

Opportunities for and Barriers to Cooperation between Employers and Employment Offices in the Czech Republic: Employers' Perspective

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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to present and analyse opportunities for and barriers to cooperation between private employers and public employment offices in the Czech Republic, from the employers' perspective. Based on research results, opportunities for cooperation can be seen in attitudes of employment officers towards employers, individualization and differentiation of approaches, better mutual awareness etc., but also in successive changes of some legislative and institutional factors. The barriers to cooperation, on the other hand, can be seen in hardly removable structural factors, such as the structure and characteristics of jobseekers, divergence of goals and lack of mutual interdependence.

KEYWORDS: • cooperation • public-private partnership • opportunities • barriers • employment office • employers • Czech Republic

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1 Introduction

Based on the Employment Act (No. 435/2004) of the Czech Republic, public employment offices cooperate with various actors and institutions, including employers, to design and implement measures related to labour market development and employment. Employers are expected to cooperate with employment offices especially when searching for a new workforce and when using the active labour market policy measures (training, investment incentives, publicly beneficial work, socially beneficial work, etc.) which are intended “to ensure the maximum possible level of employment” (§ 104, Article 1 of the Employment Act, No. 435/2004).

In practice, however, cooperation between private actors (firms, enterprises) and public employment services faces a number of institutional, structural and other limits but it also offers a number of opportunities for more effective and intensive cooperation in local labour markets. Nonetheless, it is of primary importance to understand the perspectives of particular actors and to detect and interpret where they themselves see the potential for cooperation between private and public institutions and, at the same time, where they see limits which restrain such cooperation.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the opportunities for and barriers to cooperation between private employers and employment offices in the Czech Republic – from the employers’ perspective. The point of view of the other key player (employment office staff) is not considered in this paper, except in the concluding suggestions for further research at the employment offices.

The paper begins with discussion of the theoretical bases for exploring the conditions for cooperation and partnership in local labour markets. The main concern is whether cooperation is possible at all, or whether the objectives of specific actors (private employers on one hand and employment offices on the other) are so different that effective cooperation in a local labour market is not feasible. The study is based on the theoretical assumption that there are, on one hand, *structural and institutional conditions* determining a successful cross-sectoral partnership, respectively cooperation as discussed below, in labour markets which are characterized by “long-term effects and objective nature with regards to the current actors on the labour market” (Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2008: 45), and on the other hand, there are so called *project conditions* that can be – to some extent – influenced by particular actors (Parsons, 1999; Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2007, 2008). Based on this theoretical assumption, the aim is to examine whether employers interpret problems they might have while cooperating with employment offices in terms of institutional and structural factors (i.e. issues which can hardly be affected and controlled by the actors involved in the cooperation), or in terms of project factors (i.e. factors which are to some extent under control of the actors and can be affected by them).

2 Key Terms: Cooperation Versus Partnership

First of all, it is important to specify and distinguish two key terms of the theory of public service organisation which are used in this paper – the terms of *cooperation* and *partnership*. Novotná (2009) presents a relation continuum of organisations with two primary axes which represent criteria for assessing an external space shared by organisations. The first criterion (axis) is a level of openness based on mutual trust, or distrust. The second criterion (axis) is equality or inequality of partner conditions (for details see Novotná, 2009: 75-78). Both *cooperation* and *partnership* lie in this relation continuum in the quadrant defined by the half-axis “trust” – “equality of conditions” but cooperation is closer to a neutral centre which according to Novotná means that cooperation is a shorter (transitory) relationship than a partnership.¹

Although the conceptual framework of public-private *partnerships* (Parsons, 1999) is used for the following analysis of opportunities for and barriers to *cooperation* between employers and employment offices in the Czech Republic, I am aware of differences in meanings of these two terms. However, I believe that this conceptual framework of partnerships can also be applied (slightly adapted) to analysis of conditions for *cooperation* which is, just as a partnership, based on trust and equality of partners' relationship.

3 Cooperation or Clash of Interests

Let us begin the theoretical overview with the following questions: Should public employment services actually cooperate with private employers? Are the goals and interests of these actors not too different or even contradictory? Different authors have presented various arguments for and against cooperation between public employment services and private economic actors (see e.g. Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2007, 2008). These different arguments are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Arguments for and against cooperation between public employment services and private employers

For cooperation	Against cooperation
Increase of employers' influence on labour market problem-solving	Dominant control over the solution to unemployment problems held by the state
Cooperation and partnership with employers enhance effects of employment policy	Serious institutional discrepancies and barriers to cooperation between the welfare state and the free market
Convergence of objectives of public economic and social policies with economic interests of entrepreneurs (in the framework of the European Employment Strategy)	Conflicting or alternative targets of government agencies and employers' organisations

Adapted from Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2008.

The *arguments for* promoting cooperation are discussed first. An increasing influence of employers on labour market problem solving is shown by various empirical studies describing effective cooperation of employment offices with employers as well as involvement of employers in solving particular problems of local or regional labour markets (OECD, 2001; Winkler, Klimplová & Žižlavský, 2005; Klimplová, 2007; etc.). Cooperation and partnership between employers and employment offices in labour markets at the same time improve the efficiency of achieving particular objectives of state employment policy (cooperation of employment offices with employers in Sweden can be given as an example, see Klimplová, 2007).

