

Training & Employment

Competence management (or skills or competency management, as it is also known) has been defined as follows: "a system used to identify the correlations between skills, knowledge and performance within an organisation. It enables an organisation to identify gaps and introduce training, compensation and recruiting programmes based on current or future needs". It is also intended to stimulate the commitment of individual employees to improving their company's performances. For this purpose, managers have to constantly invent arrangements striking a balance between mobilisation and equity. Competences often tend to be defined purely in terms of the company's immediate requirements as far as encouraging personal initiative, learning processes and innovation are concerned. The question therefore arises as to whether the skills acquired by individuals will be duly recognized on the labour market, since individual workers' chances of mobility may depend on being able to prove what competences they have acquired, apart from how they are used at their places of work.

MANAGING COMPETENCE AND SETTING UP QUALIFICATIONS

How to reconcile company performances and individual careers?

Competence management, which began to emerge in the collective bargaining context during the 1990s, has been so widely debated that it is not always easy to distinguish between purported facts and actual practice. This concept has given rise to high expectations as well as to deep misgivings, both fed by heated debates between the defenders and detractors. Competence management has no doubt been overestimated, however, and has probably not come up to initial expectations. Perhaps it was also expected to bring about the changes to which it has only been accessory. It therefore seemed to be necessary to determine the modes whereby competence management has been introduced at firms in order to assess its scope, its coherence, and the questions it raises. Observing and analysing the procedures and practices developing at firms (*cf.* the inset on page 2) should in fact help to build a more objective picture of "competence logic" and the "model" which goes by the same name, especially in the following three main fields: supervisors' competence management practices; the organisational changes resulting from the redefinition of "occupations" and "competences" at firms; and the long-term effects of competence management on the setting up of qualifications.

Competence management: a managerial responsibility

Competence management is part of a business management doctrine promoting greater employee commitment to company projects. It involves team-work and a flexible approach to work: these are not novel ideas of course, but they have been given novel emphasis here. The challenge consists in stimulating employees' personal motivation in order to boost collective performances. In other words, improving an individual's skills is no longer an end in itself. These skills have to be invested in collective efforts which can be measured in terms of overall efficiency, productivity and adaptation to change. Executive managers therefore have to sort out the various contributions to the collective work, recognizing competences where they are to be found without discouraging other members of the team. The competence-based approach is based on personal assessment procedures promoting individualistic strategies. Competence inventories provide standards to which employees can refer to measure their progress in the hope of being promoted. Calculations of this kind can undermine team spirit, however, making for less spontaneity and less efficient team-work in the long run. In cases of this kind, competence management can increase the frictions resulting from the individualisation of wage relations: although placing the emphasis on individual contributions was intended to boost collective dynamics, it is also unfortunately liable to be perceived as an end in itself.

It is usually at a lower supervisory level that these pitfalls have to be avoided. Those performing this crucial task are caught between the conflicting demands of the budgetary constraints and productivity, which often means optimising the use made of employees. Managing the company's ongoing activities therefore tend to take priority over competence management matters. It is always easier to use the competences immediately available than to plan the development of future competences, especially in staff management contexts where friction has developed about the budgets allocated to salary increases and

" In fact, it is not always easy to distinguish between competence and experience "

promotions. Contexts of this kind make it difficult to keep to vocational training schedules and to meet competence validation and promotion deadlines. They can even affect the nature of vocational training practices: it is increasingly frequent for the training to be dispensed in real work situations, and to consist of either closely guided work or self-training. Vocational training of this kind becomes less easily certifiable, since it no longer takes the form of the classical training course. It is therefore hardly surprising, however contradictory this may seem, that firms' training expenditures decrease with competence management. On-the-job training is tending to become simply an integral part of the normal task prescriptions.

Executive managers also have to draw up rules ensuring that their teams function efficiently. To benefit from the contributions made by even the most reticent members of staff to competence management efforts, they tend to spread out salary increases as evenly as possible, using a sprinkling procedure or setting up rotas, often against the advice of human resource managers. They also tend to base their assessments on hybrid criteria, since seniority is never completely abolished in favour of more objectively testable skills. In fact, it is not always easy to distinguish between competence and experience, especially when it is necessary to quieten disputes about competences between younger and older members of staff. In addition, at large public and private firms, individual commitment is often not immediately recognized because of the way the wage scales have been drawn up: wage scales are mostly based on a system of deferred payment, whereby each employee's efforts are recognized only on a long term basis. It can be most frustrating, however, for employees subjected to increasingly heavy

short-term demands to have to wait so long before being rewarded for their efforts.

