
PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYERS IN ROMANIA OF THE GRADUATES FROM THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES – CASE STUDY

Stăiculescu Camelia¹, Lăcătuș Maria Liana² and Todea Steluța³

^{1) 2) 3)} Bucharest University of Economic Studies

E-mail: camelia.staiculescu@dppd.ase.ro ; E-mail: maria.lacatus@dppd.ase.ro ;

E-mail: steluta.todea90@yahoo.com

Abstract

In the context of the present dynamics of the labor market and of the continuously changing of economic reality, the universities must adapt and make their educational programs more flexible so that their main products, the graduates, should be employed appropriately and be socially useful. The paper represents an analysis of Romanian employers' perception regarding the quality of education received by students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. The research presented in the paper was conducted on 80 employers in Romania.

The results of the research can lay the foundation for the development of the institutional capacity and the quality improvement of the educational offer of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies in terms of adapting, structuring, and reconciliation of the university educational programs to the requirements of the labor market.

Keywords

Employers, insertion, employability, labor market, transversal and professional competences

JEL Classification:

J24

Introduction

For universities, the labor market represents a reference and, in the same time, an indicator of quality, usefulness and necessity of educational programs they are offering. The labor market is the place which validates the educational activity both from the perspective of the contents of the study programs suggested to various categories of persons interested to learn and to acquire certain competences that are useful in life and in the efforts for one's own professional training of those enrolled for various study programs, and from the perspective of adaptation to the short-term and long-term economic and social realities.

More than other higher education institutions, a university of economics and business, such as Bucharest University of Economic Studies, whose declared mission is to develop professional competences at a high level of performance that are necessary for acquiring knowledge and taking action in the economic and administrative fields, will prove its force by the value of its graduates and their contribution to the functioning and development of the economy.

University graduates in general and especially the graduates of the economic universities can take advantage of the opportunities triggered by the nowadays in the labor market. Whereas for more than 20 years the market has been able to absorb nearly all the economic training graduates, we find that there is a **shortage of labor force** at present. Employers are complaining due to the lack of labor force, they talk about the problems they encounter when hiring personnel and they even show interest in importing labor force.

For the Romanian market, these are new elements that bring along major changes for the benefit of present/ future employees: **a wide and diverse offer of jobs** and therefore, **better employment conditions**. At the level of the entire country of Romania, there is an increase of the number of jobs in fields such as financial, insurance, real estate services and business services (Capital, 2017). As expected in the conditions of shortage of labor force, one anticipates an increase of salaries and benefits offered by employers. The employers reconsider their requirements when hiring people – they no longer expect to hire persons with work experience, but merely with basic knowledge in the field and, very important, with learning abilities. They are willing to **offer training for their employees** so that they could develop the competences needed for the job (Research Romania, 2017).

In the conditions of the shortage of specialists, the employers compete with each other for highly educated employees. They aim at hiring young people with good and very good school results, great communication skills in foreign languages, extracurricular activities, talent, initiative, dynamics, flexibility, and adaptation skills. The focus is placed more and more on talent, initiative, and capacity to take over responsibilities, risks and entrepreneurship/ intrapreneurship skills, qualities which employers find less and less in the young employees, although they are intellectually very competent (Mihalcea, 2017).

Some major changes on the Romanian labor market appear also in terms of labor force. In contrast to previous periods when large numbers of people were interested in working abroad, at present their number has decreased and therefore the number of persons searching for professional achievement in Romania has increased (Capital, 2017). The economic development has created conditions for many young people to be able to obtain attractive benefits being employed in a company in the country that are comparable to the ones they would obtain abroad, without having to pay the costs of migration. Romania has become attractive also for various foreign citizens: persons with temporary right to work in UK, native British people, Swedish, German people for which Romania represents an alternative and an opportunity to become entrepreneur or to be employed in the subsidiaries of multinational companies. Romania has become attractive also for Serbian and Macedonian people who find familiar cultural attributes in the Romanian economic environment, but also for Asian citizens who are drawn by the possibility to earn more than in their native country or by the perspective of having a job in another European country.

