

# THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR YOUNG GRADUATES AND THEIR EMPLOYABILITY

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**ABSTRACT:** Certain young people are being propelled towards a more promising future than in the past, due to – amongst other things – continuous learning, which guarantees their productive capabilities. Employers are called upon to arrange a cogent value proposition to support young people in their constant growth that would also help them create an autonomous professional identity.

**KEYWORDS:** employee learning value proposition, youth transitions, professional identity.

## *1. Introduction*

In this contribution, we consider the pedagogical dimension of organizations linked to the definition of policies, levers, and instruments whose combination can be a *value* for young people passing through them, from work experience and apprenticeship to normal working relationships.

Consequently, we are going to look at the results of the PRIN Emp&Co research (Employability and Competencies, 2012–2016) using the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) paradigm, i.e. everything that people experience and receive within a working relationship (Pavar, Charak 2015; Minchington 2010; Michaels *et al.* 2001), to understand how young people build their own set of *values*, from those offered by the organizations where they pass through the management of training processes and to which they are exposed (in transitions prior and subsequent to graduation). This is because EVP includes not only pay and economic benefits, but also – amongst other things – the ELVP – *Employee Learning Value Proposition*, i.e. the provision of learning actions – above all informal – contextualized and aimed at the acquisition and development of skills and knowledge of all kinds, as well as certain behaviour and attitudes. Such opportunities can be directly created by the factors of *value proposition* of the organizations or simply stimulated by them. It is the young person's task to seize them to build their own growth path.

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The research set out to investigate the educational or disadvantaged valency of learning processes as a result of the *value proposition* of working contexts, especially in view of the number of organizations through which young graduates pass just after graduating. In the research we did not investigate personal and social factors, which also affect the professional future of individuals, to focus on the educational dimension of factors that promote or hinder transitions.

Our hypothesis is that a *value proposition* structured in instruments that create affiliation and quality in the required work promote recognition and benefit – as well as learning – career development; that they provide transparent pay policies (Browne 2012), as well as attracting talented young people and expressing high potential for keeping their job; that they stimulate individuals, inducing them to make the best of themselves, to build (also autonomously) sense in their work actions, starting from reactive learning opportunities (Eraut 2000), dependent on the growth and development paths of the professional self to act in the context of work. Conversely, a poor *value proposition*, lacking in learning valency risks re-routing such paths and adversely affecting the management of internal and external transitions to the job market.

The contribution is subdivided into an introductory part that illustrates the adopted paradigm (paragraph 1), followed by paragraph 2, which provides brief notes of a methodological character, further elaborated in Chapter 4 of this volume.

In paragraph 4, we describe the types of transitions that emerged during the research as typifying the period immediately following graduation. Paragraph 4 provides the empirical evidence that we have read and interpreted through the *learning value proposition* approach, on which we finally founded our conclusions (paragraph 5).

## 2. *The first transitions of young graduates towards work found in the research*

### 2.1 *Methodological nods*

During the research the data was collected using records of semi-structured interviews, according to a rigid research protocol (see Gaia Gioli, *Employability-Oriented Curriculum: Strategies and Tools to Train Young Graduates. The PRIN EMP&Co. Project*). The analysis unit was the learning (adverse and favourable) action directed at young people during their work experience.

### 2.2 *Descriptions of the first transitions*

Starting from the analysis of the interviews, we show the main data, referring to what we might define as the first three transitions towards work:

1. internships and work experience during the university course
2. the first work experiences after graduation, not necessarily consistent with preparation or professional aspirations
3. the first work activity consistent with the higher education received and with the professional family corresponding to the aspirations of the young graduate.

The succession of the three transitions is indicative of a path that we might consider virtuous, but not generalized. In fact, the third transition – which usually occurs at least 12 months after the end of studies – was only found in a part of the young respondents. There are, in fact, two other groups that were distinguished by not being a part – after one year – of any work environment or for not having reached any form of *stabilization* of their work.

Below we provide some basic information on the basic features of the *value proposition* which characterised the work experiences encountered by the respective professional paths. The aim is to understand whether there could be a correlation between the professional results achieved in the third transition and the *value proposition* of previous work experience.

Cluster 1 – Young people not in any business environment by the end of the Third Transition.

