

THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING PROGRAM OF THE HUNGARIAN CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE

I. Point of origin

In order to fulfil the mission of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office set up for the new millennium, as well as to ensure the quality of the statistical production process and the statistical product, **strict professional criteria** have to be implemented. Therefore we deem the presence and the continuous development of **up-to-date professional knowledge as our most important resource**.

The guarantee for this is a **complex, efficient inner training system**, which can accommodate a **large number of staff**. Learning and training are a part of the **operative human support** of the performances of our office, and one of the main guarantees of the principle of „the right person to the right job”. In the spirit of the above, in 2005 a new training strategy was elaborated based on the needs and suggestions that have surfaced.

The **aims of the new strategy** were the following:

1. To organise training into a unified system;
2. To put professional training into the spotlight instead of the mandatory and administrative training courses;
3. To focus training on the actual work carried out in the office, emphasising practical skills to complete theoretical knowledge;
4. To keep in mind the current priorities;
5. To satisfy quality requirements in training, regarding its content as well as all other considerations.

II. The Birth of HCSO-School

The aims outlined above implied the need for a self-developed training programme and an institution to operate it. The aim of the project is to **communicate the general statistical culture**, and to ensure the presence of special skills, knowledge and expertise **necessary to carry out the various tasks of the statistical office** on a high level. These skills cannot be acquired in the present Hungarian school system due to a lack of relevant specializations in the university level education. Therefore the **mission** of the new in-house institution for education called “HCSO-School” is the classification, supplementation, maintenance and development of skills. The implementation plan of the new, concise training system was finished in September 2005, and by the end of the same year the announced comprehensive training courses have already started.

There are **two main fields** within the training system:

- statistical skills,
- other background skills.

The two main fields branch out to include **subcategories** in the following way:

I. Statistical skills

I.1. Statistical administration

- I.1.1. Statistical systems, relations
- I.1.2. Statistical legislations

I.2. Statistical professional skills

- I.2.1. General statistics
- I.2.2. Statistical subject-matter fields
- I.2.3. Methodology of the statistical production process
- I.2.4. IT systems supporting the statistical production process

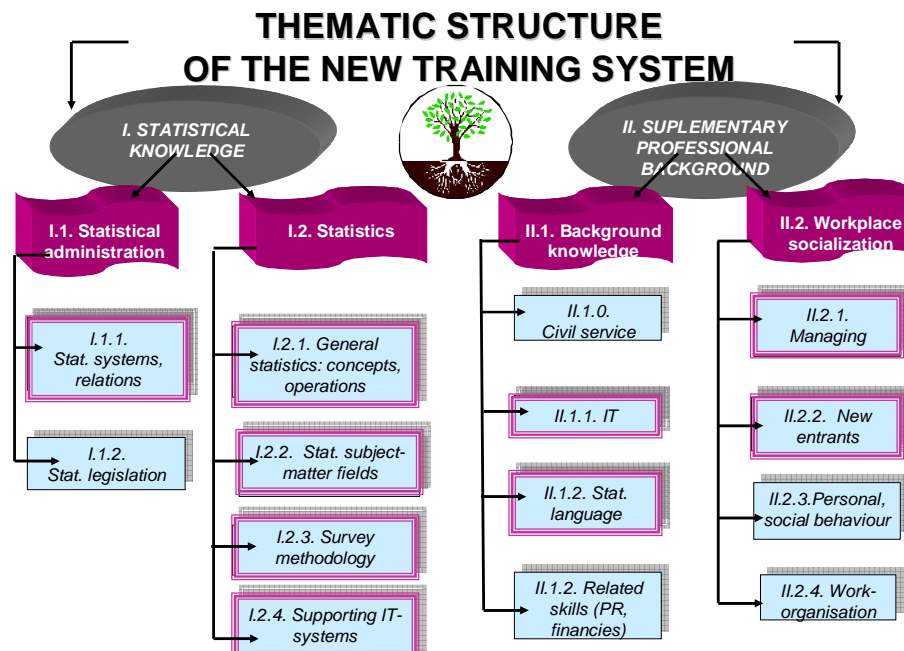
II. Other professional and background skills

