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The Dual-System: More than just a Backup Plan
A study on the apprenticeship system in the region of Vorarlberg

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Abstract

The presented exploratory research explores the population's perceived image of the apprenticeship system in the region of Vorarlberg along with the resulting challenges. For this purpose, five experts from major apprenticeship training companies, as well as 250 adolescents aged between 13- and 19-years were interviewed and surveyed. The analysis shows that the apprenticeship system faces a rather negative perception among the population and indicates an enormous potential for innovation in the current communication and ongoing initiatives. Both groups, the companies, and the adolescents, who can be defined as the potential future employees, highlight the fact that change is inevitable.

Keywords: Dual-System, Youth Unemployment, Vorarlberg, Specialized Work, Vocational Training, Apprenticeships, Employer Branding

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Introduction

Young people between eighteen and twenty-five are generally considered a high-risk demographic group when it comes to unemployment (Axelrad, Malul, and Luski 2018). In many cases, young individuals have not yet a clear vision of what kind of professional career would suit their expectations, ambitions, and preferences best. Compared to the middle-aged population, young adults are more likely to shift between employment, training, and unemployment, often leading to temporary work relationships (Caliendo and Schmidl, 2016). Much higher degrees of switching or turnover rates increase the risk of creating sunk costs from investing in young talent for companies and organizations, resulting in potential future employers' hesitant position towards young market entrants (International Labor Organization, 2020).

In addition to that, fresh high-school graduates, for the most part, show a deficient level of relevant experience for the job market (Hughes and Borbély-Pecze 2012). Many of those who finish their educational journey can provide minimal or no record of job-specific skills and training. The lack of relevant abilities often has a deterrent effect on companies, as the needed investment in vocational training is much higher than for individuals who are already in the labor market (Pastore, 2018).

The situation is further aggravated for young adults, as school leavers and people who have freshly entered the market are also the first ones impacted by market crises. The 2008 financial crisis highlighted that specifically young people, who are already in the labor market, are, in general, the ones who were made redundant first because of temporary employment contracts (Tanveer Choudhry, Marelli, and Signorelli, 2012).

Lasting adverse effects on young adolescents who experience time out of the labor market are noticed by reduced employment prospects and lower future income, and the substantially lower self-esteem of young men and women. Experts also consider early-stage unemployment a potential trigger for mental illnesses on top of higher smoking likelihood and lower satisfaction with life (Jacobsen, 2015). Psychological damages created through unemployment increase proportional by the time an individual spends out of the labor market and manifest primarily in young people (Goldsmith, Veum and Darity, 1997), impacting the future workforce of nations heavily and increase the demand for public services.

However, youth unemployment is the cause of dramatic personal consequences; it also directly affects the nations' economic situation. A few indicators of such an economic influence of the youth unemployment rate on the nation and its services are reduced overall productivity, declined GDP, lowered revenues of income tax, loss of skilled human capital, and limited innovation capacity (Putun, Karatas, and Akyildiz, 2017).

Therefore, nations worldwide have initiated different practices and concepts to counteract the early-stage unemployment of future generations. While some were on the right track to develop suitable solutions, COVID-19 has ripped an enormous hole into the world economy, leading to a postponement of the deeply needed policy changes. In some member states of the European Union, youth unemployment has risen during the pandemic to a historic high of nearly 30% and more. For instance, Portugal recorded an 18.3% unemployment rate at the end of 2019, which had risen back to 27.40 percent in June 2020 (EUROSTAT, 2020).

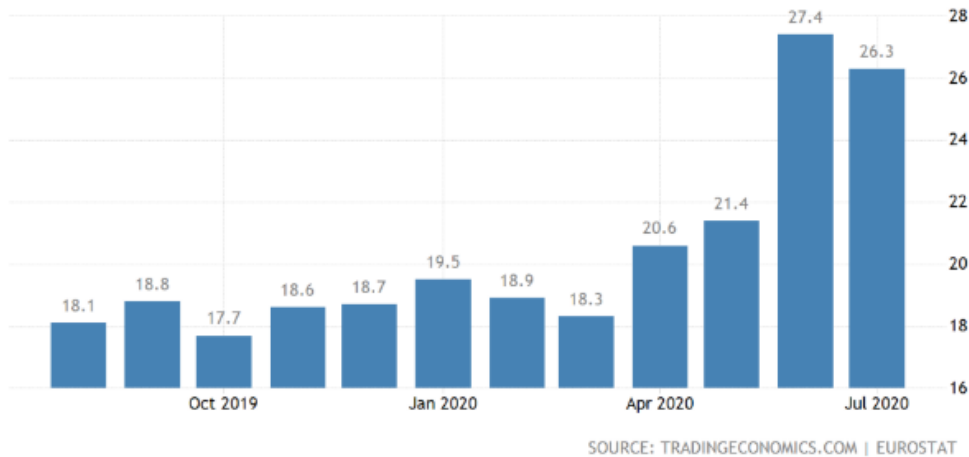


Table 1: Youth Unemployment Rate: Portugal (EUROSTAT, 2020)

