of personality analyses, knowledge tests, logical-psychological tests, and the results are expressed in numbers, points, percentage or textual evaluation.

During school- and working years individuals face complicated assessment systems, get numerous certificates which result in a total confusion. Note that in the present study we do not focus on measure systems of different institutions. To have an insight into the overdetailed and intricate system it is enough to check an administration document issued by the Hungarian Government.[1] Nowadays, measurement and evaluation are one of the most complex and critical areas of social communication with their affects on cultural, psychological, management, organization building and moral factors (Pongrácz 2012), and furthermore, the consequences affecting financial and existence issues are widespread, as well.

The following questions arise: To what extent is the performance measure and evaéuation practice accepted that is used every day, an is part of professional and private lives, or works according to a formal methodology with legal support in many cases? To what extent are we critical, untrustful and opposed to it?

How much are the results accepted and regarded as something valuable by the individuals (subject to the system)? How much do they find performance measure and its results authentic, fair and relevant?

2. Value Research

The attitude to, the acceptance and rejection of measure and evaluation of performance as a specific field of communication research became a crucial and current research area in the last third period of the 20th century (Konczosné 2007). Murphy and Cleveland (1995) highlighted the distinction between the terms judgement and evaluation. Judgement reflects the decision of the person conducting the measure, and evaluation is an overwhelming qualifying process involving many factors. Bernardin and Beatty (1984) state that individualistic cultures regard results of measures as an objective and current state, while in high context cultures the results are used as a motivation tool to reach goals and develop. Greenberg (1987) focused on the question which factors are relevant in acceptance of measure results, that is, the reaction criteria. He defined four criteria of perceived authenticity: configural justice – authenticity of professionally conducted measure results; systemic justice – correct part of measure and evaluation, with the opportunity to challenge them; interpersonal justice – authenticity of interpersonal relations, style and behavior of the evaluating authority; informational justice – authenticity of information, giving explanations and reasons. Murphy and Cleveland (1995) declare that lack of acceptance and perceived authenticity can result in a complete failure of the whole measure and evaluation process. The issue of the authenticity of measure and evaluation is a relevant and long existing issue which needs

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[1] A Magyar Kormány rendelete a köztisztviselők rendszeres teljesítményértékelésről 2010-ből (Government regulation on evaluation system of employees, 2010): https://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi ?docid=a1300010.kim

deeper analysis that we will do in the present study focusing on a well defined group.

2.1 Value exploratory simulation

Prior to the survey we worked on a decision making task in a communication course at our university. Based on Kohlberg's (1997) protocol we intended to reveal which moral values and content the students consider important in measure and evaluation processes, and also, their attitude to making the results available in public (Moral Judgement Interview). This exploratory simulation requires cautious preparation to diminish influencing the students by the test situation. That is why the group memebers were not exactly made aware of the types of information and behavior patterns we focused on during the survey. Their task was to decide a dilemma after exploring the context and selecting the key aspects according to their own judgement. As a general experience we can claim that students can adopt the situation if they find any similarities to the reality of their own lives, such as age or education, and they behave as an affected person instinctively. They do not try to find or formulate answers according to academic expectations but rather wish to cope with a realistic situation.

At first, they had to express their views in written form as a starting point, and then they had the opportunity to discuss the dilemma based on a story (Tompos 2014). The specific aim was to reach a consensus, but in terms of the research the details and comments were the most important. To enhance the results we used the method of thick description by Geertz (2003); so the comments and ideas enabled us to attain valuable resource to prepare and conduct our survey. We highlighted content focus and key terms by using the method of narrative discourse analysis.

Description of the dilemma: 'Ministry of education is planning to publish the names and study results of the best performing onehundred graduates on the university websites, just like in the USA. The list should include names of the students with the best results at graduation. The rank list will be calculated on the basis the average of the number of completed semesters, results of the final exam and the thesis work. The list will be available on the website of the faculties. The aim of the initiative is to provide future employers with proper and professional information on graduates entering the labor force market.' Question: Do you support the introduction of the new system or not?

The students did not get any aspects or instructions to make a decision. This simulation is appropriate to discuss a symmetric dilemma where both sides have equal possibilities to be supported and explained with ethical reasons. We can assume that the participant students will come up with generally accepted, standard opinions and conventional value judgement both in pros and cons. According to the expectations neither only negative nor only positive attitudes occur on any sides, we anticipated to get relatively balanced comments.