Another argument supporting cooperation of employment offices with private employers is a link between the European Employment Strategy (with its three interconnected goals – full employment, improvement of quality and productivity of work, and strengthening of social cohesion and inclusion) and the Broad Economic Guidelines which have included macroeconomic, microeconomic, and employment guidelines since 2003 (Sirovátka & Rákoczyová, 2004). This means that the interconnection between economic and social objectives has gradually occurred throughout the labour market, and thus there has also been a convergence of the objectives of social and economic policies, on one hand, and the economic interests of private employers, on the other. European countries have slowly started reforming their social policies with an emphasis on workforce mobilization in order to *enhance competitiveness, increase productivity and promote economic growth* (this means goals which overlap with the interests of employers) and at the same time, to improve the situation of disadvantaged groups in labour markets and reduce poverty (Timonen, 2003; Taylor-Gooby, 2004 & Cerami, 2008, etc.). There are also a growing number of economists who emphasize the need to increase measures on the labour market supply side. According to them, deficit financing can no longer be seen as the right engine to propel economic growth and as a defence mechanism against unemployment during periods of economic

recession. At the same time, the attention of politicians moves to methods strengthening the work flexibility and reducing labour market obstacles (Taylor-Gooby, 2005). Thus, social policy, including employment policy, should no longer be viewed as a burden on economic development, but rather as an investment to improve the adaptability and employability of the workforce on the labour market (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Pierson, 2001; Taylor-Gooby, 2005; Cerami, 2008; Klímplová, 2008, etc.).² Public employment services and private employers should thus cooperate in order to achieve the described goals.

After discussing the arguments for cooperation between public employment services and the private sector (employers), the *arguments against* such cooperation (the second column of Table 1) are presented. One of them is that the state still retains a dominant control over the solution to unemployment problems. The reason here is obvious: methods and results of addressing unemployment and social risks related to unemployment (as important factors of social cohesion in society) significantly affect the legitimacy of government policy (Winkler, Klímplová & Vrbková, 2008). Another argument against cooperation might be that while interests of employment and economic policies at European and national level have been gradually interconnected (or at least their gradual linking has been declared), in the practice of local labour markets the objectives of public employment services, on one hand, and business (private employers), on the other, might continue to be inconsistent. Employers may only pursue their own economic goals, competitiveness and profit; employment offices, on the other hand, have to focus on helping persons who are disadvantaged on the labour market – they pursue social objectives (social inclusion and cohesion). Sometimes this can entail an objective conflict which hinders mutual cooperation.

This is related to another argument against employment offices' cooperation with employers which is that the state and the market are two economic institutions among which there are deep institutional and value differences (differences in interpretation of rules of conduct, a different value system, etc.). These disparities impede mutual agreement on the goals of labour market regulations and on issues of employment and unemployment (Winkler, Klímplová & Vrbková, 2008). Thus, cooperation between public employment services (employment offices) and private employers is not always possible for objective reasons.

4 Conditions for Public-Private Partnership/Cooperation

As mentioned above, the adapted conceptual framework of conditions for public-private *partnerships* (Parsons, 1999) is used to analyse conditions for *cooperation* between private employers and public employment offices. On one hand, this framework distinguishes *start conditions* for public-private partnerships/cooperation – convergence of objectives and interdependence between public and private sectors (Parsons, 1999). On the other hand, there are so

called *project conditions*. This general conceptual framework is adapted for analysing public-private cooperation in local labour markets.

This study distinguishes between *the structural and institutional conditions* (related to Parsons' start conditions but broadened) and *the project conditions* (just as Parsons'), which both determine a partnership/cooperation of public employment offices and private employers.

The structural and institutional conditions are external and can hardly be affected or controlled by the actors involved. In the case of labour markets, these are primarily connected with the structure of labour supply and demand. If employment offices have nothing or nobody to offer employers, the condition of interdependence of these two actors is not fulfilled and a successful partnership/cooperation between employment offices and private employers can hardly be achieved. However, labour supply and demand can hardly be influenced by particular actors (employment offices as well as employers); therefore one can speak about a structural barrier to cross-sectoral cooperation which had an objective character with regard to current actors on the labour market.

Legal provisions are another factor which can hardly be affected by the cooperating actors. There is a strict legal and institutional framework in which cooperation between employment offices and employers must take place. Legislative conditions can be interpreted by some actors as barriers for efficient cooperation of public and private organisations on local labour markets. On the other hand, their changes, although hardly enforceable by local actors, may be perceived as an opportunity to enhance such cooperation.