While all member states of the European Union are struggling to win the overhand over the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the prior existing causations of youth unemployment, two countries were able to stabilize a low youth unemployment rate for more than a decade. Austria and Germany have been continuously under the top five countries with the lowest rate for over ten years (Exception: Austria ranked 6th in 2018). Between 2010 and 2015, both countries even were in an exclusive competition against each other for the 1st rank (Leythienne, 2020). While the EU average for youth unemployment was at 16.8 percent, Austria could reduce its rate in 2019 by 1.5 percent to 8.5 percent. The country's lowest value scored in the last ten years (Austrian Chamber of Commerce, 2020).

In comparison to other European countries, Austria disposes of comparatively good grades in all of the examined measures concerning youth unemployment and educational attainment. One of the main reasons for this sustainable performance in integrating young people into the workforce lies within the system of vocational education and training (VET), which both countries have implemented (Dornmayer, 2016). The extraordinarily high proportion of professional training possibilities in the Austrian educational system that is available right after

compulsory schooling, which ends at the age of fifteen, allows the country to have a very smooth transition of its adolescents into the working force (Nowak and Dornmayer, 2019).

Just like its border neighbors, Germany and Switzerland, Austria has implemented the Dual Learning System. The term has been used since 1964 to describe the mutual relationship between school and in-company training as a joint educational unit and has become one of the if not the most critical tools of the country to fight youth-unemployment (Arnold, Gonon and Müller, 1982). Currently, Austria has more than 109.000 persons in the dual training system. 7.238 of those are located in Vorarlberg, making it, proportionally, the most vital region of Austria in terms of dual training (WKO Austria. 2020).

The second smallest province of Austria has been known as a forerunner in the training and development of highly skilled specialists for years, and with the set goal of the regional government to become the "Hot-spot of vocational training in Europe", it does not aim low for the future (Statistik Austria, 2020) (WKO Vorarlberg, 2019). At the beginning of 2020, 168 different apprenticeship programs in 25 different categories ranging from business services, healthcare, textile, tourism, environmental protection to IT, construction, and many more have been offered in Vorarlberg, setting perfect conditions to expand the leading position of specialized workers further (BIFO, 2019).

In recent years, there has been a noticeable, albeit slight, trend towards a decline in the number of apprentices (Nowak and Dornmayer, 2019). Therefore, this work aims towards understanding the underlying issues through a first exploratory study and consequently examines what challenges private and public organizations in Vorarlberg are confronted with and what possibilities arise from this.

To make the study comprehensible for readers who are not familiar with the Austrian system of apprenticeship, the first section briefly outlines the dual system. For that purpose, an introduction to the dual learning system will be provided; further, the province's situation will be examined from two perspectives. On the one hand, through qualitative interviews with HR and organizational development experts, and on the other hand, through a survey of young adults aged between 13 and 19 years.

The Dual-Learning System: A quick introduction to the Austrian System

Austria provides its youth with the possibility to choose between general or vocational education in the 8th grade (See Figure 1 in the Appendix), one year before compulsory schooling officially ends (Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research of Austria 2019). Approximately 40 percent of all 15-year-olds in Austria decide to pursue an apprenticeship at this stage (Nowak and Dornmayer, 2019).

However, since the decision to start an apprenticeship may already be made after completion of the 8th grade, but compulsory education is not yet completely fulfilled at this point, the Polytechnic School was introduced in 1962 (Kogelnik, 2017). It serves as a one-year preparation for the dual-education-system. The young adults continue to receive general training during this year and have the opportunity to prepare themselves for their future career choice. This shall ensure that the apprentice prospects receive the necessary information about the various training opportunities and enables them to already get in touch with their possible future employer. To do so, young talents have to choose a field of study that best suits their area of interest in which they will receive the vast majority of information during the orientation period in the Polytechnic School (Hackensöllner-Ali, 2017).

As a preparation for an apprenticeship, this structure seems conceptually sound, and offers many benefits for the prospects. However, it must also be stated that the Polytechnic School is under sharp critic for its relatively bad public reputation of being a drop-off pool for weaker pupils, making it not, or at least less, attractive as an option for highly talented kids. Only 0.8 percent of students from an Academic Secondary School switch into a Polytechnic School after graduating in the lower cycle. Consequently, the vast majority of students from a Polytechnic School is made up of the weaker percentile of students from general secondary schools (Kogelnik, 2017).