II.1. Background knowledge

- II.1.1. IT
- II.1.2. Professional foreign language
- II.1.3. Related skills

II.2. Workplace socialization

- II.2.1. Manager training
- II.2.2. Training of new recruits
- II.2.3. Behaviour, work culture
- II.2.4. Organisation of work



There are certain programmes and courses associated to each subcategory. The planning and implementation of training programmes is the **responsibility** of the Department of Human Resources, while the realisation falls to the department in charge of the given topic. The participants are delegated by the directors based on the **Training Schedule** published at the end of each year. Attendance can be prescribed as a target in the **yearly performance target setting**. Since 2006, the attended courses are registered in the personal HR database.

Besides the courses published at the beginning of each year, the HCSO-School is ready to conduct unexpected, **ad-hoc training courses** if the need arises during the year, **reacting in a flexible way** to the new and urgent professional development needs.

Some facts and figures on the operation of the HCSO-School 2005-2008

	2005	2006		2007	2008/I
		Centre	Regions		
Number of courses	3	31	30	44	26
Number of participants	62	604	462	676	554
Number of trainers	20	122	89	129	52
Total number of training hours	72	445	215	821	380

III. Determining the needs for theoretical and practical training

The syllabus of the concise training programme is defined by the **current international and HCSO priorities**, as well as the **needs** communicated by the organisational units of HCSO. For example, this year there was a great emphasis on the preparation of the NACE revision. The programme often serves to **train the staff in the practical aspects of work**. This came about two years ago as well, with the setting up of the competence centres, when the regional directorates changed profile and their staff had to adapt to previously unknown, new professional tasks. This is why these sort of **retraining courses** dominated the 2006 programme of the HCSO-School; during half a year, 30 courses were held for about 500 people, mainly in professional statistics and IT courses **assisting the day-today work** of the staff.

Besides the obvious priorities, we try to determine the **expectations** related to the programme through **different approaches** in the form of consultations, questionnaires before and after the course and feedback analysis, in order to place the proper emphasis within the structure of the courses.

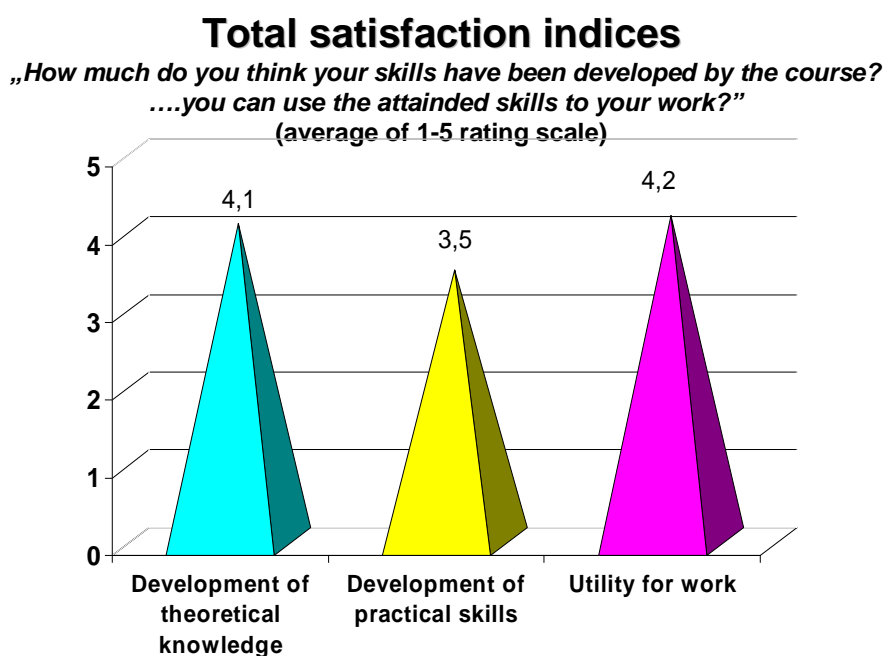
Before each course we survey the exact expectations, needs and level of knowledge related to the course in the form of a **preliminary questionnaire**, which helps the trainer compile the theoretical and practical components of the subject-matter. Several questions in the questionnaire aim to discover certain areas where the knowledge of the participants is lacking, and where emphasis should be put during the course. Most common among the stated **expectations** are the **learning of the practical use** of the different methods and theories.