The project conditions for successful public-private partnerships/cooperations, which are related primarily to conduct of actors and thus may be, to some extent, influenced by the staff of the cooperating organisations, include mutual trust between actors; clarity of objectives and strategies; unambiguity of the division of costs, risks and returns; a clear division of responsibilities and powers; phasing of the project; conflict regulation laid down beforehand; internal coordination and adequate support of partnerships in the participating organisations; adequate project organisation; legality; protection of third parties' interests and rights; business- and market-orientated thinking and acting (Parsons, 1999: 498, see also Table 2). Most of these project conditions of public-private partnerships are also an important precondition for successful cooperation between employment offices and private employers.

In addition to the start conditions and the project conditions, Parsons (1999) also presents the *secondary (interlinking) conditions*. These conditions comprise the existence of a network of communication channels between the public and private sectors concerned, and the existence of a broker to facilitate negotiations of cross-sectoral cooperation (Parsons, 1999). As can be seen in Table 2 as well as in the

subsequent analysis, these secondary (interlinking) conditions are ranked among the project conditions since they are also related to the conduct of actors (behavioural structures of involved actors) and may be to some extent influenced by those actors. Moreover, the existence of communication channels as well as the existence of a negotiation broker facilitate implementation of project conditions – interlinking conditions increase information capacity of cooperating organisations, leading to better mutual understanding which can deepen mutual trust, etc. (OECD, 2001; Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2007; Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2008).

Table 2: Conditions for public-private partnership/cooperation in local labour markets

Structural and institutional conditions	Project (and interlinking) conditions
Convergence of objectives and values	Communication channels
Interdependence between actors	Negotiation broker
Labour market supply and demand	Mutual trust
Current legislative provisions	Unambiguity of strategy and of the division of costs, risks and returns
	Clear division of responsibilities and powers
	Phasing of the project
	Conflict regulation laid down beforehand
	Internal coordination and adequate support of partnerships/cooperation
	Adequate project organisation
	Legality
	Protection of third parties' interests and rights
	Business- and market-orientated thinking and acting

Based on Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková (2008), adapted from Parson (1999).

5 Research Questions and Data Sources

From the outline of the theoretical framework presented above, the following questions have arisen: Do employers perceive barriers for creating a more intensive and efficient cooperation with employment offices in terms of the institutional and structural conditions, or rather in terms of project conditions which are particularly related to the conduct of actors and thus feasible to be influenced? What would have to change for cooperation to become more intensive and efficient? Where can employers see opportunities for cooperation with employment offices? Two research investigations have been conducted in the last three years with an aim to answer these questions.

In October and November 2007 a questionnaire survey among employers in a selected district of south-east part of the Czech Republic was conducted. The local employment office gave us a database comprising all employers in the district and

all 343 employers from this database were asked to fill in questionnaires. The rate of return was 26 %. The results of this quantitative survey were summarized in the research report "*Analýza spokojenosti zaměstnavatelů s činností úřadu práce*"³ (Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2007) and afterwards published in the article "*Proč jsou zaměstnavatelé (ne)spokojeni s činností úřadu práce?*"⁴ (Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2008).⁵

The second survey conducted in the spring and summer of 2009 consisted of 19 in-depth interviews with selected employers (with the human resource managers or the owners of visited enterprises) in mechanical engineering and IT in selected regions of the Czech Republic (Brno, Ostrava, Pardubice, Zlín). The survey took place within larger research entitled "*Quality and work organisation in different sectors of national economy of the Czech Republic*". As well as the results of the abovementioned quantitative survey, the results of this qualitative interview-based survey are limited since the sample was not representative. There was an intentional choice of interviewees, with the selection criteria based on the following:

- a) differences in production technology – IT and mechanical engineering;
- b) enterprise size – medium-size and large firms;
- c) different structural conditions of regional labour markets.

In addition to the presented selection criteria I should also mention the willingness of enterprises (employers) to participate in the research which also impacted the sampling. Therefore the results cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, they might provide a valuable insight into the issues under discussion and facilitate understanding and interpretation of the employers' perspective. They might also serve as a helpful basis for further research and analyses.

The results of both investigations described above have been used to answer the main research question: *What are the opportunities for and barriers to cooperation between private employers and public employment offices in the Czech Republic from the employers' perspective?*

6 What Employers Regard as "Cooperation with an Employment Office"

The term "cooperation between employers and employment offices" has often been used in this paper, but what does this term actually mean for employers themselves? What do these important actors on the labour market regard as "cooperation with an employment office"?

Recruitment of new employees with the assistance of an employment office is most frequently regarded as cooperation by employers. Mediation of new employees was marked by the employers participating in the questionnaire survey in 2007

(Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2007) as the second most important service provided by the employment office (see Chart 1 in Annex) and “searching for new employees and offering vacancies” as the most frequently solved problem in cooperation with the employment office (see Table 3).

Table 3: Types of problems solved by employers in cooperation with the employment office (by frequency)

Type of problems solved	Frequency
Searching for new employees and offering vacancies via the employment office	36x
Subsidies for workplaces	4x
Employing foreign workers	2x
Establishment of socially beneficial work	2x
Retraining courses for employees	1x
Allegations of discrimination in employee recruitment	1x
Dissatisfaction with an employee recommended by the employment office	1x

Source: Research "Analýza spokojenosti zaměstnavatelů s činností úřadu práce" (Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2007)

Note: More than half (44 out of 84, i.e. 52.4 %) of the employers who answered this question had contacted the employment office while solving a particular problem in the 12 months preceding the research. Most of these employers were solving just one problem via the employment office; however, there were employers who were solving two, three or even more problems. The total number of problems solved was 53.