Managers therefore have to watch out for signs of discouragement or demobilisation due to this state of affairs. The criteria on which they base their assessments often include social skills and other behavioural attributes, which are sometimes listed in inventories of competences. Although these tools help to make staff assessments more objective, behavioural assessments are known to be always somewhat subjective. It is possible, however, that with the introduction of competence management, these assessments will become less arbitrary, since leaders are now expected to clearly explain the reasons for their decisions at face-to-face interviews with their subordinates. However, the usefulness of exercises in explicitation of this kind is bound to be restricted, like all interactions, by the need people feel to "save face", which makes it impossible to judge attitudes and behaviour in a completely transparent way. As they spread, these practices tend to generate the use of officious language to evade the real issues at stake. Actually, the lack of linguistic explicitness is not so much a handicap as a factor promoting mutual understanding: some things are better left unsaid, since openly spoken judgements can have undesirable stigmatising consequences.

On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that although competence management is intended to provide incitements, it can actually lead to new forms of selection. More specifically, this approach is extremely sensitive to the state of the labour market. When the market is thriving and offers plenty of opportunities for advancement and professional mobility, the conditions are met for positive competence dynamics to develop. But when, on the contrary, the labour market is listless and the outlook bleak, tensions and internal competition will increase, leading to the employees taken to be the most competent being privileged at the expense of the others. Any regulatory interventions devised will not suffice to dispel the feeling of insecurity to which this situation gives rise, and the management will become bogged down in static competence administration. Under these conditions, groups and teams must be capable of self-regulation to prevent and de-fuse any tensions liable to arise in their midst. The resulting compromises, which will necessarily be defensive strategies, should not be misdiagnosed as being due to demotivation about work or resistance to change. The pressures exerted on employees due to current high unemployment rates are certainly liable to trigger intense bouts of mobilisation, stimulate personal motivation levels and knit the members of teams more closely. However, no magic competence management formula has yet been found which could be used to sustain this enthusiasm indefinitely.

Competence management: some surveys and analyses

The analyses presented in this issue of "Training and Employment" were based on two large projects carried out by Céreq in connection with competence management.

A multidisciplinary work-group was first set up, consisting of sociologists, economists and management specialists from Céreq, GREE (Groupe de recherche sur l'éducation et l'emploi, Nancy), LEPII (Laboratoire économique de la production et de l'intégration internationale, Grenoble) and LEST (Laboratoire d'économie et de sociologie du travail, Aix-en-Provence). The members of this group carried out some detailed field studies at several business firms, where they interviewed all those involved in competence management, such as human resource managers, union representatives, managers at various levels, and employees. The results of these efforts, which have been published under the title *La gestion des compétences : acteurs et pratiques* (Competence management: actors and practices; see the inset on the opposite page), have made it possible to define the issues involved at all these levels.

In parallel, Céreq has been addressing some of the more theoretical questions about competence management arising in various fields of research. These questions were discussed in the framework of a series of symposia attended by specialists in the fields of sociology, law and economics. The proceedings of these meetings have been published in a volume entitled *Réfléchir la compétence. Approches sociologiques, juridiques, économiques d'une pratique gestionnaire* (Reflecting competence. Sociological, economic and juridical viewpoints on a management practice) published by Editions Octarès (see the inset on the opposite page).

Defining competences and occupations: the responsibility of firms

Competence management nevertheless includes at least one good ingredient for triggering dynamic collective mobilisation processes: the fact that this method makes the definition and the attribution of work extremely flexible. Apart from eliciting individual commitment, it tends to generate a genuine collective competence within the firm itself. The cases studied so far show, however, that the idea of "learning-oriented work organisation" is more of an ideal than an attainable goal. As Philippe Zarifian has mentioned, competence management can certainly contribute to transforming organisations beneficially and improving economic performances. What usually occurs, however, is that it simply becomes part of pragmatic attempts to reform the organisation of work, and thus contributes to these efforts more than being the prime moving force. One of the common features of these reforms is that they boost production processes by developing stronger internal and external cooperative links. They therefore contribute to strengthening the connections between the various components of the organisation and give the employees an opportunity of being more involved in company strategy.