After graduating from the Polytechnic School, but also after completing compulsory education through another educational path, for example, another year in the higher cycle of an academic secondary school or a vocational school, young people, as well as adults, are qualified to start a dual education in Austria (WKO Oberösterreich, 2011).

In contrast to the full-time vocational schools, which are also offered in the countries educational system, the dual-training takes place simultaneously at two different learning environments; inside the respective company and the vocational college. The apprentice is an employee of his training organization and a student at the vocational college simultaneously. 80 percent of their education is delivered inside the company. The remaining 20 percent can be spent either in a block-format (depending on the respective industry) or year-round in a part-time vocational college (WKO Wien, 2018).

From a business point of view, apprenticeships are primarily seen as an investment in the future. Companies can thus not only rely on the reinforcement of young workers into the job market but also cover their future demand for highly qualified and skilled workers. The dual education,

however, is to be seen in itself as a system of free vocational training. This implies that apprentices do not have any obligation to stay in the training company after completing their training, which takes, on average, three years (Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs, 2018).

To ensure the consistent quality of training positions throughout Austria, all apprenticeships follow specific job descriptions. Therefore, training content is explicitly tailored to each occupation and follows the same curriculum throughout the country. This applies to training at the vocational college as well as in the company. Depending on the profession, the curricula are supplemented by training guides and other qualitative measures (IBW, 2019).

What makes the dual system unique in its form is the real-world-working situation, that the apprentice experiences during his training. Thus, the future skilled workers are not separated from the other company employees but are directly integrated into the daily business. The learned theory in the vocational college is directly applied in the company and takes place in proactive work. This has a positive effect on the company's overall productivity and acts as a motivator for adolescents. It furthermore ensures that the knowledge transfer between long-time employees and apprentices is optimally carried out. As a result, a very steep learning curve is established, which ensures that after completing the training, the apprentice has acquired the necessary skills to be a full-value specialist and directly take over qualified activities (Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs, 2018).

Companies that do not meet the requirements for training apprentices, can offer an apprenticeship position in a association. Besides, "supra-company training centers", sponsored by the federal government, are made available in order to be able to educate more new apprentices (Lackinger, 2020). To be considered a full-fledged skilled worker in Austria, an apprentice must

have completed the training with a positive final examination. Professional experts from the respective sectors carry out this exam. The examination may be taken at the earliest ten weeks before the end of the apprenticeship and six weeks before completion of the vocational school (Austrian Chamber of Labour, 2019).

The example of the office assistant works as a good illustration of the areas covered by the final assessment. The LAP ("Lehrabschlussprüfung" - final apprenticeship examination) comprises a theoretical and a practical element. In the theoretical section, skills from the areas of accounting, bookkeeping, commercial calculation, as well as economics, business organization, and administration, are tested. The practically oriented part of the exam is divided into three sub-areas (Chamber of Labor, 2004). In addition to the written and oral examination of the skills required in the office, communication, and organization, a possible business scenario is outlined, which the examinee must work out in written form and then subsequently present to the commission. In conclusion, the acquired abilities of the apprentice are examined in a technical discussion with industry experts. Provided that all areas are completed positively, the apprentice will be recognized and honored as a full-fledged skilled worker (Dornmayr, et al., 2014).

The theoretical and practical examination as the final test for apprentices is an essential part of the quality assurance chain in the training of skilled workers in Austria. In addition to the necessary skills for the respective profession, it ensures that the overall quality of the apprentice output in Austria remains at an extremely high level of quality.

All that Glitters is not Gold: Challenges for the future of apprenticeships in Vorarlberg

At last year's World Skills Championships, where a total of 1.400 participants from almost 70 nations competed against each other in their respective professions, Austria again emerged as the strongest nation in the European Union. Twelve medals (6x Gold, 5x Silber, 1x Bronze, 17x "Medallion for Excellence") could be brought home by the Austrian delegation (Marold, 2019). Nevertheless, even if Austria and especially Vorarlberg (2x Gold) consistently deliver strong results, one must not rest on one's laurels.

Even though the nation is still achieving remarkable results, the total number of apprentices has declined over the last ten years. 2019, for the first time in 10years, promises an increase in the numbers of apprentices. However, the hope that a possible break in the trend towards a lower influx in the dual-system is imminent is rather unlikely (Nowak and Dornmayer, 2019).