After evaluation of written notes and thick descriptions, the results were completely different from expectations beacause refusing attitudes dominated. The mostly criticized issue was the tools and methods of measure and evaluation. Statistical methods can hide important details and personal judgement is not objective. They expressed ethical concerns about online exams which are about to be introduced as obligatory, saying that the quality of technical devices is not good enough for these exams. They also agreed on existing content related problems: 'out-dated evaluation methods, which have been used

for ages in the same form, cannot serve as a reliable basis for the employers.' Measure and evaluation results are no concern for youngsters in their twenties, between the generation of Millennials and generation Z.[2] They deem feedback and performace assessment necessary, but also need the opportunity of development assuming responsibility and trust. Authority cannot be rooted in hierarchy systems, but students prefer role models they can respect. If employees disagree with the results or methods of measures they are ready to leave their workplaces opting for another one. These ideas match with the results of previous research publications (Garai, Nádai 2015, 2017). Fluctuation is more typical of employees from the younger generation compared to older generations. The students also agreed that 'the cleverest students are not definitely those with the best marks and they do not have the most knowledge, either.' Excellent study results and real knowledge background are only overlapping in case of students with the most outstanding performance. According to estimations it takes less than about 5 percent of students. This phenomenon needs further examination in the future. There is no consensus on the question if weak study performances affect the evaluation of the personality negatively.

It is deemed a positive tendency that performance results are usually modified in a positive direction which can be beneficial for the students as well as the person in charge of evaluating. The attitude of solidary appears due to the fact that success of evaluation is the goal of both parties. Nevertheless, it is considered unfair to publish the names and results of students because of the difference between measured and real performance. Some came up with the idea of publishing measured data on voluntary basis which was denied, as the whole process could become unreasonable. There is a firm agreement that employers are not interested in school marks but they rather try the talent of the students in real work-related tasks in a probation period where real knowledge and performance will be obvious.

Based on the survey and the structured interviews we formulated statements according to theme focuses. Visibly, 'perceived fairness/authenticity' (Greenberg 1987, Murphy, Cleveland 1995) must stand in the main focus and needs a thorough research regarding graduates and measure tools.

2.2 Survey with semi-structured interviews

To carry out the survey we used value scale conceptions by Schwartz (SVS – Schwartz Value Survey, Schwartz 1992). The developed version of the survey, the Portraits Value Questionnaire (PVQ) model was not applicable in our research as it allows self assessment in answering questions such as 'How much like you is this person who…?' (Schmidt 2007; Bamberg, Davidov, Herrmann Schwartz 2007).

By using SVS questions it is simple to formulate comments and complete the survey. Schwartz created ten value concepts, out of which we focused on 'Self-direction' and 'Achievement', and made a deeper analysis into them to adapt them to our own research. Each statement offered the same scale options where the respondents had to mark the one reflecting the rate of identification with value judgement utterances. The group of

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[2] Matures: 1933–1945; Babyboomers: 1946–1964; Generation X: 1965–1976; Generation Y: 1977–1998, Millennials; Generation Z: 1998–tól

respondents is relatively homogenous as it involves graduates right before starting a career, after completing a period of internship, thus, we listed statements twice. There were corresponding students among the respondents with career backgound who were able to compare workplace and school evaluation systems based on personal experience on both areas. We used a five grade scale at the questions. The basic question was: How much do you agree with a person who states that…?

(1)

- performance evaluation is absolutely required at education institutions:

completely	very much	no opinion	in some way	not at all

- performance evaluation is absolutely required at the workplace:

completely	very much	no opinion	in some way	not at all

(2)

- measured study results, performance of students are public data, you can publish them anywhere in or out of school

- measured results, performance of employees are public data, you can publish them anywhere in or out of workplace

 (3)

- Students are forced to accept measure systems and they cooperate at evaluation processes because of obligation

- employees are forced to accept measure systems and they cooperate at evaluation processes because of obligation

(4)

- students find current evaluation systems reliable at schools

- employees find current evaluation systems reliable at workplaces

(5)

- school communities can judge real study performance and they do so

- workplace communities can judge real professional performance and they do so

(6)

- there is a major gap between performance measure results at school and performance evaluation by the community members

- there is a major gap between performance measure results at the workplace and performance evaluation by the community members

(7)

- if students do not accept performance evaluation results they can challenge them as they do so at times

- if employees do not accept performance evaluation results they can challenge them as they do so at times

(8)

- the better results students achieve at school measures the more popular they will be among fellow students

- the better results employees achieve at school measures the more popular they will be among colleagues

(9)
- teachers conducting the measures are subjective which may distort results
- employers/professionals conducting the measures are subjective which may distort results
(10)
- negative school evaluation affects self-evaluation and relationship to community members badly
- negative workplace evaluation affects self-evaluation and relationship to community members badly
In the following I sum up the results of attitude research based on analysis of narratives.