<i>First transition</i>	<i>Second transition</i>	<i>Third transition</i>
The <i>value proposition</i> of internship experience is poor: young people are looking by themselves for opportunities to acquire further areas of specialization (e.g. Master in Clinical Pedagogy, research PhD). Transition to internship and closure of the university course are accompanied by work experiences non-coherent with young people's projects for work placements, for a variety of reasons (desire to know the contexts of work, activate compensation measures independently and construction of professional networks).	Job or opportunity research is focused on small localities and local markets and is not guided by an analysis of demand in the job market. Failures also in non-relevant job search with their own aspirations and professional paths follow each other. This does not always result in discouragement. In some cases, there is a strong motivation to complete specialization interventions because of a more favourable professional future.	Component management of <i>value proposition</i> is predominantly in the hands of the young person due to the absence of an involvement in an organization. For extended periods of time there are seasonal work experiences that are repeated without stability over the years (e.g. being educator in summer centres). They contribute to the development of a professional identity and skills that organizations are not interested in stabilizing internally.

Cluster 2 – Young people in a precarious/casual working environment at the end of the Third Transition.

<i>First transition</i>	<i>Second transition</i>	<i>Third transition</i>
<p>Internship experience conducted in an activity that is consistent with personal interests, in conjunction with non-homogeneous work experiences, neither with personal interests nor with career paths and career expectations (waiter/ress, host/ess). The <i>value proposition</i> activated by the organization sometimes serves to develop some skills, especially transverse (relational, managerial). On the other hand, it is not very decisive in terms of professionalism and attractiveness.</p>	<p>Higher education experiences compensate for the skills not acquired in previous experiences. At this stage young people have job opportunities and are engaged in activities whose content is highly professional. There are still no compensation, career development, and reward instruments.</p>	<p>Young people still have casual employment relationships. In many cases they are simultaneously engaged in multiple activities and with various organizations. Professional growth and new perspectives often result from the networks of relationships that young people build. It is through “small jobs” and the networks that young people deepen their knowledge of the specific job market (e.g. third sector, international co-operation) and their potential future employment opportunities.</p>

Cluster 3 – Young people in a work context in a structured way at the end of the Third Transition.

<i>First transition</i>	<i>Second transition</i>	<i>Third transition</i>
<p>Internship experience conducted in an activity that is consistent with professional aspirations (e.g. training officers and managers for private organizations, nursery educators, family pedagogues, ministerial advisers for innovation policy in education), along with casual work experiences, consistent and not (leaflet delivery, classroom tutor, babysitter, back office in bank).</p>	<p>Consistent work experience in the same field of training; in some cases, the indicator of compensation is built on the initiative of the young person who continues in parallel with multiple, inconstant work experiences. The indicator of the <i>value proposition</i> on the content of work and on professional challenges is often developed autonomously by the young person who builds on own initiative opportunities for growth of skills (Master’s degree, elaboration of research projects for PhD candidates).</p>	<p>Organizational behaviour supports the professional growth processes of young people, for whom organizations provide challenging tasks (e.g. the creation of an HR office for early childhood services), relationships networks, career prospects and, at times, rapid development paths and consequent rewarding instruments. In other cases, pathways aimed at building self-employment projects are being developed.</p>

### 3. The 'employee value proposition' for managing the transitions of young graduates

We now analyse how the EVP's educational dimension affects organizations in the progression of transitions.

#### 3.1 The EVP in general terms

In recent years, we have witnessed a change of approaches, terms, and contents that help to expand an organization's offerings to the people involved. The concept of EVP, initially used in managerial literature and human resources, and today of interdisciplinary interest (marketing, communication, etc.), generally includes (Minchington 2010): Compensation (remuneration policies); Benefits (incentive schemes including monetary and non-monetary elements, fixed and variable remuneration, incentives to increase the baggage of skills, etc.); Work content (recruiting, training, assessment, growth policies that affect the more or less challenging and attractive content of the work assigned to each worker); Career assistance (career development policies); Affiliation (loyalty policies to the organization). It has a direct impact on the proposed learning value, as we shall see in the paragraphs below.

