

METHODS AND MAIN RESULTS OF STAFF MIGRATION MOTIVATION RESEARCH AT THE HUNGARIAN CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE, 2010

Author: Ms. Eszter Virágh, professional advisor, Human Resources Section

Summary

Indispensable condition of the effective long term human resource management is to keep and motivate the manpower, considering in particular that in Hungary there is no such comprehensive tertiary education providing the complex knowledge necessary for the work in HCSO. So it is a crucial task to explore and analyse the reasons and types of fluctuation and to create, elaborate the procedures and to create measures prevent workforce migration based on the results. The following study presents three pilot programmes and some main results of migration motivation research in the Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

The investigation contains three approaches: one of which is a direct inquiry of colleagues leaving the office by an exit interview and the analysis of their personal data; the others are indirect interpretations of the results of the programmes – such as questionnaire survey of new entrants and workshops as well as the satisfaction survey of the whole staff – that explore the staff's expectations and commitment, so they can indicate the possibilities to prevent the migration. The first results indicate that the staff – also new entrants – have definite ideas about a “good workplace” and the frustration of their job quality expectations has a main role in leaving the office. The most important factors of the commitment for the workplace are interesting, challenging everyday duties, financial and moral appreciation of performance and an adequate, broad chance of career.

Introduction

The main effort of the human resources development policy of the HCSO is to establish and maintain the **workforce able to adapt flexibly to the increasing external expectations** towards HCSO. One of the most important resources of the office is the available technical knowledge which undergoes continuous improvement so that it could meet the various challenges it faces. As at present there is no comprehensive tertiary education in Hungary which could ensure the complex scope of knowledge necessary for the special works at HCSO, the office needs significant **training investments** and has to ensure long-term possibilities for gaining experiences. Just for this reason it is essential for the effective long-term human resources policy of HCSO to **keep and motivate the staff** and to promote the recovery of professional and material expenditure. In this respect it is an essential task to get to know the **motivation of withdrawals from resignation**, to **analyze the reasons and types of fluctuation**, and based on the results, to elaborate the procedures, measures aiming at the **prevention of workforce migration**. This study presents the experimental methods and some main results of this motivation research in HCSO.

In the last 5 years, nearly **twice as many employees (722 persons) left the office as many were newly employed (357 persons)**, and almost each year the number of employees leaving the HCSO was higher than the one of new entrants. In this, the establishment of regions completed in 2004 (centralization of the former county directorates and then establishment of competence centres) played also a significant role. The **fluctuation** (rate of leaving employees to the total staff number) of the 5 was 9 percent on the average.

The **average age of new entrants was 38** in the last 5 years, and most of them (55%) were under 35 years. **Withdrawing employees have spent 15 years on the average at HCSO and their average age was 54 years**: most of them left the office at retirement or near retirement age (18% of the leaving employees at the age 56–60 and 44% at the age over 60 years).

At the same time, **among leaving employees, the high proportion of young people under 35 years of age (17%)** and also **middle-aged people** between 36 and 50 years **(15%)**, who did not leave the office due to their age (near retirement age), is remarkable. The **target population** of our motivation survey is essentially **this one third of all withdrawing employees, altogether 232 persons**. Their **fluctuation** amounted to 3% totally on the average of the 5 years.

Till now, we could get information on the **reasons of fluctuation** only on the basis of official categories in personnel records (see categories in **table 1**). However, these categories do not show clearly in several cases, who initiated the withdrawal and what the real reason was. Among others, the objective of this motivation survey is to explore these reasons and background information of fluctuation.

The research aiming also at the prevention of fluctuation applies multiple approach: by means of **exit interviews** it contacts directly the **employees leaving the office** on the one hand and, on the other hand, it **analyses indirectly** the results of internal programmes which explore the expectations and conditions of commitment of the colleagues, and so they may point out the **possibilities of the prevention of fluctuation** in advance. We have elaborated experimental methods for these approaches, and based on some realized programmes, we have also collected some initial experience.