3. Results and Conclusions

The results of our survey conducted with semi-structured interviews show that existing measure and evaluation systems are rather accepted than refused in spite of problems described in the present study. Seventy-eight people were involved in the survey, and two-third of them also provided comments of various lengths. Typically, respondents judged school and workplace circumstances similarly, scales showed hardly any differences.   School measure systems were less accepted and regarded unappropriate compared to workplace measure systems. The reason for the difference can be rooted in various life circumstances of the respondents, who look forward to new life periods with special expectations on the labor force market that they do are really well informed about in advance.

The necessity of measure and evaluation was doubted only by ten percent of the respondents, in forms of comments and hidden references. Five respondents were not willing to express their opinions on the questions, and most of the respondents selected the option 'very much'.

The second statement was accepted by forty-six respondents only 'in some way'. It proves they keep a big distance from publicity. Many refuse competitive attitude, so they feel worried about sharing their achievements with the public and do not want to show pride.   Solidarity can be tackled in this attitude because being a student is a good opportunity to belong to a community and make friends, which enables students to experience collectivism to a certain extent (saying I do not want to be in the centre of others' attention).   Some respondents underlined the importance of protecting personal data which is also a way to exclude publicity – it is mostly typical of respondents who are employees.

The third statement reveals differences concerning school and workplace environment. More than half of the respondents feel that they are 'very much' obliged to accept school measure systems. With thirty-seven answers alike, this rate is also high concerning employees. In the comments respondents said that refusing attitude was common and many claimed the opportunity of criticism.

Responses to the forth statement proved to be the most negative. Interviewees plan to introduce a new methodology of measure and evaluation instead of the old one. It was a general requirement that performance should be evaluated as a whole process and not only based on final results.   According to another approach it is not necessary to make

isolated, individual measures as achievements are the result of teamwork.

The fifth statement was evaluated relatively in a homogenous way. In the comments the respondents claimed that evaluation by fellow students or colleagues did not always appear in form of a declaration. There may occur conflicts between them because of the school or workplace evaluation results, especially when it comes to rewarding performance.

We attained the most ambiguous answers concerning question six, as many respondents did not want to declare their opinion. Nineteen of them remarked in the comments that the reason was the lack of information on the issue. Thirteen respondents said that the difference was enormous. Most of them have got a conformist behavior, they accept current circumstances.

Answers to question seven showed just little difference between school and workplace regarding acceptance of evaluation. About half of the respondents marked that there was a difference just 'in some way'. They also remark in the comments that although they have the opportunity to criticise judgement, there is hardly any chance to modify the results.

Statement eight was added with some comments similar to those concerning the dilemma task. Students with extremely high performance at school/workplace evaluation and the fellow students and colleagues' judgement may be the same but in case of people with average performance the results are different. Due to this difficulty only nine respondents marked the option 'I completely agree'.

Statement nine was the least ambiguous one. Fifty-four respondents 'completely' agreed with it, but remarked that the interviewer's personality was determining. At the analysis of the dilemma task we saw that evaluators may change results into a positive direction. However, in the interview the respondents warned of the danger and possibility of negative and subjective attitudes.

According to the interviewees you need to be really cautios about negative evaluations. Fourteen of them completely agree with the statement and thirty one marked 'very much' on the scale. We attained the longest comments regarding statement ten. Strong remarks were made about criticism that should be expressed without causing any harm to the person's dignity. It was highlighted that an individual was evaluated and judged by he community in other aspects, and the character of an authentic personality was taken as a key factor. In this approach, school marks and percentages are not dominant, students with the best school results will not definitely be the most successful in terms of professional career.

4. Summary

From the above research we can conclude that respondents generally accept the necessity and current practice of measure and evaluation, although some methodological amendments are required. The respondents find it vital to isolate and not to mix school/workplace performance and personality. The other crucial remark was to use criticism as a tool for improvement. In the future the research must focus on up-to date forms of measure and evaluation, where interactions, performance as a process and team performance must be subject to research.

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