The organisation of work actually tends to give scope for initiative and learning processes within a very local area. Jobs are redefined in terms of "occupations" or functions, by regrouping or redefining former workstations. The term "occupations" should not be misunderstood, however, since it has nothing to do with the usual connotations. In the present case, occupations are categories of tasks defined in functional rather than technical terms. They include all the jobs performed in a single workshop, sector or department, thus making career advancement possible within these units.

The perimeter of employees' jobs is thus enlarged, since they are required to be capable of performing multiple tasks as well as taking on heavier responsibilities, as Yves Lichtenberger has suggested. The inventories of the competences associated with these jobs can be used to define priorities among the various tasks involved and to encourage personal initiatives with a view to personal advancement. It is mainly within these new areas of activity and development that positive dynamics stimulating learning processes can occur. Work groups and progress groups are also developing in these areas, in which employees are invited to participate. The resulting collective impetus which is supposed to develop depends, however, on whether the work of these groups is recognised.

Competence management alone has therefore not given rise to any very spectacular innovations. In addition, its limitations are due to the frictions which innovations tend to suscite at firms. All innovations are known to be disturbing, and although they usually generate new competences, they also raise doubts about the organisation of work and struggles

for power, which are bound to have destabilising effects. Some fruitful experiments, involving the installation of new equipment, for example, have promoted learning processes, the sharing of know-how, and an unprecedented level of mobilisation, under stimulating forms of team management. But after effervescence, there comes the aftermath. It is therefore necessary to codify and institutionalise the new collective competence in order to stabilise and diffuse it, as well as to establish links between the vocational skills acquired and individual careers.

The rules and tools involved in competence management make it possible to record the contributions of employees, but the formal requirements which have to be met in doing so are all the harder to master as they are intended to be exhaustive. At least these requirements cannot be accused of preventing innovation. Competence management is mainly designed to draw employees out of their narrow workstation routines by prescribing specific behavioural attitudes rather than tasks. The actual forms of innovation liable to result are left to chance, as there are many possible forms. Competence management therefore does not lead solely to the creation of areas giving scope for autonomy and initiative, where the know-how mobilised can be pooled to promote innovation and the enrichment of the workers: to improve organisational efficiency, it is also necessary to set up some very strict routines. The latest procedures, such as those involved in quality assurance and cost control, with which employees have to comply as they acquire increasing levels of responsibility, have led to both regulating and intensifying work. Competence management procedures will not necessarily spare employees from the risk of occupational fatigue.

Setting up qualifications: the responsibility of all

Career advancement is beginning to depend on the acquisition of competences, which may be prevented by many factors relating to the market, the organisation of work and company management. Now employees do not all have equally strong personal resources for coping with obstacles of this kind, and the unions are therefore keeping a watch on firms to make sure that the gaps do not become too wide. When the acquisition of competences does lead to agreements being signed, which does not occur very often, the unions try to ensure that the minimum possibilities of advancement at least are guaranteed. However, the unions rarely participate in defining the competences corresponding to jobs. They deal mainly with ensuring that managerial assessment procedures are properly applied and that employees are able to use their right of appeal. Although the unions act mainly on behalf of powerless workers, they occasionally also provide services, helping employees to have their skills recognised at competence assessment interviews.

Céreq publications on competence management

- *La gestion des compétences: acteurs et pratiques* (Competence management: actors and practices), D. Brochier (Editor), Editions Economica, 2002. This work includes three company monographs: one on a firm in the tertiary sector, and the others on firms in the automotive and metallurgical industries. It also includes three thematic studies on standards, vocational training at firms and the individualisation of wage relations. The following authors contributed to this volume: L. Baraldi, H. Bertrand, W. Cavestro, T. Colin, C. Durieux, B. Grassier, P. Kalck, C. Marquette, S. Monchatre, E. Oiry and E. Sulzer.