The labor market also brings along changes at the level of the employment relationships, specifically in the employment agreements. Traditionally for most employees, finding a job means being employed with a permanent employment agreement and the introduction and extension of the fixed-term employment agreements have not significantly changed that, at any rate not at the level of mentality of most employees or persons in search of a job. The challenges and opportunities that exist at present on the labor market trigger the introduction of a new type of employment agreement – the project employment. This is actually a fixed-term employment agreement (it lasts as long as the project lasts), which represents employment “on demand”, to implement specific projects or to obtain specific results. (Colorful.hr, 2017). The employment for a project has spread more and more in the conditions of the increased economic dynamics, becoming the predominant type of employment agreement in the “sharing” type economy or „gig economy”. This is also encountered on the Romanian market and it is expected to be used more and more, as a consequence of hiring an increasing number of persons in the multinational corporations or

outsourcing system. A typical example of gig work is the one of Uber services, which was very successful in the transportation field and which is relatively known in Romania. Gig work means performing services that the client needs, when he/ she needs it and as long as he/she needs it, using the performer's own resources (for example, in the case of Uber services, these are the cars) which are in this way shared with the ones needing them. Requiring and obtaining these services in real time is done by using technology means. Such new models of employment represent an alternative to the traditional business and employment models, being perceived by some of the employees and employers as a threat to the existing jobs and work places.

Problem statement

The information presented in this article is part of a greater study, which was carried out in the project „*Graduates from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and the labor market*”, a project which was financed by the Ministry of National Education through the National Council for Higher Education Funding, within the Institutional Development Fund FDI 2017, field 8 – The correlation of educational offer to the demand on labor market, conducted by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE) through the Center for Counseling and Career Orientation, during the period 15th July– 15th December 2017.

The project aims at reaching generous objectives – analyzing the insertion of the graduates from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies on the labor market and their career as well as the correlation of curriculums and of competences obtained by the university graduates to the requirements of the social – economic environment and of the labor market. Under the assumption that universities should be open to partnerships in order to offer adapted services both to students and to the labor market, the research efforts have tried to identify, among other research objectives, the opinion of employers on the quality of ASE graduates, as a mechanism of measurement and evaluation of the university educational performances. The data that are collected contribute to the promotion of an academic culture of quality, to the performance of some rigorous analyses with a view to permanently adjust the educational offer to the specificity and requirements of the labor market.

Problem statement

The main hypothesis of the research aims at proving that *there is a direct relation between the competences obtained by the ASE graduates and their social –professional insertion* as it is perceived by the employers.

Purpose of a study

A part of the research conducted among employers aimed at identifying the employer's perception on the competences of ASE students and graduates, having the following guidelines as landmarks:

- „*Transition from school to work*”, defined as the period between the end of studies and finding a stable full-time job (OECD, 1996);
- *Social – professional integration* as an adaptation process of a person to the professional environment, to the work and behavior requirements of the organization he/ she works for, of suitability of his/ her personality to the work group;
- *Social – professional insertion*, as professional socialization process in various stages during which the organization is guiding its new employees in their profession: recruiting new members of personnel, training them in a university institution and assigning a job at the end of the training program;

- *Employability*, being the capacity of a person to find a job, to keep it and to find a new job, if needed (personal dynamics)/ the capacity of a person to develop his/ her potential in a viable position/ job.

Research methods

In order to analyze the employers' opinions on the quality of ASE students/ graduates, we have conducted *an empiric sociological research*. This enables the direct observation of the reality under study by applying certain specific methods and techniques to collect information (in our case – the questionnaire-based survey), analyzed, and interpreted them to obtain information on the phenomenon under investigation.

The questionnaire-based survey was selected as research method because it allows the systematic collection of information on the insertion of ASE students/ graduates on the labor market, and the data that are obtained this way enabled interpretation of their significance. The survey was conducted among employers in the database of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (employers who are providing opportunities for pre-service training of students, ASE partners, representatives in the Advisory Boards within ASE faculties).

The type of sampling that is used:

- *Non-probability sampling*, which means using previous information or information from experts for the coordination of the selection of typical or representative samples for a particular issue under study;
- *Group sampling*, where the population that needs to be investigated is made of several heterogeneous groups. Thus the groups are separate sampling units.

The group of responding employers included 80 respondents from the 435 who were found in the ASE database having contact information (18,39% response rate). It is meaningful to mention the respondents' connection to this database because it includes the most significant employers of the ASE graduates from the public/ private entities.