- ⇒ In case of **leaving employees** we analyse either the **personal data** which may be hypothetically in the background of leaving the office, and, or we conduct **exit interviews** with them in order to get more profound information on their reasons. The target population is formed basically by those leaving the office with mutual consent, dismissal or resignation. Those leaving the office due to old-age retirement or early retirement do not belong to the observed population.
- ⇒ For the **young (under 35 years of age) employees** of the office, we organized a programme consisting of a **questionnaire survey** and **workshops** in order to get information on the motivations of commitment with the aim of preventing the problem of migration. The results point namely out, how to make young workforce interested in the long run, how to retain them.
- ⇒ In the framework of exit motivation research we can mention also the (voluntary) experimental **staff satisfaction survey** conducted as an experiment a few years earlier. Its objective was to get to know the components of general feeling and satisfaction in the office as well as the expectations towards the work and the office and the problems. The results also throw light on those factors the lack of which may cause the migration of the workforce.

1. Exit motivation research by contacting outgoing employees directly

Those colleagues were involved in the analysis whose reason for leaving the office was **not the retirement**. We apply two procedures among them: on the one hand we analyze the information in the personnel **records** with the retroactive effect as from several years, and, on the other hand, we conduct **deep interviews** with the colleagues leaving the office in a given year.

1.1. Analysis from the personnel records

From the personnel records we select specific information about the fluctuation of staff and try to find tendencies explaining the background of migration. We analyse the followings:

- ⇒ **The way and reason of leaving the office:** whether it is unilateral or by mutual consent, by dismissal or resignation? On the basis of the personnel database, we can obtain only formal answers (see **table 1**), the deeper reasons are shown by the interviews. The majority of young and middle-aged colleagues of our target group left the office with **mutual consent** (some of them changed only their place of work or organizational unit due to establishment of regions). In every tenth case, the employer did not extend the **fixed-term contract** after its expiry (e.g. replacement of mothers on child care leave), but employees with permanent contract used the possibility of **resignation** with the same frequency as well.
- ⇒ Are there typical **withdrawing age-groups** among young (under 35 years of age) and middle-aged (36–50 year-old) colleagues? The data indicate that, while within the target population, **most (36%) of the leaving employees are 31–35 year-old**, their proportion in the total staff number of the office is only 15%. So, we can say that the intention to exit is more characteristic of this specific age-group than of the others (see **table 2**).