The trainers of each new course undertake a **preparatory consultation**, where the organisers of the training share with them their experience from previous courses and the consequences which can be drawn from the results of the preliminary questionnaire. Thus the trainers can begin their preparation with useful advices, which make it possible for them to elaborate the **balance between theory**

and practice, or for example focus on **interactive teaching** instead of the frontal, one-way education method.

We request the participants to provide feedback in the form of **evaluation questionnaires**, which is especially important for the development of further training courses. It is worth mentioning that according to the feedback, the **practice oriented courses are much more popular**: the general answers show that these courses better satisfy the aims set out and the expectations of the participants than the mixed courses containing a number of theoretical components. (In previous years, the specially practice-oriented courses made up the slight majority of the programme: courses on IT skills, usage of certain software, language courses and the manager training courses. Among the rest of the courses, e.g. statistical administration, subject matter statistics, methodology, our intention was to have a **balance between theoretical and practical components**.

After processing the evaluation questionnaires it became evident that the **main measure of value of a course is its utility for work**, which is in line with the mission of the HCSO-School. Generally the courses that helped the participants learn skills associated with their day-to-day work received more favourable opinions. Thus, the especially positive feedback on IT and language courses is no coincidence. According to the feedback received from the participants of professional statistical courses, the theoretical part is always somewhat more extensive than the practical part, and that is why participants usually **suggest to increase the ratio of practical components**. Those courses where the trainers could find a balance between the two fields by introducing exercises and homework, proved to be successful – such as the ones on methodology, e.g. sampling and questionnaire design.



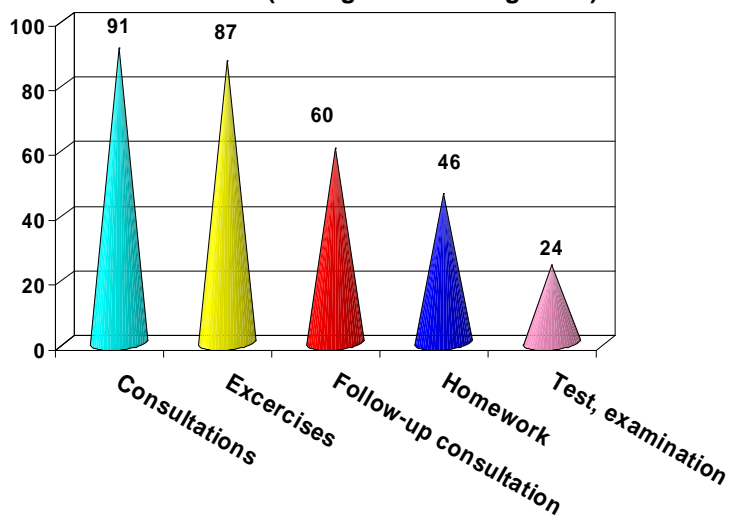
The participants highly prioritise the programme components related to **exercise solving and practise** (e.g. real-life cases, examples from different fields of statistics, solving exercises). Opinions on **homework** – where participants may face the degree to which they could understand the subject and how well they can apply it in practise – vary greatly. In the case of several courses, the participants themselves

suggested more homework, at the same time in other cases they refuse the extra burden it puts on them, which can lead to the conclusion that for them, the **interactive, consultative lesson in the presence of the trainer** is a better way to get the required skills.

The **final exam** at the end of the course is definitely less popular among the staff. At the same time, the general good results of the exams prove that the learning process was successful and the students made the necessary effort to learn the subject-matter.