It is, however, important to note that such cooperation in the form of assistance with recruitment means in many cases only the *legal obligation to report vacancies to the employment office*. This legal requirement (based on § 35 of the Employment Act, No. 435/2004) is perceived by many employers as something which complicates their situation when recruiting new workforce, and therefore it can be hardly called cooperation. There are two reasons why this obligation to report vacancies makes recruitment more complicated for employers. Firstly, it is not possible to advertise vacancies elsewhere before their reporting to the employment office, and secondly, when vacancies are officially put out by the employment office, some employers have to face increased visits by jobseekers with insufficient qualifications or skills who have learnt about the vacancy through the employment office. Such jobseekers count on not being accepted; they come just to get “a stamp” proving they have been actively searching for a job as a precondition for obtaining of social benefits (see also further).

Another legal obligation of employers is to inform an employment office about employment of *foreigners* – EU citizens and their family members as well as family members of citizens of the Czech Republic (§ 87 of Employment Act, No. 435/2004). When employing other foreigners a *permit* issued by an employment office is necessary (Employment Act, No. 435/2004, Part 4, Title II)

– and obtaining such a permit is regarded by employers as another field for cooperation, although this kind of cooperation is again enforced by legislation.

Employers also cooperate with employment offices while employing *people from the risk groups* (Winkler, Klimplová & Žižlavský, 2005), such as disabled people or first-time jobseekers. Support for the creation of workplace for disabled people is considered by employers as the most important service provided by employment offices in the Czech Republic (see Figure 1, Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2007).

Last but not least, employers cooperate with employment offices in the field of *workforce education and training*. Currently, employers refer particularly to the project “EducateYourselves!”⁶ However, one cannot speak about an equal (symmetric) partner relationship in this case – the employers are in the position of the applicant for a grant from European Union funds; the employment offices, on the other hand, have the role of the authority which decides whether to grant this financial contribution or not. Besides, the employment offices also have the role of the controller of how this contribution is used.⁷ According to the relation continuum of organisations (Novotná, 2009), we should, in this case, talk about assistance (long-term relationship in the quadrant of trust and inequality) rather than cooperation or even a partnership (the quadrant of trust and equality).

7 (Dis-)satisfaction of Employers and Reasons for it

The analysis of employers' satisfaction with the activities of the investigated employment office (Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2007) has shown that the rate of employers' problems successfully solved in cooperation with the employment office is relatively low. Only 25 problems out of 53 problems that the employers were solving in cooperation with the employment office (see Table 3) were regarded by employers as successfully resolved (a problem-solving success rate of less than 50 %).

The main reasons why the employment officers were not able to help employers solve their problems were, in the employers' point of view, a poor supply of “appropriately” skilled workers on the labour market, the jobseekers' reluctance to work and their lack of interest in work, as well as their unrealistic demands for the working conditions. The results of this quantitative survey showed that the reasons for this rather negative evaluation of cooperation from the employers' perspective were probably not related to the work and conduct of employment officers (a part of the project conditions), but rather to the current supply and demand on the local labour market and to institutional rules and conditions applied in the system of public employment services (Winkler, Klimplová & Vrbková, 2008).

However, the results of the qualitative research conducted a year and a half later brought a deeper insight into the issue and no longer provided convincing support

for the statement that non-cooperation or inefficient cooperation between employers and employment offices is mainly determined by the structural and institutional conditions. Thus, one can ask: What do employers perceive as the cause of the problem? What would have to change in their point of view to intensify and improve their cooperation with the employment offices? The following section discusses the structural and institutional limits for public-private cooperation in detail, and subsequently the project conditions and the secondary conditions of such cooperation will be examined (Parsons, 1999).

7.1 Structural and Institutional Limits

The structural conditions belong among the objective limits of cooperation between employers and employment offices. They can hardly be influenced by particular actors and they practically impede cooperation. If actors do not have common goals and interests, it is virtually impossible to develop cooperation. In practice, this is one of the most common reasons why employers do not cooperate with the employment offices. Some employers⁸ have no need to cooperate with the employment office to achieve their objectives, and in some cases the employment office is seen only as a dispensable go-between for cooperation with other institutions (see the quotation below). Thus, there is a lack of interdependence between employment offices and some employers on the labour market which means one of the conditions for the development of successful public-private partnership/cooperation is not fulfilled. Employers often do not see the potential benefits of cooperation and seek more effective ways of solving their human resource problems.