- ⇒ **How long** did the leaving employees work at HCSO? And, based on the number of former workplaces and the duration of work there, do the “**job-hoppers**” of the labour market who leave soon and easily or rather those who need stability? The results show that employees stay at the HCSO for a longer time: while the **members of our target group** spent **hardly more than 3 years** at the **4 former workplaces (on the average)**, the middle-aged outgoing colleagues had spent nearly 8.5 years and the young ones had spent 3 years on the average at HCSO before they left. (We remark that – considering the total staff –, the number of years spent at HCSO is 15 on the average and nearly 20 in case of elder colleagues!)
- ⇒ One of the important issues of the motivation research is where the colleagues in the “**hierarchy ladder**” are when they leave. Still low down or at a higher level? Are there people in **leading positions** or having **specialist’s title** among outgoing employees? Does specialist’s promotion or career result in a greater commitment of employees? While considering the total staff of the office, the proportion of employees in leading position and those having specialist’s titles is 10–10 percent, out of the 123 young outgoing employees only 3 percent were head of section and no one had specialist’s title, while among the 109 middle-aged ones 4 percent were head of section and 4 percent had specialist’s title (see **table 3**). This low number indicates that the **lack of promotion could play a significant role in leaving** the office! (The results of interviews confirmed also the conclusion drawn from the fact data!)
- ⇒ What types of **field of work** or **scope of duties** do employees leave: most of all statistical fields (within this economic or social statistics) or rather sections fulfilling functional tasks? And are there divisions where fluctuation is significantly more frequent? In the last 5 years, nearly half (47%) of the withdrawing young and middle-aged employees worked in **statistical–specialised fields** and one tenth in functional divisions (this corresponds to the proportion of the total staff). At the same time, due to the establishment of regions of the county directorate system in 2004–2005 and then, the establishment of competence centres, the staff of **regional directorates** changed the most compared to their headcount number. That time, 43 percent of employees at the directorates were transferred from the counties to the regional centres or were dismissed finally, mostly with mutual consent (see **table 4**).
- ⇒ What kind of **knowledge** do the outgoing employees have? Do college or university graduates leave the office or are they experts in **humanities** or rather in **sciences**; do they have **one or more** diplomas; how many **foreign languages** do they speak? According to the data, our target group can be considered slightly more qualified than all the leaving employees or than the total staff of the office (see **table 5**), mainly due to the young generation’s higher qualification in general. More than two thirds of them obtained college or university degree, at least every second young or middle-aged outgoing employee has mostly fair English and/or German knowledge certified by state examinations. Among them, qualifications in sciences as economist, mathematician, engineer, etc. were more characteristic than in humanities.
- ⇒ What kind of **performance evaluation** did the leaving target group have? Were their leaders satisfied with their work or not? Data suggest that, based on the unfavourable performance evaluation, the withdrawal from a job **can be predicted**. Half of the leaving employees (whose work was evaluated by their leaders) had an appraisal “**average**” and only one third were qualified as “over the average” and even less (12%) as “excellent”. (Evaluations, however, were bound by the system of compulsory distributions prescribing how many percent of employees can be classified in each category.)
- ⇒ How far does **money**, i.e. the fact that the **earnings** of civil servants are lower than that of employees in private sector, play a role in migration? The earnings of civil servants are relatively stipulated, i.e. they rise along with the age and in connection with that with the promotion in the classification of civil servants. At the same time, earnings may fluctuate between 80% and 130%, which is limited only so that the total wage level has to be 100% on the level of divisions. In case of the observed target group we can say that as mostly young people are included, they have of course lower earnings than their older colleagues. Nevertheless, their wage divergence is 98% on the average which corresponds roughly to the average in the office. So, this factor in itself only slightly explains fluctuation.

- ⇒ How much did the **office spend on training, further training** of leaving employees? How many and what kind of courses did they complete, what kind of knowledge applicable in other fields as well did they obtain here? **One third** of the young and middle-aged outgoing employees **participated in the courses** of the office, **in 4 courses on the average**, which number is **significantly higher** than the one experienced in the total staff. This shows that withdrawing employees are in most cases ambitious colleagues who took often the opportunity to improve their knowledge and who obtained convertible (professional) knowledge over their shorter or longer work at the office.

1.2. Exit interviews

As we have seen, though the analysis of **official data and statistics** about the colleagues provides many kinds of information and enables also to draw conclusions in respect of the **possible tendencies**, we deemed **necessary to explore more authentically the reasons for migration** with the help of personal, direct interviews as well. By making capital of the particular methodological possibilities of interviews, we can get to know the course of life in depth and examine the specific features of the way leading to leave the office, and in many cases, less realized elements may be brought to light as well. We examined the following issues:

- ⇒ One of the key issues of the interview is to explore **spontaneously** those factors which can influence the **general feeling** at the **workplace**, which are deemed generally **important** by the leaving employees in respect of a good workplace. Here the respondent may formulate on his/her own what motivates him/her to stay at a workplace for a long time. So far, the most often mentioned factor in the interviews was **“good work”** which means of course “easy” and “little” work for some colleagues, while “difficult” and “much tasks” for the others, “theoretical challenges” for some of them and “practical ones” for the others, some of them need that their work should fit their qualification and preliminary competence, while others, on the contrary, prefer tasks which encourage them to obtain new knowledge. We can say generally that employees do not “escape” from work; in fact they rather **need burden**, the content of work is important for them and it is important too to fulfil **clear and useful tasks**. In any case, the interview answers indicate that **leaders have to get to know properly** what their colleagues mean by “good work” in order to be able to keep the appropriate workforce in a long run. Among spontaneous answers, the second most important factor is usually **earning**, as well as other allowances and bonuses supplementing earning.
- ⇒ We ask withdrawing employees about preliminaries, their **direct or indirect reasons** for leaving the office. What has given grounds for their decision? It is true that people often do not formulate even for themselves the direct or indirect reasons for their decisions, they rather look for some **pretexts** as explanation. Thus, it is worth taking the direct reasons into account only after deeper investigations. However, the interviews showed so far that direct reasons meet more or less the lack of the most important factors: colleagues mention **generally as the reason for leaving the office** the **boring, uninteresting tasks which are free from challenges** and do not meet their demands. More rarely, but as a strong reason, **money**, low earnings and the lack of possibilities for wage supplements are mentioned.
- ⇒ We try to explore where the history and characteristics of earlier and internal **professional career** indicate problems that led to leave the office. Was the promotion of the colleagues unbroken? Were their greater performances directly appreciated, rewarded by a progress in the hierarchy (e.g. accelerated progress, specialist’s title or managerial appointment)? Could they possibly feel that they had not received any appreciation? We could suspect already when analysing fact data that **one of the most crucial factors of leaving the office** was the lack of **promotion and recognition** and this was confirmed by the deep interviews. Feedback, recognition of work and, connected to this, ensuring professional opportunities is very important to the colleagues. Many of them said that as the progress as civil servant is very slow and bound to age, they **do not have proper career perspectives**, therefore they leave in the hope of a more rapid progress depending directly on performance.

- ⇒ Out of the human factors and psychical motives of leaving the office, we examine among others the **relation** of the leaving employees **with their heads**. Did they receive enough information and support for performing their work effectively? Did they get any feedback on their work? In case of any problem, could they sit down with the head, did they gain a hearing or was their relation cool and impersonal? The interviews conducted so far suggest that the relation with the chief as well as his/her personality, professional acknowledgement influence largely whether someone stays at the office or leaves. Among motivations of leaving, the unpleasant **personality**, exaggerated authority, nervousness or just the low prestige based on improper professional knowledge of the heads are often mentioned. All these have the results that employees find his/her decisions ungrounded and are less willing to follow his/her instructions. In some cases, the bad relation with the head and not accepting the he/she was directly in the background of leaving the office.
- ⇒ **Professional and personal contacts with the direct colleagues** and with the colleagues working at other sections of the office may also have influence on fluctuation. We set out from the assumption that the pleasant everyday general feeling at the office, the sincere, confidence-based co-operation, mutual assistance increase the engagement to the work and office, while the tense, bad atmosphere caused by intriguing, envy, career-fight, concern for job and distrust may decrease the pleasure in work. However, based on the interviews so far, we experienced that this motivation only **had played a slight role in leaving HCSO**; the colleagues were usually **satisfied** with their direct personal–professional relations.
- ⇒ Former staff survey outcomes indicated that satisfaction with **work conditions** is a determinant factor of everyday general feeling that may influence fluctuation indirectly. Therefore, we examine in the course of exit interviews how much the colleagues were satisfied with these factors, whether all material, technical conditions for well-being and for performing the work effectively, such as furniture, equipment, placement, lighting, silence, etc. were available. It turned out from the answers that this factor had been **important only where infrastructure had been very poor**, if it had made work impossible. Where the provision was at least of medium quality, this factor was almost imperceptible and had nothing to do with migration. Though it was not mentioned among spontaneous motivations of leaving the office, it was confirmed through questioning that, especially among young colleagues, everyday general feeling was influenced very unfavourably by the **fix working hours**, the obligation to start work early and they would rather search for workplaces with not so strict working time.
- ⇒ Also the role of the **prestige** and **recognition of the workplace** was investigated as factor of engagement in the exit interviews. Respondents could tell what kind of workplace they liked, what they expected from an **ideal workplace**, how they judged HCSO in this respect and what they expected at the newly chosen (or to be chosen) workplace. Based on the opinion of the colleagues, they like working at workplaces which have a great prestige outside as well, its social acceptance and judgement is good, which is attractive and can be appreciated and respected also by the colleagues. A workplace, where the “rules of the game” are acceptable, measures are correct and real, processes are transparent, competences and responsibilities, the responsible people are identifiable, where theories are followed by actions and quality has greater priority than practical or material aspects.