EVP therefore incorporates, but goes beyond, the benefits of monetary compensation (from compensation to total reward) that an organization provides to its employees in exchange for their time, commitment, talent, and performance. The focus is on attraction and retention towards those who help organizations achieve their missions and business goals. This is from the perspective of the organizations.

The theme, analysed from the perspective of young people looking for work, raises questions of pedagogical importance since they are bound to identify actions that allow young people to build and manage themselves, to employ their talents, to act on knowledge, skills, and behaviour – hidden or lacking – with the support of the organizations to which aspirations, knowledge, attitudes, and time are available. In other words, pedagogical problematics lie in the way young people are able to build a proposal that is valuable in terms of positioning within companies, organizations, and the free market. This means analysing the meaning of EVP for a young trainee, apprentice, worker, i.e. the educational dimension of the EVP (*i.e.*, the ELVP), depending on the transitions into and out of the job market, the way the learning actions which take place during a work experience support young people or not in managing transitions and building their own professional life project (aware that the process of 'employability' begins much earlier, Boffo *et al.* 2017).

### 3.2 *The pedagogical dimension of the EVP*

Pedagogical reflection relates to the way in which a work experience (an apprenticeship, internship – of any form – and more or less regular work experience) are learning opportunities through which young people capitalize on their ‘achievements’ (Yorke 2006) for the autonomous construction and implementation of their professional project through interaction with the contexts they are a part of. In fact, the growth and construction of one’s own realization depend not least on the confidence that young people feel to be what they want, and the actions they plan and set in order to become what they want to be.

It is essentially to conceive the *value* produced by organizations as an opportunity for young people to reflect on their identity – professional and personal – and to bolster this based on the experiences that they are offered by life, or slowly build freely through a conscious integration of every aspect of the professional and training experience (networks, Master’s courses, professional tasks, etc.). Young people on a first work experience, before being competent in productive action, learn to be competent in reflective and learning action and can bring about transformations that influence the definition of even short paths to explore organizations. Through the various experiences that the job market offers (not always fulfilling), young people acquire knowledge, grow, transform their behaviour, nurture proactivity or resistance (influenced by the contexts and the way they live). Especially through these, young people learn to read the *here* of now and define the *here* of tomorrow. In other writings, we have dealt with the subject in the penitentiary context (Torlone 2016). Here we analyse the role that organizations – not just penitentiary – have, through EVP and ELVP, to promote processes of awareness, self-development, self-design, research, and development of the professional self into a renewed social context in which family membership/ professional profiles and identities are no longer immutable as in the past or guaranteed by enduring lifelong work, but constructed in a more modest and negotiable way (Bauman 2005).

It is indisputable that being part of an organizational context, influences an individual’s private and personal sphere in various ways, their ability to give a sense and unique meaning to experiences, even sooner than the ability linked to working productively. In this context, an ELVP is successful whenever it prepares young people – at least the most ambitious and those likely to initiate change – for the autonomous and targeted management of their transition into the job market (Tab. 1) through involvement in learning actions be they ‘favourable’ or ‘adverse’ (Federighi 2016), re-worked autonomously by the young person, in tune with their new career aspirations.

Table 1 – The effects of EVP on the progression of the transitions of young people in the construction of a professional identity.

Effects of EVP / ELVP on young people	Young proactive, ambitious in looking for employment.	Young little proactive, little ambitious in looking for employment.	Young not proactive nor ambitious in looking for employment.
Types of EVP / ELVP			
Rich, positive EVP (referring to all components of the EVP)	Attraction. Retention. Vertical mobility (internal/external).	Attraction. Resistance to transitions.	Attraction.
EVP poorly rich, negative (in reference only some of the 5 components, they satisfy the young person)	Attraction. External mobility.	Attraction. Retention. Resistance to transitions. Possible external mobility.	Attraction. Retention. Resistance to transitions.
EVP poor, negative (referring to all components of the EVP)	Attraction. External mobility.	Attraction. Retention. Resistance to transitions. Possible external mobility (immediate/postponed).	Attraction. Retention. Resistance to transitions. Possible external mobility (immediate/postponed).