- *Réfléchir la compétence. Approches sociologiques, juridiques, économiques d'une pratique gestionnaire* (Reflecting competence. Sociological, economic and juridical viewpoints on a management practice) edited by A. Dupray, Ch. Guitton and S. Monchatre, Editions Octarès, 2003. The following aspects of competence management are analysed in this volume: the systems of social relations to which it is applicable (sociological approaches), the rules to which it gives rise or which it contributes to developing (juridical approaches), the modes determining the value of work, which is one of the key concepts underlying competence management (economic approaches). It includes contributions by sociologists such as F. Piotet, M. Stroobants, S. Le Corre, P. Rolle, and M. de Nanteuil-Miribel, legal specialists such as P. Caillaud, Ch. Guitton, V. Wauquier and M.-L. Morin, and economists such as G. Caire, A. Kartchevski, F. Eymard-Duvernay, F. Stanckiewicz and W. Cavestro.

Since competence management ought to ensure that the skills acquired are recognised, one of its benefits in comparison with workstation management methods is that it promotes the continuity of employees' careers when internal reclassifications occur. Agreements have been signed in line with the principle of individual competence credit within firms. However, since so few branch agreements have been signed so far and given the highly "procedural" nature of the rules negotiated, the content of qualifications acquired in this way is liable to be worthless outside the firm. The acknowledgement of skills acquired depends on the firms which expressed the need for them, and their validity is restricted to the organisations responsible for defining them. Even within a single group, the definition of occupations and the skills they require can be seen to vary from one establishment to another. The fact that competences are not easily transferable has given rise to a highly paradoxical situation, to say the least: firms are becoming increasingly vulnerable and their employees are becoming increasingly exposed to the risks involved, but the competences they have acquired do not always provide them with a passport to reconversion.

What can be done, then, about external mobility as far as competence management is concerned? If we look at the way this approach has developed over the last twenty years, it can be seen to consist of two parts. It was designed to improve company performances while improving individuals' chances of evolving and meeting labour market requirements. Looking back, we can see that these two objectives gradually drifted apart. At the end of the 1980s, the threat of redundancy and the need for firms to become more competitive gave rise to the idea of developing collective and individual skills concomitantly. Competences then became a human resources planning tool, which was used to improve the corporate skills base and plan reclassification schemes in advance. Although the threat of redundancy did not entirely disappear during the 90s, the predictive planning aspects gave way to a more pragmatic managerial approach. Some new actors then appeared on the scene: while firms were inciting their employees to mobilise their efforts to improve collective performances, the professional branch organisations and the French State were getting together to devise means of promoting life-long access to employment.

Since competence management is the responsibility of all the actors involved in the interactions between training and employment, its implementation goes far beyond companies' internal competence management practices. This concept is central to a scheme in which the French State and the social partners are both becoming interested. The challenge here is to provide firms with the competences they

need and individuals with suitable mobility on the labour market. Competence development regulations are therefore focusing more on individual than collective rights. The individual rights for which provision is being made tend to ensure that qualifications acquired are properly defined, assessed and certified, especially in the framework of acquired skills validation systems. There is also a tendency to develop collective benchmark systems listing the qualities required of employees, with a view to facilitating their occupational mobility.

It still remains to be seen whether these schemes promote "positive mobility". The most mobile workers at the moment are known to be the least qualified: they mostly move from one firm to another for reasons beyond their own control. One of the questions raised by Pierre Rolle at the Céreq symposium on competence management (see the inset on page 2) was how to reconcile the increasing instability of employment with the need for every citizen to earn a life-long income. At the moment, the workforce needs arising as the baby-boom generation reach retirement age will hopefully mean that individual experience will be valued more highly. It is nevertheless likely that the need for mobility generated by productive systems will make it necessary to take steps to prevent individual trajectories from becoming too unstable. It may well be that the whole idea of careers, which has been based so far on increasing qualification and wage patterns during each worker's life, may need to be completely re-visited.

Sylvie Monchatre (Céreq).