2. Survey of expectations of young new entrants

In 2004, we launched an experimental programme for the new entrants under 30 years with the aim of getting to know the **opinion of young colleagues** about their work and workplace, future professional and career opportunities and exploring the conditions of **effective work in the office** with the help of collective thinking. The results of the programme served after all for the increase in the **engagement of young colleagues to the office** and the **prevention of migration**. The programme consisted of **3 elements**:

1. a questionnaire survey,
2. a workshop and finally
3. a conversation with the president.

In the course of the 3 programmes, a **picture of an office** was drawn up, where young people would work with pleasure in the future, even for a long time. Young colleagues deemed comprehensively the followings **important in terms of an attractive workplace**:

- ⇒ always new, exciting tasks,
- ⇒ good relation between a head and his/her staff,
- ⇒ consistent, democratic management and information about the background of decisions,
- ⇒ effective organization of work avoiding parallelism and hectic work and ensuring enough time for high-quality work,
- ⇒ proper information flow necessary for performing work,
- ⇒ opportunities for horizontal communication among professional sections replacing bureaucratic–hierarchic administration,
- ⇒ real, flexible working hours adjusted to actual tasks,
- ⇒ effective training programmes,
- ⇒ moral–financial recognition that motivates above-average performance,
- ⇒ regular evaluation of work, stimulating promotions opportunities,
- ⇒ correct selection system both for the heads and the staff,
- ⇒ proper material–technical conditions for performing work,
- ⇒ clean, civilized circumstances,
- ⇒ extension of social-type allowances, as well as
- ⇒ stable, predictable, quiet atmosphere with few reorganizations.

3. Staff satisfaction survey

An experimental (voluntary) survey among the full staff of the office was launched in 2001 with the aim of getting information about the general feeling of the colleagues at the workplace and about the factors influencing it with the help of a questionnaire (the questionnaire and some main results you can read in another article submitted by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office to the CES Forum on HRMT in Geneva). We attribute great importance to the results in respect of outlining the way leading to leave the office and predicting the motivations of migration.

The 335 respondents (about 25 percent of the staff) were **satisfied** most of all with the material–technical conditions of the office, and deemed career opportunities and utilization of the abilities of the colleagues less adequate. In respect of **work efficiency**, they criticized the heaviness of information flow necessary for work and the organization of work. Many of them demanded “teamwork”. They accepted the determination of general **rules** concerning behaviour but rejected the enforcement of standards concerning the opinion and value system of colleagues.

Most of the colleagues thought that money, financial and moral recognition, as well as high-level, interesting work were the best tools to increase the **attractiveness of the office**.

Table 1: Distribution of young and middle-aged outgoing employees by the way of leaving the office; and degree of fluctuation, 2005-2010 (persons)

Way of leaving the office	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010/ 1 st half year	Total (persons)	Total %
I. Termination of civil servant's employment:								
With immediate effect during probation time(both parties, without explanation)		2	3	4	1	1	11	5
Fixed term contract expired		11	8	2		2	23	10
Dismissal 17 § 1/c (due to re-organization)	1	2			1		4	2
Dismissal 17 § 2/c (withdrawal of appointment as leader)			1				1	0
Dismissal due to disciplinary offence					1		1	0
With mutual consent (but sometimes due to re-organization or staff number reduction as well)	71	26	30	12	4	5	148	64
Resignation 15 § 2/c (with 2-month notice)	1	3	7	10	1		22	9
Death of the civil servant		1			1	1	3	1
Transfer in public administration (to fields of public administration or public services)		2	1	5			8	3
II. Termination of employee legal relationship (manual workers):								
Dismissal of employee (e.g. re-organization, outsourcing)		3					3	1
Termination of employment with mutual consent (sometimes due to re-organization)		3	4				7	3
No registered reason	1						1	0
NUMBER OF YOUNG AND MIDDLE-AGED OUTGOING EMPLOYEES IN A GIVEN YEAR (PERSONS)	74	53	54	33	9	9	232	100
FLUCTUATION OF THE TARGET GROUP % (OUTGOING EMPLOYEES / ANNUAL STAFF NUMBER)	5	4	4	3	1	1		3
TOTAL FLUCTUATION IN THE OFFICE %	14	9	14	7	4	3		9