"Surely, we know about each other, but so far we did not encounter anything common to build it [our cooperation] on. They [employment officers] were here; they promised us that if we prepared some leaflets, they would present them at the apprentice school. And then we started to cooperate with the school, so again it [the employment office] will be a go-between. [...] So far we have always somehow managed to recruit people, so we were not simply forced to use those options... "

(a mechanical engineering firm, medium-size)

"... And regarding educational and training programs offered by the employment office, the majority of them are somehow not applicable and suitable for us... They offer computer courses, but we have them here internally. They offer welding courses, but we're recruiting mostly welders who have already completed the course. They offer accounting courses, but we recruit a person who knows it already. So for us ... we pass each other in this. "

(a mechanical engineering firm, large)

"We do not cooperate with the employment office, we have different ideas. We are looking for active people; those registered at the employment office are not in most cases such people. The way of cooperation with schools seems to be more efficient."

(an IT firm, medium-size)

The last of the quotes above also points to another structural limit of the type of cooperation under discussion – the discrepancy between the employers' demand for workforce and the labour supply (jobseekers registered at employment offices). It is not just about qualification, skills or capabilities but also about other characteristics of potential employees, such as the human and social capital, motivation, qualities of jobseekers, willingness to accept certain working conditions, etc. Thus, the success of cooperation with an employment office while recruiting new employees (as the problem most frequently solved in cooperation with the employment office, see Table 3) depends on the nature of the potential workplace and on the structure of jobseekers registered at a respective employment office. Especially while looking for more skilled personnel (particularly in the IT sector), employers consider cooperation with employment offices utterly unnecessary due to their experience with (or perhaps stereotypes about) the quality of registered jobseekers. Therefore, they prefer using other methods while recruiting (advertising, cooperation with schools, private recruitment agencies, recruitment through current staff, etc.).

Limits of an institutional and legislative nature are partly related to the above described structural limits to cooperation. Among them are not only legal standards but also the internal rules of public employment services which, according to employers, complicate their cooperation with the employment offices.

As stated above, one of the legal obligations for employers is to report vacancies to the employment office. Many employers consider it as unnecessary, inefficient, or even problematic (see the quotation below).

"We are obliged by law to tell them [= staffs of the employment office]. Sometimes they put it out somewhere. Occasionally, somebody from them [=a jobseeker registered at the employment office] appears at a job competition, but 90 % of people go straight to ask for signing the paper that we have not employed them. I find it as a very unproductive system."

(an IT firm, medium large)

At the same time, some entrepreneurs see the problem more generally – as unsuitable settings of employment policy (support in unemployment) as well as social policy generally (various social benefits) which negatively affect the motivation of the unemployed to work. Motivation is seen as a personal trait of a jobseeker but it is also strongly determined by settings of the institutional and

legal framework within which an unemployed worker decides on his life strategies. This might complicate cooperation of employers with the employment offices just because when reporting a vacancy (as it is a legal obligation) they become a possible place for jobseekers to get the “stamp” demonstrating they have been actively seeking a job, which is a precondition for receiving unemployment support.

"I'm afraid it's a bit difficult because the man gets a stamp and the next 2 months he receives the support and it may often happen, especially in the case of those – not our professions – but shop assistants and the like, that thanks to the support his income is higher than if he worked. So these people are going for the stamp intentionally, to prolong the time when they don't need to go to work because they have got more money while unemployed."

(an IT firm, medium large)

Employers also highlight the problem of internal rules and different working methods at different employment offices; in other words, there is often a lack of clear and uniform guidelines for functioning of the employment offices as well as for work of their staffs – for illustration see the following quotations:

"... The methods, or I do not know how to call it, ... that these people working at employment offices should know what they can and what they cannot do. I encounter this very often... They say: Yeah well, they [ministry officers] have posted it on the internet but we had no guidelines, we do not know what ..."

(a mechanical engineering firm, large)

"There is no single methodology, every employment office works differently and does it differently ..."

(an IT firm, medium large)

Such non-uniform working methods complicate the way some employers view cooperation, especially when an employer has to cooperate with more than one employment office, and also when working together with different departments of a single employment office. Employers expect employment officers to be well informed and willing to provide employers with relevant information (see also below).

Another significant problem perceived by some employers is in the classification of vacancies which are offered by an employment office, or in the categorization of jobseekers by employment officers which is inappropriate with regard to the needs of employers. It is treated as an internal standard of employment offices, which limits effective cooperation between employers and the offices – as demonstrated by the following excerpt from the interview:

"Our names of those positions do not correspond with how they [=employment officers] have them, as they index them within some of their statistics, or any of their names for those positions ... and then completely different types of people from who we would actually need come from the employment office..."

(a mechanical engineering firm, large)

The question remains – to what extent is this inappropriate categorization of jobseekers and subsequently unsuitable pre-selection of job candidates performed by the employment offices caused by poor methodology or internal rules of advisory and mediation services at the employment offices, and to what extent is it a fault of employment officers. This question will be discussed in the following section on project limits of cooperation between employers and employment offices.

7.2 Project Limits

Apart from the poor methodology or unsuitable internal rules at the employment office as discussed above, incompetent pre-selection of jobseekers for specific job vacancies advertised by an employer which is carried out by the employment office can be considered either as ambiguous strategy of different partners or as a communication error between the employment office and the employer (both discussed below). There is no explicit specification of what employers can expect from the employment office, and this often leads to frustration due to unfulfilled expectations.