For further information

- "Politique salariale, régulation et échange" (Wage policy, regulation and exchange), D. Eustache, *Revue française de sociologie*, no. 42-2, 2001.
- "Compétence, organisation du travail et confrontation sociale" (Competence, the organisation of work and social dialogue), Y. Lichtenberger, *Formation Emploi*, no. 67, July-September 1999.
- "En quoi la 'logique compétence' modifie-t-elle les politiques et les pratiques de formation?" (How do 'competence management logics' affect vocational training policies and practices?), M. Parlier, *Actualités de la formation permanente*, no. 170, January-February 2001.
- "Le management par les compétences, un essai d'analyse" (Competence-based management, an attempt at analysis), J.-D. Reynaud, *Sociologie du travail*, no. 43-1, 2001.
- "L'introduction de la notion de compétence dans les grilles de classification : genèse et évolution" (Introduction to the concept of competence in systems of classification: its origins and development), M. Tallard, *Sociétés contemporaines*, no. 41-42, 2001.
- *Le modèle de la compétence* (The competence management model), Ph. Zarifian, Éditions Liaisons, 2001.

Other reading suggestions

- "Interne ou externe, les deux visages de la mobilité professionnelle" (The internal versus external facets of work mobility), T. Amossé, *Insee Première*, no. 921, September 2003.
- "Mobilité externe et compétence. La question d'un système de repères collectifs des qualités du travail" (External mobility and competence. The question of a collective catalogue of work-related qualities), M. Campinos-Dubernet, *Formation Emploi*, no. 74, Avril-June 2001.
- Commissariat Général du Plan, 2003, *Les mobilités professionnelles : de l'instabilité dans l'emploi à la gestion des trajectoires* (Work-related mobility: from unstable employment to trajectory management), La Documentation Française.
- "La validation des acquis professionnels. Bilan des pratiques actuelles, enjeux pour les dispositifs futurs" (The validation of occupational competence. A review of current practices, and the challenges facing future schemes) C. Labryère, J. Paddeu, J. Teissier and A. Savoyant, *Bref*, no. 185, Céreq, April 2002.

ISSN - 1156 2366

Céreq

Direction de la publication : Hugues Bertrand. Rédacteur en chef : Jean-Louis Kirsch. Traduction et adaptation : Jessica Blanc, Miriam Rosen. Pao : Dominique Bally
Reproduction autorisée à condition expresse de mentionner la source.
Dépôt légal 1er trimestre 2006.

10, place de la Joliette,
BP 21321,
13567 Marseille cedex 02.
Tél. 04 91 13 28 28.
Fax 04 91 13 28 80.
<http://www.cereq.fr>

Briefing

In Focus

A North American View of the Competency Model

Colette Bernier,
*Department of Industrial Relations,
Laval University (Quebec)*

Competency-based approaches are much more popular in France than in North America, due to the dominant system of industrial relations in this part of the world. Although the objectives of the competency model are being pursued in North American firms via the reorganisation of their work methods, such approaches are being set up here mainly through the redefinition of the roles of the institutions responsible for work and education.

In France, the competency model was part of the move to decentralise collective bargaining processes, whereas in North America, collective bargaining traditionally takes place at the level of the firm. This has resulted in qualifications and workforce mobility being managed differently in North America, based in particular on job evaluation methods. Despite the criticism these methods have attracted, they have been fairly well adapted to the specificities of firms and to the latest technological innovations and methods of work. They were even revived by feminist struggles during the last decade, when they provided a basis for employment equity and pay equity legislation. The need to adopt the competency model was therefore less urgently felt in this part of the world.

During the 1970s, the concept of competency nevertheless began to emerge in the United States. However, rather than involving the various aspects of human resource management in firms, this approach focused on specific areas such as vocational training and career management and was mainly applied to supervisory and management staff. Although skill-based pay, which bases employees' wages on competency criteria, is a fairly common practice among North American companies, this applies mainly to larger ones and only to a small proportion of employees. Moreover, rather than replacing pre-existing wage payment methods, this method is usually complementary.

Despite the interest it has aroused, the competency model has not been central to the social innovations introduced in North American firms. The introduction of new forms of work organisation has had a stronger impact in terms of stimulating employees' personal commitment to the company, since it has led in many cases to the development of new criteria for qualifications based on behavioural attitudes and the contribution made by employees to corporate performance. Competence management objectives are therefore being met in firms via the reorganisation of work and the gradual adjustment of companies' collective agreements (e.g., the number of job classification levels has decreased and seniority is no longer such an important criterion).