The instrument that was used was the *Questionnaire to assess the employers' opinion on the quality of graduates and of the study programs offered by ASE Bucharest*, which is a questionnaire with 9 questions (8 closed-end questions and 1 open-ended question);

The questionnaire included questions with pre-coded answers, aiming at supplying information of the topics addressed, but also open multiple choices questions and factual questions (regarding age, level of education, year of graduation, type of higher institution graduated, position within the higher institution graduated etc.).

The way in which the questionnaire was applied: self-administration, on-line. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail to all employers in the ASE database, by using a Google drive form which allowed creation of an electronic database.

The period when the questionnaires were applied: August – September 2017.

Findings

The employers assessed to what extent the graduates from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies possessed the following qualities:

- Theoretical training (Figure 1);
- Specialization in the economic field (Figure 2);
- Professional background in the economic field (Figure 3);
- They are open to learning experiences, they have proactive attitudes towards the professional activity (Figure 4);
- They comply with the culture of the companies during internships (Figure 5).

The majority of employers, that is 60% of the respondents, expressed opinion that ASE graduates have a good theoretical training.

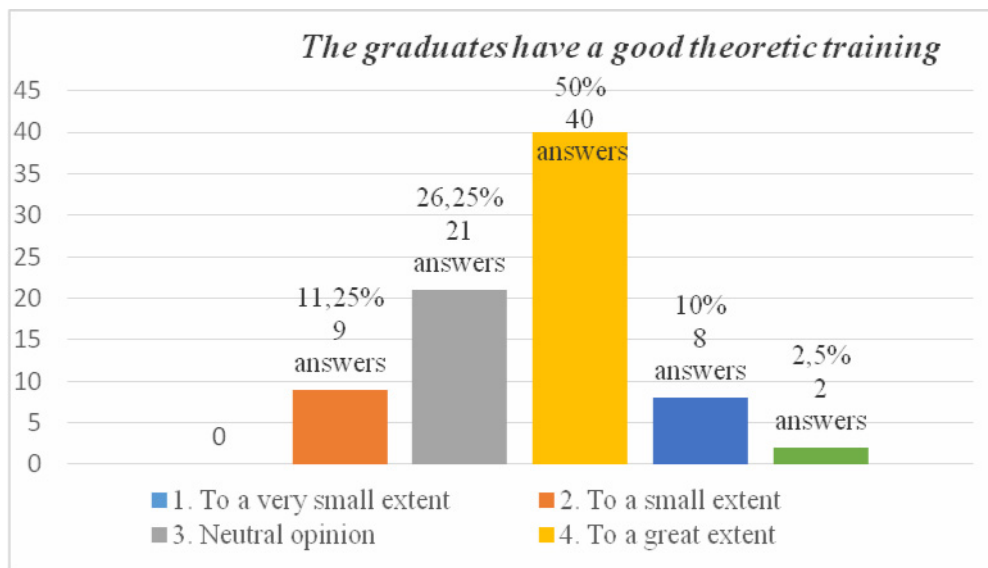


Fig. no. 1. Employers' opinions on the theoretical training of ASE graduates

Concerning the specialization of the graduates in the high-interest economic fields on the labor market, the opinions are polarized. Less than half of the respondents (45%) consider that the ASE graduates are specialized to a great and very large extent, approximately one quarter (23,75%) say that they are specialized to a small and very small extent and about 30% have neutral opinions. We believe that this aspect should give the university something to chew on from three perspectives: the improvement of the educational offer, the development of partnerships that should be more active with the organizations from the social – economic environment in order to ensure a more relevant education as compared to the labor market and the improvement of university's communication with the external environment. For example, according to the information ASE possesses, most of the ASE graduates are employed in the field in which they have their specialization (most of the graduates - 48,71%, work in the field of their studies or related to it - 35,39%).