Employers expect that if they report a vacancy to the employment office (as they are legally obliged to do) and specify their requirements for potential applicants, the personnel of the employment office will try to select a suitable candidate for this position and send this selected candidate to the employer for an interview (a job competition). However, experience shows that the employment offices' personnel do not carry out a *targeted pre-selection of jobseekers* (although according to § 15 of the Employment Act, No. 435/2004, the advisory services for employers provided by the employment offices in the Czech Republic should focus on selection of appropriate workers by analysing qualifications and personal capacities of registered jobseekers) and they "try" to send differently skilled and qualified candidates (in some cases completely failing to meet the advertised requirements) for the reported vacancies. This undermines employers' trust in the possibilities of cooperation with public employment services, as documented by the following quotations from the interviews:

"The employment office got exactly what they should send. A few dozen came to us for the stamp proving they were here. That was their sole objective. The employment office is in this case totally dysfunctional. The

employment office sent us people who did not meet any of the requirements. We wanted, for example, an advanced designer and they sent us a cleaner. She had us give her the stamp that she was here for an advanced designer job and she was gone."

(an IT firm, medium large)

"We always specified some requirements, I completed a lot of papers and the result was that there was a queue of people here who wanted the stamp on their papers, but no one wanted to work so then we have gradually dissolved this cooperation..."

(a mechanical engineering firm, large)

It is obvious that employers expect the employment office to function more as a recruitment agency to which they assign their exact requirements regarding the workforce they are looking for, and it would send them the suitable candidates from which they would select the most suitable one. Employers perceive the malfunction of the current "cooperation" model in:

- a) an inappropriate internal organisation of employment offices;
- b) the lack of specialized diagnosis of jobseekers' skills and personal qualities;
- c) the fact that employment officers who carry out the pre-selection of jobseekers do not have sufficient knowledge about requirements for reported vacancies.

"[Employment offices] do not do anything other than recruitment agencies, but they do it differently. It is either because they do not manage... – They do not manage to pay attention to the individual. They do not manage to match those vacancies to the right people. They do not have much time to assess what a person would be suitable for. Or the man cannot even assess himself. – One day we went round to several recruitment agencies and we talked about what they do and what we do and how we would like to have it. I cannot imagine going to the employment office like this and there telling them what our requirements are, what we want. – [And have you tried it?] – No. [...] I do not know, we haven't tried it. We haven't even thought about going to the employment office and telling them we are such and such firm. If every firm announcing a job vacancy went there, they might be overwhelmed."

(an IT firm, medium large)

In this context, employers (especially in the IT sector) point out an interesting issue: it happens that even when the applicant is registered at the employment office, he or she does not come to a job competition thanks to the recommendation from the employment office but through a recruitment agency, which made a specific pre-selection for the employer, or thanks to an advertisement published

elsewhere. Thus, employment offices seem to fail when matching appropriate jobseekers to vacancies. Here it should be remembered that the *appropriate matching process* is one of the most important services which employers expect from the employment offices and it is also an important aspect for development of closer cooperation between employers and employment offices, as might be shown for instance on the Swedish example (Klimplová, 2007). Since 2006, the Swedish active labour market policy and its measures have been focusing more and more on the employers. Swedish employment offices primarily endeavour to establish effective communication and cooperation opportunities with employers. The priorities are:

- a) *to allow an open and broader space for contact with employers*, i.e. to provide employers with information on employment office services (using all opportunities and contacts to pass on information on services provided by the employment offices, especially in those sectors which lack workers), to take into consideration employers' priorities and possibilities (e.g. time possibilities), etc.
- b) *to obtain the best possible knowledge about the vacancies as well as about professional and personal qualities of jobseekers* – the better knowledge of the job vacancy (it means good knowledge of specific demand on workforce required by a particular employer) and of possible candidates to fill in the vacancy, the more successful “matching” process; and the more successful matching process, the less complaints from employers about inappropriate pre-selection, and the larger interest of employers to cooperate further with the employment office,
- c) *to target contacts with employers on employment policy objectives*,⁹ i.e. to obtain more vacancies or more places for practice,¹⁰ to be well informed about changing demands on the labour markets (important for decisions on appropriate ALMPs), etc. (Klimplová, 2007).

If employers become repeatedly (and in some cases once is enough) disappointed while cooperating or even simply contacting the employment office, this leads in most cases to reduction or even interruption of contacts and also to disruption of employers' reliance that cooperation with the employment office may be useful to them.

It is not only for this reason that communication is important for successful and efficient cooperation between private employers and public employment offices. As stated by Parsons (1999), the existence of a broker to facilitate negotiations of such cooperation is also significant.

Distrust towards the personnel of a particular employment office pertains to the other project limits. It is usually not that employers would negatively assess all employment office's staffs but they perceive cooperation better with some and more difficult and complicated with others.