Nevertheless, negotiations are not much in evidence in firms, but tend to involve the institutions where the respective roles of educational establishments, firms and intermediary organisations are redefined. In Quebec, for example, the last decade was a period of intense negotiation about the setting up of sectoral workers' committees responsible for developing professional standards and workplace apprenticeship programmes. In these negotiations, in which the labour market partners were central, the role of the institutions was redesigned. As educational establishments have been given less responsibility for vocational training and their programmes have been reduced, firms have become not only places of training but key institutions as far as the assessment and validation of competency is concerned. In the new set-up, competencies are defined as capacities that reveal themselves and are evaluated in the very act of carrying out work.



■ Contact :
Colette Bernier
Department of Industrial
Relations, Laval
University (Quebec)
Colette.Bernier@rlt.ulaval.ca



In France, branch negotiations might seem to be showing a loss of importance, whereas on the other side of the Atlantic, the opposite is true. In fact, the branch organisations are becoming increasingly involved in negotiations on issues such as qualifications and workforce training. Actually, on both sides of the Atlantic, it is not so much that the arena of negotiations is being replaced by another but rather that their respective roles are being redefined. As several French experts have pointed out, the mission of the sectoral and branch organisations is being redefined around the establishment of standards and procedures for a competency approach in firms (the assessment and validation of employees' skills, their right to internal and external mobility, etc.).

This move to make intermediary organisations responsible for drawing up standards seems to be due to the great change in employment relations which the competency approach has brought about: there has been a shift of emphasis from the idea of steady employment associated with firms to that of employability, where steady employment depends on employees' ability to maintain their own competency levels in an increasingly precarious labour market. To reach a balance between company performance and individual careers, it has therefore now become necessary to address the question of competencies beyond the boundaries of the firm and tackle public policies head-on. Life-long vocational training policies have opened the way to imagining many new transitional paths forming bridges between work and vocational training activities; now we have to start thinking about the rights associated with these transitions. In this way, the European approach to transitional labour markets, which aims at combining company flexibility with steady employment, might lead to creating rights of this kind by making systematic use of bridges between the activities involved in work and activities of other kinds, including vocational training. ■

New Publications

Validation des acquis de l'expérience: objectif partagé, pratiques diverses

[Accreditation of Prior Experience: Shared Objectives, Varied Practices]

> Chantal Labruyère and José Rose

NEF no. 15, Céreq, May 2004

This work addresses current debates concerning the accreditation of prior experience (APE) in France. The first of these bears on the interpretation of the latest APE legislation. Depending on the situations and the participants, this legislation may be considered alternately as an improvement of the earlier law because of the broader field of application or as a break with it because of the recognition of a new path of access to certification. The second group of questions deals with financial means. In face of the rising costs of the APE procedure, there is notably a need to define the modalities of funding for all kinds of publics if this individual right is to be exercised. The publication also brings out the need to clarify the debate within the public institutions, whether in terms of what is to be evaluated or the standard to be applied in evaluating prior experience.

Une mise en regard des mesures usuelles de la (non)qualification

[A Comparison of Common (Non-) Qualification Measurements]

> Gaëll Ryk

NEF no. 16, Céreq, June 2004

While the number of jobs considered unskilled showed a consistent decrease from 1980 to

1994, it has been constantly on the rise ever since. Today, there are more than five million members of the labour force holding such jobs, as was the case twenty years ago. The hierarchy of qualifications and the opposition between qualification and non-qualification may be defined in three contexts: in terms of work, of employment and lastly, of training and experience. On the basis of common statistical classifications and thresholds, Ryk examines the degree of convergence of these three dimensions of qualification. He questions the present boundaries between qualification and non-qualification through an analysis of the first years of working life of young people entering the labour market in 1998. The recent entrants in fact seem to be more affected than other members of the labour force (with the possible exception of those at the end of working life) by the new modes of regulating employment and reconfiguring its forms.

Parcours des jeunes à la sortie du système éducatif et déclassement salarial

[Young people's trajectories after leaving the educational system and the downgrading of employment]

> Emmanuelle Nauze-Fichet, Magda Tomasini.