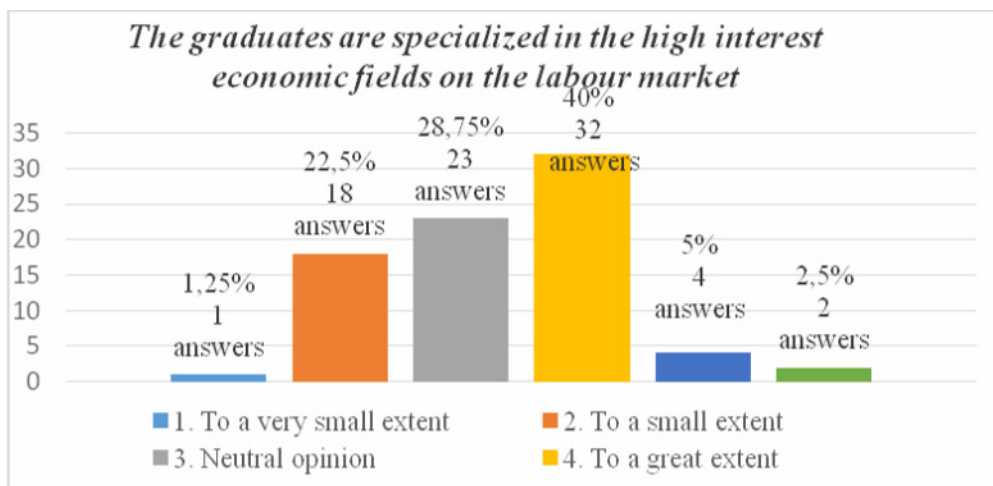


Fig. no. 2. Employers' opinions on the specialization of ASE graduates in the high-interest economic fields on the labour market

The employers considered that the pre-service training of ASE graduates in the field is rather low, only 11,25% consider that they are specialized to a very large and great extent, whereas 60,5% of the respondents declare that ASE graduates have little and very little practical experience. This shows that the university must provide a better pre-service training of students, offer professional internships, increase the proportion of professional-oriented activities in the didactic activities, reinforce the partnerships with the employers etc.

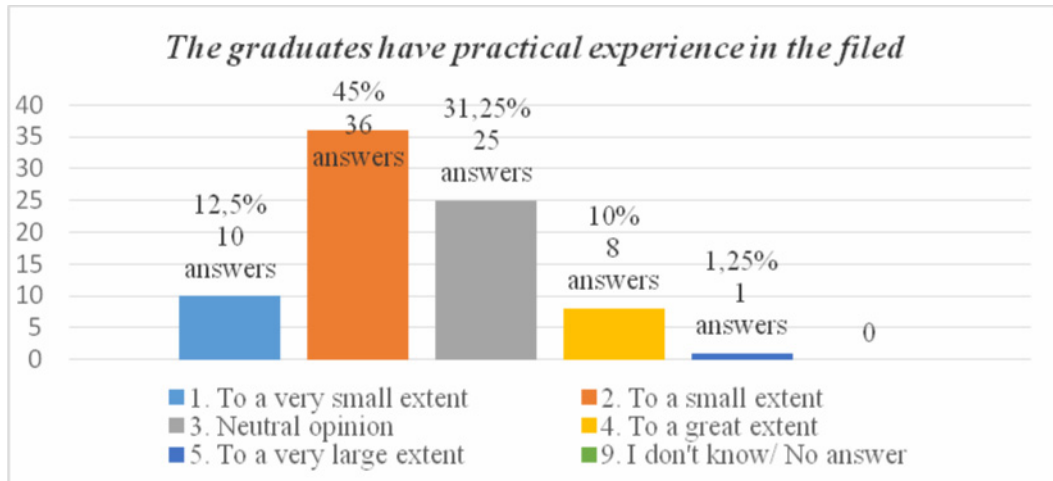


Fig. no. 3. Employers' opinions on the practical experience of ASE graduates

An encouraging aspect is the one that 75% of the respondent employers consider that the ASE students and graduates are open to learning experience to a great and very large extent and they have proactive attitudes towards professional activities.