Expectations towards practical elements

„How much do you think it is important in the course?“
(average of 1-5 rating scale)

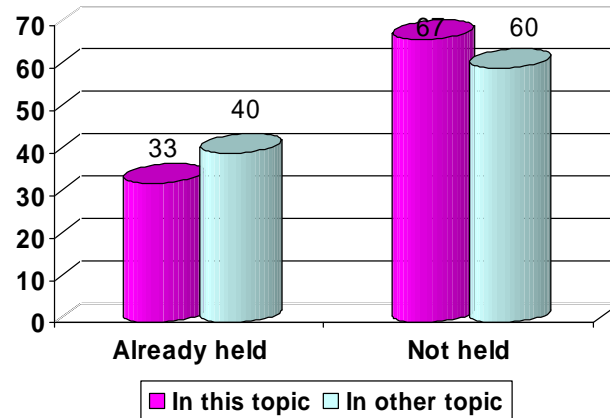


Another chance to get to know expectations is the **consultative workshop held at the end of each year** where representatives of the trainers and the participants can express their views and suggestions in order to help develop the training programme. The focus of these structured consultations was, in every year, the need to **put more emphasis on the practical side** of the courses. However this is a major difficulty for the trainers: beyond the simple teaching of the subject-matter, improving the participants' skills to utilise the information gained, and to increase the efficiency of learning.

This is shown also from the **questionnaires that the trainers** are asked to fill after the course, partly about the actual course, and partly about their general experience as trainers. The answers to the self-evaluation questions show that they are **not experienced teachers, but rather well educated professionals**, who have little experience in passing on the knowledge, in applying methods of instruction or in increasing participants' motivation.

Trainer's experience

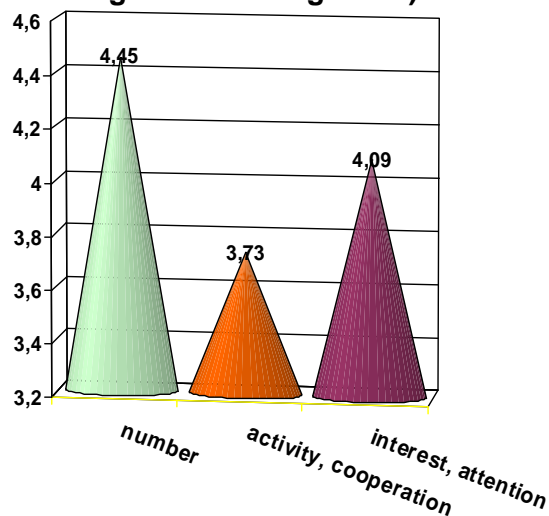
„Have you ever held a lecture before?” (%)



From a trainer's point of view, **reaching active participation of the students is the biggest challenge, and one of the hardest parts of practical training.** It is apparent from the trainers' questionnaires that they experience a great level of **interest**, but they are not satisfied with the level of **active participation** and **cooperation**. Experienced trainers admit that it is their own fault: it is up to them, to what degree they can use their skills of didactics and training technique to raise the interest of the participants.

Trainer's satisfaction with participants

„How much are you satisfied with participants...?”
average of 1-5 rating scale)



IV. Ensuring the balance between theory and practice

Based on feedback, we are taking several steps in the HCSO-School, which aim to satisfy user's needs that generally focus on strengthening the practical side of the courses.

The **expectation to expand the practical methods of training and increase the practical skills of the trainers** appears to be evident. Great professional knowledge is of no use without efficient instruction skills! Therefore in 2008 we introduce a new course called "**Training of trainers**", which besides teaching the educational, didactical skills, helps the work of the trainers by focusing on practical examples and exercises.

To increase the practical component of the training, we plan to create a **web based common online exercise book**, where all the exercises of the training courses will be found for the purposes of practising and keeping skills at a level.

We will open a **forum on the intranet** surface of the office, which makes it possible to publicly answer questions that arose during the courses, or provides for further consultation.

In this year we introduce experimental courses based on the **e-learning method**, which facilitate personal practise – in the first round, we bought and installed two software, a language course and a typing course, which for many colleagues are necessary for the day-to-day work.

Authors:

Mr. Imre Dobossy, Head of Human Resource Section

Mrs. Eszter Virágh, Professional Advisor, HR-Section

Mr. Gábor Apáti, Senior Counsellor, HR-Section