NEF no. 17, Céreq, July 2004

The more the risk of unemployment increases, the greater the risk of encountering downgraded conditions of employment becomes. Downgrading, i.e., situations where young

DOCUMENTS
NEF



people take up jobs for which they are obviously overqualified, is tending to develop in parallel with the rising unemployment figures. Based on an analysis of the trajectories of young people who left the initial vocational training system in 1998, the authors examine the conditions associated with downgrading, using an wage-based approach: a young person is said to be downgraded if his or her wages are lower than those of half of all the young people who have obtained qualifications at the level immediately below their own. The first rather surprising finding to emerge from this study was that most young people who have been downgraded in the jobs they have taken during the first three years of their active lives have never encountered situations of any other kinds during this period. One might have expected downgrading to usually occur at the end of a period of unemployment which has incited job-seekers to lower their sights; it turns out, however, that the downgrading usually occurs right at the start. In terms of individual profiles, some characteristics previously noted in other studies were confirmed: young people with the «baccalauréat» and graduates with bachelor's or master's degrees have greater difficulty in having their qualifications properly recognized than young people with lower-level diplomas.

instruction" as the basis principles of the *licences professionnelles*. Thus, the ministerial order creating this diploma grants representatives of unions and employers' organisation a place equivalent to that of university representative in the process of setting up these programmes. This publication offers a comprehensive study of the genesis of the *licence professionnelle* supply by situating it in a local context from both university and professional standpoints. In the process, the authors bring out the ways this supply was constructed, in terms of specific forms of "partnership" between universities and business in each case. They also address the extent and limits of the change which the *licences professionnelles* have brought about in the universities.

Évolutions de l'emploi tertiaire de base et positionnements des CAP-BEP tertiaires sur le marché du travail

[Trends in low-level tertiary employment and the positioning of those with CAP-BEP diplomas in tertiary specialities on the labour market]

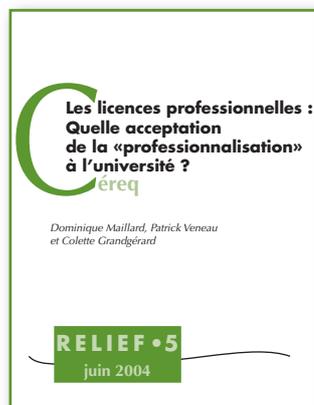
> Thomas Couppié, Céline Gasquet et Alberto Lopez (Céreq).

RELIEF no. 6, July 2004

Many questions are being asked about the French CAP and BEP diplomas in tertiary specialities, and increasingly worrying problems are arising about the positioning of these short vocational training courses on the labour market. On the one hand, "basic tertiary employment" has been undergoing many changes which have had serious repercussions. On the other hand, young people who have taken these courses are far from being sure of finding jobs: even in a favourable economic context, they are highly exposed to long periods of unemployment and short-term jobs. To draw a picture of the positioning of the level V tertiary sector diploma in France, the authors first describe the low-level tertiary job situation and the main trends shown by conditions of employment and the ways in which positions are assigned to employees. They also examine in detail the changes occurring and the job supply problems arising in the case of seven typical examples of basic tertiary jobs: shop assistants, assistant accountants, secretaries, odd-job office workers, staff providing cleaning services, hairdressers and hospital orderlies. In each case, they examine the patterns of recruitment of young diploma-holders, before drawing a more overall picture of these young people's transition to work and the opportunities available to them after training to work in the tertiary sector. These results are discussed in the light of some general ideas about the future of these CAP-BEP courses preparing students for tertiary sector jobs.

■ These publications are available at the Céreq bookstore or by mail order to Marie-Christine Antonucci, Céreq, 10, place de la Joliette, BP 21321, 13567 Marseille cedex 2. Tel. 33 (0)4 91 13 28 89 Fax 33 (0)4 91 13 28 80. E-mail: antonucci@cereq.fr. Orders must be accompanied by payment (please include 4 € for postage and handling).

DOCUMENTS RELIEF



Les licences professionnelles. Quelle acceptation de la « professionnalisation » à l'université ?

[*L i c e n c e s* professionnelles:

What Does "Professionalisation" at University Mean?]