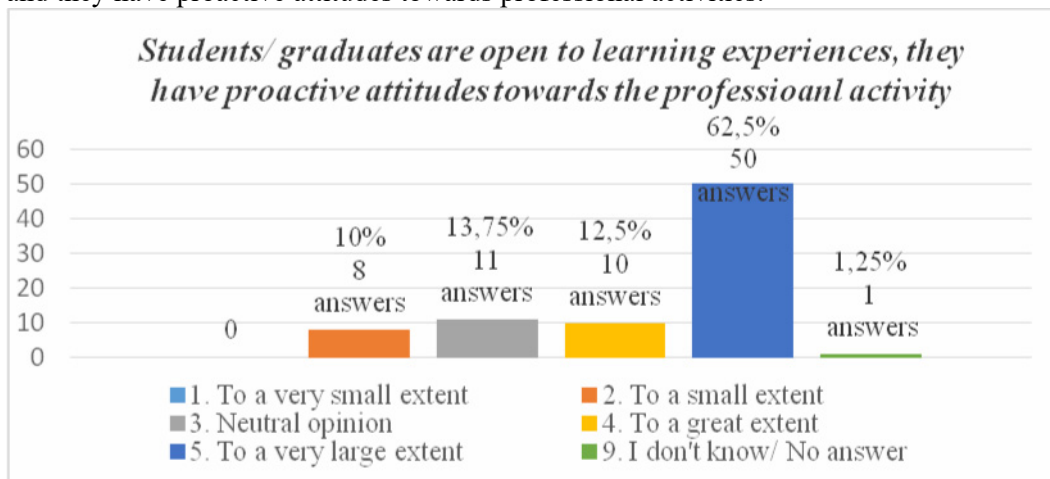


Fig. no. 4. Employers' opinions on the ASE students/ graduates' attitude towards learning and professional activity

One aspect of the research aimed at identifying the way in which students' behavior is assessed by the future employers, by reference to certain elements of organizational culture. The collected information shows that they do comply with the culture of the organizations they have their internships, they comply with the working hours and the respective regulations and they are interested to find out information on the companies. These behaviors are important for a good insertion on the labor market and they represent essential elements in the young people's transition from school to the active professional life.

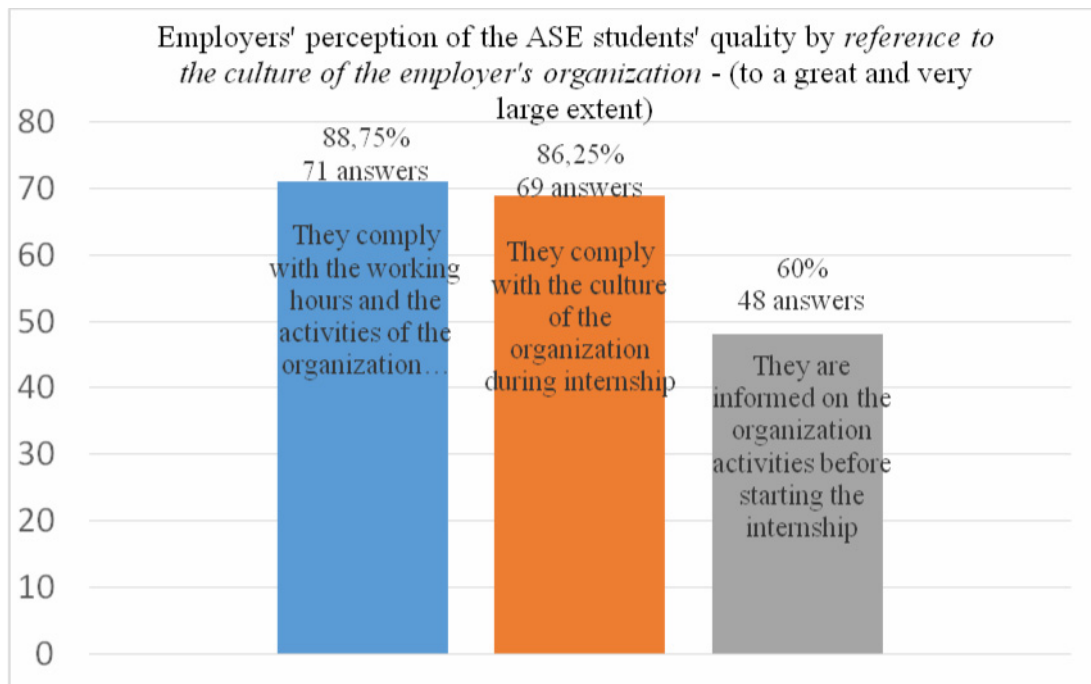


Fig. no.5. Employers' opinions on students' compliance with the culture of the organizations where they have their internships

Conclusions

The analysis of the answers proves that, although the economic knowledge of graduates is necessary, only 60% of the respondents consider that they possess it in a great and very large extent, only 45% are specialized in a great and very large extent in the field of their specialization and only 10% of the respondents consider that they have practical experience. However, this is compensated by the student's/ graduates' attitude. A percentage of 83% of the respondents consider that they are open to learning experiences, they comply with the regulations of the organizations which employ them or where they have their internships, they search for information on these organizations and comply with the organizational culture.