In order to detect future challenges that companies in the Vorarlberg region are facing in terms of the dual-system, qualitative expert interviews are used as a tool for assessing the current situation from the perspective of the businesses. The survey's main intention is to investigate the concerns of multiple companies in the region and verify which challenges are common to all of them so that prioritization for the recommendations is made possible.

Interview Method

To equip the interviews with the most significant possible depth, Rapley (2004) recommends avoiding questions that can be answered yes or no. This ensures that the interviewees speak openly about the topic and emphasize areas that are most important to them. For this reason,

semi-structured interviews, which are characterized by a guided but not strictly planned structure, are also recommended for this study. Consequently, the interviewer asks comprehensive questions and concretizes them, after having given enough space for the answer formulation, with follow-up questions (Rapley, 2004). Answers to the respective questions are provided in Appendix 2.

Interview Methodology

A total of 5 experts from the sectors trade (Expert 1), energy (Expert 2), production (Expert 3), construction (Expert 4), and transport (Expert 5) were interviewed. All interviewed persons are the prominent representatives in their companies for the training and acquisition of apprentices. Statements of the interviewees are published only in anonymized form. This implies that the participants' names and the represented companies are replaced by abbreviations (company expert 1-5). Representatives of large companies with an average of more than 100 apprentices were deliberately chosen to present a general picture of Vorarlberg's apprenticeship situation. In some cases, the company provided several experts simultaneously. This ensured that the interviewee(s) were able to provide detailed information not only about the acquisition processes of new apprentices but also about their training and retention in the company. All participating experts and delegations were directly involved in the training and recruitment of new apprentices. Every interview had a minimum duration of at least one hour and was held entirely in German and in-person.

Interview Results

Retention and Acquisition:

The retention rate of Vorarlberg companies from apprentices added to full-time skilled workers after completing the apprenticeship is still very high. The interviewed companies manage to keep 79% and are thus in the upper percentile ranks of the EU (Rudnicka, 2020). The expert interviews and the available data imply that the problem of binding apprentices to the training company in the long term represents a minor or, respectively, a non-current problem in the region.

However, it is becoming more challenging to recruit new apprentices for companies. All five interviewed companies were only able to record declining or consistent application numbers in recent years, which leads to the assumption that the situation is even more challenging for smaller enterprises (DerStandard, 2018).

Direct Competition to Schools:

From the perspective of the companies, there are various reasons for this development. The primary reasons cited for the negative trend in apprenticeship applications are the increasing diversification of schools and the social status of apprenticeships. While more and more students decide to stay in school, the social reputation of apprenticeships is declining (Köppl-Turyna, and Lorenz, 2016). At the same time, the experts surveyed point to the decreasing access restrictions for secondary schools as an enormous threat to the dual system. Expert 2, a former teacher, reports that: "*The requirements for future students are drastically reduced to fill classes in schools*". Together with the further expansion and increase of student capacity in secondary schools 2, the competitiveness of apprenticeship programs will continue to decrease. This prevents a heterogenic mixing of applicants and leads to a further decrease in the quality

of the apprentices and, consequently, skilled workers. The situation is particularly precarious when it comes to highly talented individuals. The polytechnic school, which is the leading source of new apprenticeship applicants, already has the reputation of being a catchment basin for less talented students (Kogelnik, 2017), and for this reason, it is not seen as a viable option by many students. *"If the trend towards over-schooling for young people continues, the economy and companies in Vorarlberg will experience an even more significant loss of skilled workers in the future."*, explains Expert 4. Today, 60% of the companies in Austria state that they cannot fill vacant positions. 65% of these open jobs have not been filled for more than six months (Kneidinger, 2020).

Heterogeneity of applicants

When it comes to the quality of applicants, the reputation problems of the apprenticeship system and the intense competition from schools have become very evident. The experts of the Vorarlberger enterprises indicate, that at least the general quality of the applicants worsened by the fact that there is no more heterogenic mixing of the applicant profiles. As a result, there are fewer and fewer high-potentials among the applicants, while the number of notably weaker applicants has risen sharply. *"We are aware of our social and educational responsibility to society; however, we cannot accept every applicant for certain vocational training programs. It is essential that we maintain the high quality of our work to remain competitive in the international competition"*, explains Expert 2 in the interview. Some candidates even could not be invited to taster days since their applications are too weak, although the requirements have already been lowered due to the low number of applications, explains another expert.

