

209 We deserved fair treatment! A pathetic career transition within an outsourcing company

GONZAGUE ISIRABAHENDA

BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA, Romania

Research Domains

Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

Abstract

Romania is home to numerous outsourcing companies and their arrival has radically increased the number of service-job opportunities. Romania is among the leading countries with the highest underemployment rate, and the mismatch between education and job remains a public and socio-economic issue. However, there is a lack of studies on education-job misalliance-lived-work experience and the potentially complex issues facing young university graduates. This study explains the return to the office (RTO) transition drawn on two-year ethnographical case study data analysed with a reflective thematic lens. Findings emphasised that returning to work in the office on a full-time basis proved how company management purposively ignored employees' participation and devalued CSRs engagement—for many, minimal work flexibility hindered the work-life balance. We reveal how outsourcing aligns with talent mismanagement and insecure career prospects, i.e., CSRs' daily tasks entail deskilling, offer limited personal and professional development and deter career mobility.

Full paper

We deserved fair treatment! A pathetic career transition within an outsourcing company

Romania is home to numerous outsourcing companies. The emergence of multinational corporations (MNCs) has radically increased the number of service-job opportunities and altered working conditions (Edgel et al., 2016; ILO, 2022). In recent decades, there has been a skyrocketing number of graduates employed for positions beneath their education and skill levels in their university-to-work transition (Scurry et al., 2020; Tomlinson and Holmes, 2017), and the Romania labour market is no exception (Isirabahenda, 2019; Pantea, 2019). Within European countries, Romania is among the leading countries with the highest underemployment rate, and the mismatch between education and job remains a public and socio-economic issue (Pantea 2019). However, there is a lack of studies on education-job misalliance-lived-work experience and the possible complex problems facing young university graduates. This study examines and explains the mechanisms that marked the total return to the office (RTO) drawn on two-year ethnographical case study data analysed with a reflective thematic lens. The findings emphasised that despite the numerous RTO effects on customer support representatives (CSRs) working conditions, the decision and timeframe to return work to the office on a full-time basis proved how multinational company management purposively ignored employees' participation and devaluated CSRs engagement—for many, minimal work flexibility hindered the work-life balance during the RTO transition. Against the myth of a decent career provided by outsourced companies, this study reveals how outsourcing aligns with talent mismanagement and insecure career prospects. For instance, CSRs' daily tasks entail deskilling, and entry-level positions offer limited personal and professional development and deterred career mobility. The results explain how the MNC studied re-outsourced accounts receivable departments in Asia to keep pace with the competitive world, boost profits, and highlight the pathetic strategies used to terminate employment contracts for CSRs. The disguise of mutual agreement from redeployment to the cessation of employment contracts for some CSRs triggered alarms on outsourcing precarious work, and it proved uncertain career prospects that under-employed CSRs endured. This study makes two significant contributions to the literature. The substantial enquiry into lived work experiences within service jobs is central to contemporary research in the sociology of work and employment, and this study fills this gap in the Romanian context. This study demonstrates the need for a fundamental labour policy shift in Romania. The need to re-assess the myth of decent careers within outsourced service jobs is vital as the underemployment phenomena affect the psycho-socio-economic status of young university graduates (Dooley and Prause, 2004; Kallerberg, 2007; Heyes and Tomlinson 2021) and the underutilisation of graduate capitals significantly impact the knowledge-based economy growth (Broadley et al. 2022). To improve social and economic outcomes and smooth the transition from school to work, Romania should rethink

and develop education-job matching and talent management approaches in which young university graduates can access high-quality and secure employment.

Keywords: Education-job mismatch; outsourcing jobs; precarious career, young people, Romania

References

References

Broadley, T., Cai, Y., Firth, M., Hunt, E., & Neugebauer, J. (2023). The SAGE handbook of graduate employability. (Vols. 1-0). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Dooley, D. and Prause, J. (2004) The Social Costs of Underemployment: Inadequate Employment as Disguised Unemployment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Edgell, S., Gottfried, H., & Granter, E. (2016). The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Work and Employment. (1 ed.) London: Sage Publications.

Heyes, J., and Tomlinson, M. (2021). Underemployment and Well-Being in Europe. *Hum. Relat.* 74, 1240–1266

International Labour Office (2022). *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

Isirabahenda, G. (2019). Underemployment of Graduates from Romanian Higher Education Institutions: A Conceptual Understanding. In *Cunoaștere și dezvoltare socială: lucrările conferinței „Tendințe ale cunoașterii și dezvoltării sociale în secolul 21”*: ediția a 6-a, 25-26 octombrie 2019, Alba Iulia / ed.: Lucian Marina, Mihai Pascaru. - Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2019. pp125-138.

Kallerberg, A. L. (2007). *The Mismatched Worker*. New York: Norton.

Pantea, M. C. (2019). *Precarity and Vocational Education and Training. Craftsmanship and Employability in Romania*. Springer Nature Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan

Scurry, T., Burke, C., Blenkinsopp, J., & Smart, A. (2020). Maintaining the promise without killing the dream: Developing resilience for future 'graduate' careers. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 44(1), 36-43.

Tomlinson, M., & Holmes, L. (2017). *Graduate employability in context theory, research and debate*. Palgrave Macmillan.