Among other aspects appreciated by the respondents in their interactions with the ASE students/ graduates, we mention: patience, curiosity and innovation, motivation, the competence to use specific IT programs, speaking foreign languages other than English, commitment to the activities they perform and to their professional evolution;

However, some of the respondents declared that certain students/ graduates do not know what field they want to work in, they do not know how to introduce themselves in writing or orally, they cannot apply the theory, are afraid to express themselves and cannot work in a team.

Other respondents stated that the expectations of the graduates are very high from the very beginning – they avoid the “small” details, of organizing documents, of multiplying/ editing documents, expecting to achieve spectacular things right from the start, thinking that they are prepared for it. The problem of the company appears the moment when a documentation prepared in such a way does not meet the basic requirements of the company because the basic steps have been skipped.

We consider that the aspects mentioned in the study are extremely important for the university. Even if one finds that there is compatibility between the competences acquired by the ASE graduates and their social – professional insertion, that their professional and personal qualities are appreciated, the university must organize continuous activities to improve the educational offers, to adapt them to the employers' requirements, to conduct partnership programs together with them.

References

- Capital, 2017. *Ce aduce anul 2017 pentru piața muncii din România?*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.capital.ro/ce-duce-anul-2017-pentru-piata-muncii-din-romania.html>> [Accessed 27 November 2017].
- Colorful.hr., 2017. *Trenduri în HR în 2017. Cum transformă tehnologia piața muncii*, [online] Available at: <<https://hrp.ro/trenduri-in-hr-in-2017-cum-transforma-tehnologia-piata-muncii/>>, [Accessed 27 November 2017].
- Colorful.hr., 2017. *Munca la comanda. Ce este “gig economy” si cum transforma modelul traditional de lucru: “de la 9 la 5” la “oricand este nevoie”*, [online] Available at: <<https://hrp.ro/munca-la-comanda-ce-este-gig-economy-si-cum-transforma-modelul-traditional-de-lucru-de-la-9-la-5-la-oricand-este-nevoie/>>, [Accessed 14 December 2017].
- Dobre, T., 2016. *Cum ar putea fi afectată piața muncii din România de prognozată criză financiară*, [online] Available at: <<https://legestart.ro/analiza-cum-ar-putea-fi-afectata-piata-muncii-din-romania-de-prognozata-criza-financiara/>>, [Accessed 27 November 2017].
- Hipo.ro, 2017. *Tendențe pe piața muncii*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.hipo.ro/locuri-de-munca/vizualizareArticol/22/Tendinte-pe-piata-muncii>>, [Accessed 17 November 2017].
- Mihalcea, E., 2017. *Piața muncii în 2017: Joburi noi, atitudini noi față de angajați?*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.cariereonline.ro/actual/piata-muncii-2017-joburi-noi-atitudini-noi-fata-de-angajati>>, [Accessed 27 November 2017].
- Raportul anual al rectorului Academiei de Studii Economice din București privind starea universității, [online] Available at: <http://www.ase.ro/2013_files/despre_ase/legislatie/strategia14-20/RAPORTUL%20RECTORULUI%202016.pdf>, [Accessed 20 March 2018].
- Research Romania Team, 2017. *Cum va fi piața muncii în 2017 și care sunt domeniile în care se vor face angajări*, [online] Available at: <<http://www.researchromania.ro/2017/03/studiu-cum-va-fi-piata-muncii-2017-si-care-sunt-domeniile-care-se-vor-face-angajari/>>, [Accessed 27 November 2017].
- Smart Tree, 2017. *Un brand de angajator ca la carte, cheia pentru a atrage și păstra cei mai buni specialiști*, [online] Available at: <<http://www.smarttree.com/un-brand-de-angajator-ca-la-carte-cheia-pentru-a-atrage-si-pastra-cei-mai-buni-specialisti/>>, [Accessed 14 December 2017].