Source: Nexon personnel database.

Table 2: Age distribution of the outgoing employees and the full staff (%)

Age-groups of outgoing employees:	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Outgoing employees, total	Outgoing target group (20-50 years)	HCSO full staff, 2010
Age: 20-30 years	2	7	7	9	4	9	5	17	9
Age: 31-35 years	12	14	12	15	6	2	12	36	15
Age: 36-40 years	7	3	6	5	4	4	5	17	13
Age: 41-45 years	5	12	4	3	0	4	5	17	12
Age: 46-50 years	7	5	2	3	4	0	4	13	11
Age: 51-55 years	10	5	4	4	2	4	6	xxxxxx	18
Age: 56-60 years	10	6	18	47	14	40	18	xxxxxx	19
Age: over 60 years	48	48	48	12	66	36	44	xxxxxx	4
TOTAL:	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Nexon personnel database.

Table 3: Leading positions and professional titles in the target group of young and middle-aged outgoing employees, 2005-2010 (persons)

Age-groups	Head of Section	Professional title (adviser)	Target group, total (persons)
Age: under 25 years	0	0	1
Age: 26-30 years	0	0	38
Age: 31-35 years	4	0	84
Age: 36-40 years	4	1	39
Age: 41-45 years	0	0	39
Age: 46-50 years	0	2	31
Total	8	3	232

Source: Nexon personnel database.

Table 4: Distribution of young and middle-aged outgoing employees by organizational units, 2005-2010 (%)

Organizational unit	%
Directorate in Győr	9,5
Directorate in Miskolc	8,2
Directorate in Szeged	8,2
Directorate in Pécs	7,3
Dissemination Department	7,3
IT Department	6,5
Directorate in Debrecen	5,6
Directorate in Veszprém	5,6
Business Statistics Department	4,3
Financial Management Department	3,4
Agriculture and Environment Statistics Department	3,4
Foreign Trade Statistics Department	3,0
Administration and International Department	2,6
Statistical Research and Methodology Department	2,6
Social Statistics Department	2,6
Sector Accounts Department	2,2
Services Statistics Department	2,2
Data collection	1,7
Living Standard and Human Resources Statistics Department	1,7
Living Standard and Labour Statistics Department	1,7
National Accounts Department	1,7
Population Statistics Department	1,3
Social Services Statistics Department	1,3
Price Statistics Department	0,9
International Audit Section	0,9
Population, Health and Social Statistics Department	0,9
Census Department	0,9
European Coordination and International Department	0,4
Administration and Planning Department	0,4
Central staff	0,4
Technical and System Monitoring Department	0,4
Statistical Research and Education Department	0,4
Planning Department	0,4
TOTAL:	100,0

Source: Nexon personnel database.

Table 5: Educational attainment of the young and middle-aged outgoing employees and the full staff (%)

Educational attainment	Target group, 2005-2010	HCSO full staff, 2010
University (MA/MSc)	33,6	30,3
College (BA/BSc)	30,6	39,5
Secondary Grammar School	7,8	8,8
Secondary Vocational School with GCSE	22,4	16,1
Apprentice School	0,9	0,4
Secondary Vocational School without GCSE	3,4	1,0
Technical School	0,9	1,6
8 grades of Primary school	0,4	2,3
TOTAL	100,0	100,0

Source: Nexon personnel database.