Taking into account how important mutual trust is for developing and maintaining effective and successful cooperation, employers should perhaps be allowed to choose a “facilitator” (a broker) for their cooperation with an employment office, this is an employment officer whom they trust and are willing to cooperate with.

8 Conclusion: Preconditions for Closer Cooperation Between Employers and Employment Offices From Employers' Point of View

According to the interviewed employers, what changes would deepen and improve their cooperation with an employment office? The limits of cooperation presented above can be transformed into the preconditions for improving and deepening such cooperation. These preconditions might be generally grouped into three areas:

- a) *Improvement of internal organisation of the employment offices, especially in recruiting (mediation)*, which means public employment offices working as other (private) recruitment agencies, conducting an initial selection of suitable candidates for vacancies reported by employers. This requires a good knowledge of the vacancies' nature and employers' requirements as well as an accurate assessment of jobseekers' professional skills and personal characteristics, and based on that, an *efficient matching process*. Employment officers should not send jobseekers to employers with no purpose other than getting the “stamp”.
- b) *Clarification of the rules*, namely clear guidelines for all employment offices and their staff, clear categorization of vacancies as well as jobseekers.
- c) *Change in attitude of some employment offices' staffs towards employers*. The employer should be treated as a *client* whom the employment office seeks to accommodate. There should be an effort towards a *quasi-market approach* to cooperation, i.e. an endeavour to meet the client's wishes, rather than the professional model of cooperation (a theoretical construct how this should best be done). It is also about an individualized and differentiated approach to particular clients (employers), a non-bureaucratic approach which is based on mutual trust and equal (symmetric) relationship between these two partners. It is also possible to include here the appropriate methods of communication of employment offices' workers with employers.

Besides the changes presented above, a change of employment policy system (unemployment supports) as well as social policy (various social benefits) is requested by the surveyed employers, in order to “make work pay”: jobseekers must be motivated to accept a job; it must not be better for them to stay at home and receive unemployment benefits. By altering social and employment policy settings, one of the structural factors (barriers) which limits cooperation between

employers and the employment offices in the Czech Republic might be overcome to a certain extent.

In addition to the jobseekers' structure, situations where there is no interdependence between the employment offices and employers may be included among the structural barriers to public-private cooperation (i.e. factors which can hardly be affected by particular actors). These are situations when the employment office does not have anything to offer to some employers. In such cases, there is no base on which effective cooperation could be built.

The opportunities for and barriers to cooperation between employers and employment offices discussed above are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Opportunities for and barriers to cooperations between employers and employment offices from the employers' perspective

Opportunities	Barriers
Employment offices functioning as private recruitment agencies	Structure and characteristics of jobseekers
Attitude of employment offices' staff towards employers (individualization and differentiation of approaches)	Divergence of goals and lack of mutual interdependence between certain employers and employment offices
Better mutual awareness: - Gaining information on vacancies - Gaining information on cooperation possibilities	
Current legislative and institutional conditions and rules*	

Source: Own table based on research results of "Quality and work organisation in different sectors of the national economy of the Czech Republic" (2009).

*Current legislative and institutional conditions and rules are taken as objective barriers to cooperation. However, their changes (for instance, a change of rules on advisory and mediation services at employment offices, clarification of working methods that have an impact on cooperation with employers, a change of motivational setting of social benefits, etc.) may provide opportunities to enhance public-private cooperation.

Beyond the scope of this research, the question remains whether the identified opportunities for changes are applicable and feasible in practice. Can a public employment office in the Czech Republic work as a recruitment agency? Is it possible to reform the internal organisational structure and functioning of employment offices in order to implement an appropriate and effective matching process of jobseekers to the reported vacancies? Can employment officers deal with particular employers in different ways taking into consideration their specific needs? Answering these questions requires further investigation of the other key actor of the cross-sectoral cooperation under discussion, namely a survey of employment officers in the Czech Republic. However, it is necessary not only to examine the subjective perspective of employment officers, but also to perform an analysis of organisational structures and rules of Czech employment offices. Such

analysis would provide insight as to whether the changes presented here could be effectively implemented in the everyday practice of Czech employment offices.

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Notes

¹ *Partnership* can be defined as an allied, symmetrical relationship of actors who trust each other and whose “mutual feelings are very positive and who are not subject to situation changes; the partners share visions, ideas or long-term goals” (Novotná, 2009: 76). Therefore, a partnership is based on certain accordance of values and long-term interests. *Cooperation*, on the other hand, is a “purposive symmetrical relation which is situationally conditional; trust is based on the contractual relationship; the mutual feelings are positive and the actors [...] participate in common activities in order to achieve their goals” (Novotná, 2009: 76). Cooperation does not need to be based on common values and ideas, but may take a form of a purely instrumental relationship.

² A number of reforms in many countries are, however, still rather in the stage of political debates and the above presented perspective can be seen as the normative goal which European welfare states should be gradually approaching (cf. Scharpf, 2002).

³ Translation of the title into English: “*An Analysis of Employers’ Satisfaction with the Activity of the Employment Office*”

⁴ Translation of the title into English: “*Why Are Employers (Dis)Satisfied with the Activity of the Employment Office?*”.