> Dominique Maillard, Patrick Veneau and Colette Grandgérard

RELIEF no. 5, June 2004

The *licences professionnelles* were created in 1999 by the Ministry of Education in response to three kinds of demands: the professions' demands for skills, the students' demands for vocational diplomas and the universities' demands for a development of their "strategy" (see the main article in this issue of *Training and Employment*). These different expectations have been translated into regulations setting out "partnership, mixed publics and innovative

Les stratégies d'acteurs face à la validation des acquis en Basse-Normandie

[Players' strategies for validating knowhow in the "Basse-Normandie" region]

> Abdel Rahamane Baba-Moussa

Validating past experience means giving people an opportunity of obtaining diplomas or professional qualifications on the strength of the experience of all kinds they have gained. Applying this principle in the regions requires drawing up a framework for the concerted efforts of the various players involved. The results of the present study on how this framework was drawn up in the case of the "Basse Normandie" region show that although there is a consensus about the need for lifelong training (because of the social implications and the advantages for the players) and its value in general, the practicalities (such as the modes of application, the distribution of roles and resources) and the modes of assessment required can give rise to heated debate and battles for power between the institutional actors.

Parler d'expérience

[Speaking about experience]

> Philippe Astier

Professional experience is generally regarded as a dynamic factor based on the acquisition of assets (knowledge and know-how). However, the changes undergone by organisations can lead to this rule being broken and to these assets being disqualified when they no longer constitute resources for future activities. "Dead-end" experience of this kind can disrupt not only people's activities but also their knowledge and their professional identities. Analysing what a subject has to say about this problem is a good way of establishing what has been disrupted, on condition the discourse is of a specific kind combining subjective involvement, objective statements and some awareness of the effects on efficiency, knowledge and personal identity.

Du travail collectif au collectif de travail : développer des stratégies d'expérience

[From teamwork to team spirit. Developing strategies for dealing with experience]

> Sandrine Caroly and Yves Clot

Comparisons between two French Post Offices where the work was organised differently show how teamwork is a prerequisite for setting up a team spirit among workers: it helps to set

occupational activities in a historical collective perspective, as well as having psychological effects. This analysis focusing on individual and collective attitudes towards the rules and regulations brings to light the modes whereby experience is acquired. Implementing strategies for dealing with experience can also improve workers' team spirit.

Les enjeux de la mesure des acquis en entreprise d'entraînement

[The challenge for assessing experience at practice firms]

> Cédric Frétygné

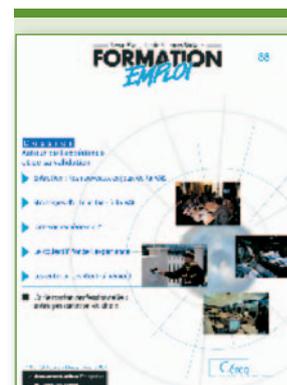
There is an urgent need these days for the promoters of training for job-seekers to be able to assess previously acquired competencies. In this context, increased employability is assumed to reflect the efficiency of the training dispensed. On what assumptions is this procedure based and what factors may have been overlooked? How can those responsible for training judge previously acquired competencies fairly? The author describes the methods of assessment adopted in the framework of training at practice firms, analyses the explanations given by the promoters and notes the paradoxes inherent to the resulting system of assessment.

L'orientation des jeunes peu qualifiés, une liberté contrainte

[Vocational guidance for young people with few qualifications: freedom within bounds]

> Isabelle Borrás

This paper deals with how to achieve a balance between individual freedom and structural constraints when giving young people with few qualifications vocational guidance. The focus here is on the public vocational guidance services consulted by young people with few qualifications in regional settings. The role of these counsellors is described first by analysing their professional practices and the organisational structures in which they work, which depend on regional vocational guidance policies, and secondly, by examining the use made of these services by young labour-market entrants. The three main principles underlying policy on vocational guidance, economic, social and educational matters are then compared with the attitudes of these young peoples and with the conditions under which the counsellors carry out their profession.



■ This issue may be ordered from La Documentation française.

- Issue price: 14 €.
- One-year subscription (4 issues): 53 € for France, 56 € for Europe, 57.50 € for the French overseas departments and territories, 60 € elsewhere.