The quality of the organization's value offering affects the professional future of young people in terms of mobility for further professionalization and employment, sought elsewhere. In this regard, the first transition (to 'small jobs' not relevant to the study path or career aspirations, see section 2) is important because it gets young people used to seeking what satisfies them elsewhere, to seizing learning values in every context they travel through, to build paths and abilities in analysis, reading, and selecting organizational contexts.

Conversely, a negative or only partially positive EVP/ELVP may activate external mobility paths or hold on to those who have poorly defined professional projects and little attention to the discovery of alternative occupational contexts.

The young person, in management of the EVP/LVP offering (whether positive or negative), faces the need, not always properly accepted, of thinking personally while something changes, meanwhile transforming within the context of the job, to become 'another professional'. The need, specifically, is to steer the change going on or about to be activated and of which they must be protagonists right from the start, triggering the set of abilities and skills possessed. It is in this way that the young professional worker who acts, communicates, interprets, seeks, studies,

takes interviews and asks questions, leveraging his transformative reflexivity (Mezirow 2003).

Of the five components of EVP, we shall now consider the most important ones from a pedagogical point of view.

### *3.2.1 The educational dimension of incentives for growth*

Talented young people, with a high degree of agency ability (Bandura 1977) and the desire to make things happen, reveal a high capacity to recognise and exploit the (reactive, deliberative, intentional) learning generated by (all) living contexts, from meeting others and using them to build one's own professional life project. Young people can cultivate experience and relate to people in their Zone of Proximal Development, which is expanding as new acquisitions stimulate new learning; they are able to invent their own professional identity, solicit and create it by activating decision-making processes constructed autonomously or through the available networks. By means of these processes, identity can also change in advancing experiences; professional itineraries are hypothesized and defined and experienced in the light of the learning experiences that the young person creates and lives critically, if not made available by the working contexts they are travelling through. All of which requires a young person to have a high capacity to «imagine and desire something that is not yet given; to identify goals for achieving it, starting with what is available; to give rise to something new; to reconstruct strategies and aims discursively» (Costa 2013: 111). Otherwise, the value creation process loses its advantages and benefits.

Young people, independently – if not accompanied by organizations – have their own learning resources, and differentiate their training and learning experiences (also with personal and economic sacrifices and renunciations), enhancing their ability to translate negative or little challenging ELVPs into opportunities to grow elsewhere.

### *3.2.2 Challenging work contents*

Opportunities for growth and wellbeing for young people in the workplace can be produced directly by the value proposition of organizations. Nowadays, the jobs available are many, varied, increasingly rich in intellectual content, and fewer physical and varied efforts in the world. Young people have the opportunity (unknown to young people in the past) to travel, to specialize, frequently change work and organizations, to deepen their knowledge and enrich their relationships (Federighi, Torlone 2013). They are, however, called for a commitment to become autonomous, to grow, become involved, to define their own professional aspirations (not necessarily identical to those built on their

university course), to improve in their work and the jobs they are doing, or to seize the growth potential that each organization offers (Learning Value Proposition). The more solid and rich the learning potential of the workplace that the young person experiences (Federighi 2013), the greater the potential for building professional advancement because of stimulation in discovering the path and a search for *the* work (rather than *a* job) or activities suited to their professional expectations and consistent with who the young person is and wishes to be. This is the time when, both in work and through it, young people can exalt their creative and propositional abilities, experience restricted ambitions of autonomy, challenge their imagination, turn to success and professional conferment, encourage and be encouraged, exalt their sense of entrepreneurship in terms of a personal interpretation of the role being played, steer organizational behaviour towards value creation. Young people who have unclear professional development, poor motivation, and little ambition, are limited to living the working environment for what it is and can give.

The success of young workers at work is not without its obstacles, suffering and difficulties, but it can be accompanied by a process of sense-making that relieves them and helps them rediscover the work environment as a place for self-improvement, for 'self-increase' (Rossi 2009: 75), and self-realization, according to the professional goals in evolution.