⁵ We are aware of the limits of research results which are applicable only to the relations between the employment office and employers in the investigated district.

⁶ The project is aimed at employers who (as a result of the global financial crisis and economic recession) have had or will have to reduce production. Under the project, employers may obtain funds for the implementation of training courses for their employees who are at risk of negative consequences of organisational changes due to the crisis. Employees are given opportunities to participate in further education, improve their professional knowledge, skills and competence, and employers are given space for effective solutions of workforce situation of the company during the crisis. (MPSV, 2010)

⁷ Besides controlling utilization of financial means granted from the European Social Fund, employment offices in the Czech Republic also control a) employers’ abidance by the Employment Law No. 435/2004, b) employers’ utilization of means provided for ALMPs, c) employers’ abidance by the Law, no. No. 435/2004, on the protection of workers while insolvency of an employer (MPSV, 2009). These controlling functions may result in an unequal position of employers and the employment offices in the Czech Republic when the employment offices are in the role of inspectors and employers in the role of the inspected. This situation has partly improved by establishment of the State Labour Inspection Office (the Law No. 251/2005, on labour inspection) which has taken over controlling activities in the fields of health and safety at workplace and in labour relations (in accordance with the Labour Code, No. 262/2006).

⁸ Based on the qualitative research it is hard to determine relations between the characteristics of employers and their reasons for cooperation or non-cooperation with employment offices. However, it appears that employers in the IT sector have no common objectives with employment offices and therefore they do not see the need for cooperation with them in more cases than in mechanical engineering. This is mainly related to the nature of job positions and skill requirements on workforce in these sectors

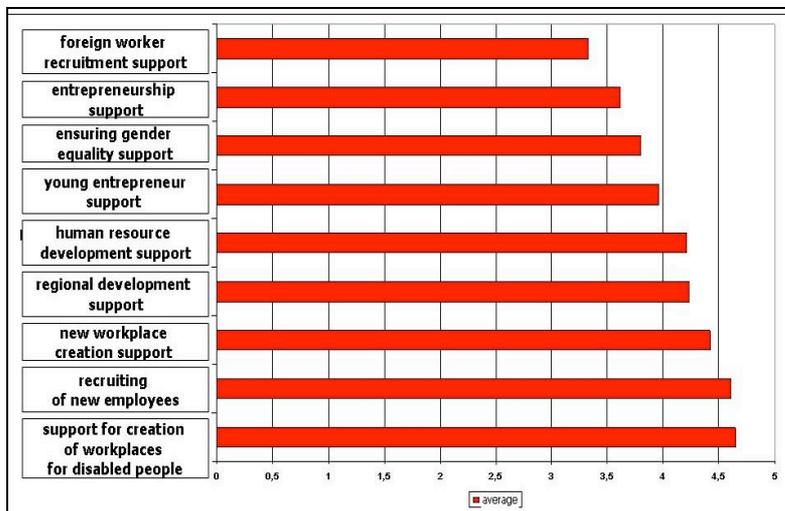
⁹ General objectives of Swedish employment policy are a well-functioning labour market as well as full employment and growing prosperity through goods and sustainable development. These general objectives have been quantified since the beginning of 2001 in order to clarify and specify goals for each worker of Swedish public employment services and also for ex-post evaluation of results. For the year 2006, the Swedish public employment service authority established the following objectives: 1) The number of newly registered unemployed men and women who find employment within 90 days after their registration at the employment office will increase compared to 2005. 2) The proportion of men and women who within 90 days after completion of the program "anställningsstöd" (wage subsidies amounting to 50 % for 6 months for those who were unemployed more than a year) find employment will be a minimum of 65 %. 3) Percentage of men and women who within 90 days after completion of a training course find employment will be at least 70 %. 4) The percentage of persons with disabilities who get (subsidized or non-subsidized) employment will increase in comparison to 2005. 5) The proportion of men and women who are partly unemployed for more than 12 months will decrease compared to 2005. 6) Proportion of long-term (more than 100 days) unemployed young people (18-24 years) will decline compared to 2005. (Klimpová, 2007)

¹⁰ The project *Jobbjakten* (translated as "job hunting") was exactly aimed at getting better knowledge about vacancies, as well as searching for them and for training. Within this project, staff of the selected Swedish employment offices went out in the "field" – they visited employers (focusing on small and medium enterprises) unannounced, and during a short, approximately 15-20-minute long visit, they endeavoured to learn about the employer's needs regarding workforce, to present opportunities for cooperation between the employer and the employment office (supply of workers, wage subsidies, training or retraining paid by the employment office, etc.) and to make a contact for possible future cooperation. After this first short visit, the employers are contacted every 6 months (see details in Klimpová, 2007).

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Appendix**Chart 1: Evaluation of significance of services offered by employment offices in the Czech Republic (1 = unimportant, 7 = very important)**

Source: Research "Analýza spokojenosti zaměstnavatelů s činností úřadu práce" (Winkler, Klimplova & Vrbková, 2007)