Job growth opportunities – wherever we look – can also be stimulated, driven by the ELVP of the organizations where the work experience is taking place. In this case, it is the young people who are responsible for evolving their professional self, seeking other experiences with greater challenges and learning content. The difficulty, in these cases, is to recognise a lack of learning gains, learning disadvantages, damage and losses to internalize and implement change, the transition to a new occupational status. When the acquisition takes place, the young person looks for further work with more attractive ELVPs, considering the first too restrictive, unattractive, and promising experiences compared to a job insertion plan that is increasingly defined or requires additional stimuli (internalized by the young person). The preparation of vocational curricula and job interviews are experienced differently each time and waiting becomes educational, all critical processing opportunities for a prepared path. To avoid involution, cognitive decline, loss of acquisition, impersonal slightly improper awareness, young people can choose between staying in saturated organizational contexts of knowledge development and new learning, less likely to build a professional identity to experience and enrich in full autonomy, and the opportunity to open up to the future and venture into the (re)construction of their own working history – often with investments to be made.

### 3.2.3 *Recompense*

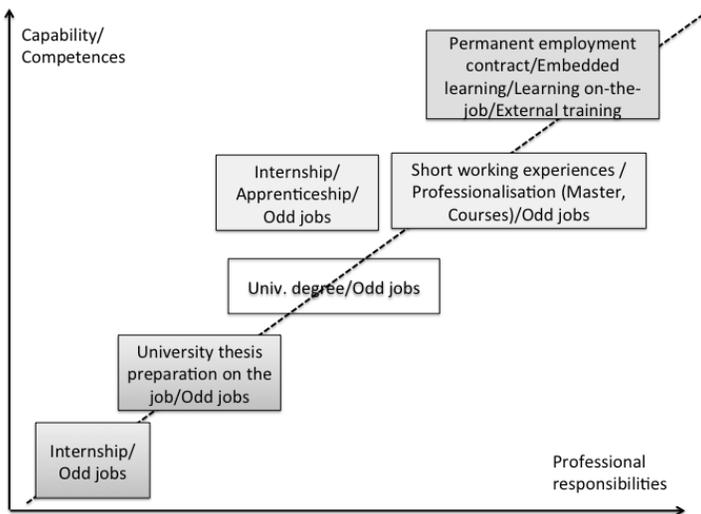
In some cases, a poor ELVP allows young people to find employment opportunities that are economically more fulfilling than those in the past. Usually it is not until the third transition that a level of compensation in line with the salary expectations the young person has matured is achieved.

### 3.2.4 *Career development*

In the absence of advancement and security prospects, it is the young person who must build these to meet the skills demand that they begin to discover in the field, to know how to look at and select more than in the past. Commitment to career development and continuous improvement (Fig. 1), with different and non-generalizable results and timeframes, is the result of young people's individual choices – sometimes influenced by personal situations, and not least by suffering – which matures with creativity, intelligent awareness, adaptability, knowledge management skills within networks that are created and available; innovations compared to initial experiences (internship).

In some cases, this is the time when the young person enters a long-term occupation (third transition), with satisfactory remuneration.

Figure 1 – The career progression of the young graduate.



The pursuit of a professional position coherent with personal aspirations is often intertwined with learning activities that the young seek for

themselves (e.g. a post-graduate or Master's degree), or receives from the contexts they are passing through (e.g. on-the-job training, or courses).

The relevant work experiences accumulated by young people take on more importance than unobtrusive or unsuccessful university pathways with vacancies (Humburg *et al.* 2013). Those more careful understand this in time and set to work to make their career path attractive.

#### 4. Final remarks

Based on the data presented, the following becomes apparent:

1. The employment prospects of young graduates are related to the type of work experience of young people. This depends on the learning value of the professional and the relational content present in such experiences, which help to develop the individual's 'calling'. Aspirations and interests change and alter due to work experiences.
2. Young people cannot expect to immediately begin a professional career consistent with their aspirations and studies. In all cases, completing their basic skills and knowledge of job demand require a commitment from young people to improve, both through positive work experiences and through a further post-graduate commitment. Young people are required to be «active, inventive and resourceful, not just on one occasion, but constantly, day after day» (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 23-26), during the paths that are built and experienced. The less active, proactive, and ambitious are those most penalized.
3. The differences between young people in terms of professional outcome, which can be traced back to one year after graduation, are patently obvious. The professional future of young people affects personal and social factors that we have not investigated in depth in this research. In all cases of failure or partial fulfilment of aspirations, there is a persistence of working experiences with poor educational content.

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