Interaction and Work Ethics

Also, more difficult has become the direct interaction with the adolescents. All companies of the interviewed experts record an inevitable loss of autonomy of the applicants. *"Teenagers need more support, which is accompanied by an extended and more intensive training period"*, Expert 4 explains. He further elaborates that the attitude towards work has changed as well: *"Young adults had relatively less drive and showed reduced intrinsic motivation than the cohorts prior to them"*. That the work attitude of a large proportion of these young people is problematic is also acknowledged by the other experts. When facing difficulties or problems, many candidates would immediately consider transferring to another employer without firstly seeking dialogue or expressing any self-criticism.

Managing Expectations

Manufacturing companies, which make up the majority of Vorarlberg's training companies, can only offer the same working conditions to a limited extent compared to showcase companies like Google and Microsoft. Nevertheless, the expectations of young people are very high in this respect. Young adults do not want conservative companies but expect their employers to actively work on being more than just a workplace. *"The development of the workplace of the future is in full swing right now, but as a manufacturing company, we can only act to a limited extent"*, Expert 3 reports in the interview. The companies are aware that they have to adapt themselves to the expectations of their future workforce and are conscious that there is work ahead of them.

The tables have turned

Companies can no longer rely on potential applicants to approach them. Expert 1, responsible for trainees at one of the leading food retailers, says "*The contact initiation no longer comes from the new applicants. We as a company must actively apply to potential apprentices and entuse them for our brand and our company*". Similarly, the remaining interviewed companies confirm that they have to approach the younger generation more often in order to fill the advertised positions. The fact that the region is not exempt from the "War on Talent" is also highlighted by observing that none of the interviewed companies could fill all vacancies advertised in 2019.

Traditional vocational training: Between Perception and Reality

The experts highlight that especially the traditional apprenticeships in the metal or synthetics sector prove to be problem areas. While up to 60 applications are submitted for an apprenticeship vacancy in the IT division, classic or lesser-known occupational profiles are left empty-handed. According to the experts, a lack of understanding and knowledge of the adolescents regarding these professions is evident. "*It becomes apparent that young people do not have any information about the daily work routine of these job profiles and do not include them in the list of feasible job opportunities merely because they are classified as physically strenuous and dirty*", describes Expert 5 the situation. Moreover, the impression that these traditional occupations have little or no future significance has become firmly established in the minds of young people, albeit the exact opposite is the case. While digitization simplifies many areas of our daily lives and makes specific occupational profiles obsolete (Sorgner and Fossen, 2018), professions such as injection molding technician or steel construction technician will not be substitutable soon, according to the industry experts. The outlined biased perception can lead

to an aggregated future shortage of skilled workers, directly affecting the region's capacity to operate efficiently.

This false interpretation, together with the devastating lack of information of today's youth, is becoming a significant problem. Expert 3 elaborates that, "*Adolescents wishing to pursue a university education are excluding apprenticeship opportunities from the outset, although one element does not rule out the other*".

Helping young talent to accelerate their career

"Young adults do not even know what opportunities vocational training has to offer. Starting an apprenticeship does not mean stopping on the career ladder after graduation. We believe in encouraging and motivating our young employees to develop themselves further - either through internal programs or through further education", says Expert 3, outlining the company's attitude towards talent development. The interviewed colleagues underline this statement. All stated that they would support suitable and proactive candidates in all aspects of their professional development. They consider the situation a win-win scenario. Not only does this open-mindedness contribute to greater employee satisfaction and support talent management within the company, but it also strengthens the company's innovative capabilities.

Public and Private Organizations need to bundle their forces more effectively

The belief that an apprenticeship is essentially a last resort must be changed. Companies, as well as public partners and schools, are called upon to do this; it cannot be done on a standalone basis. The existing partnerships with government agencies, especially with the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, are generally viewed as very positive, and the received support is highly valued. However, there is a collective perception that too many concepts are being

developed, yet too little output is created. "We simply do not bring the horsepower we have to the streets," says Expert 1, describing the backlog demand in terms of marketing the dual-system.

Communicating the right way

16% of all young people in Austria between the ages of 18 and 24 use Facebook, whereas Instagram's figure is as high as 29% (Fettingner, 2020). Online platforms nowadays not only serve as a means of keeping in touch with friends but also to obtain relevant information. In this context, 68.5% of young people state that they obtain news and information via social media (Gadringer, et al., 2020). Thus, it is likely to assume that companies may not communicate through the right channels and consequently reach fewer young people. However, the surveyed companies declare that they have shifted their acquisition- and employer branding activities increasingly into the digital space in recent years. Four of the five experts state that their companies today only invest around 10% of their marketing expenditure in classic platforms such as print.

Furthermore, the decreasing awareness of businesses outside of the digital world is becoming increasingly tangible. *"Many adolescents have little or no connection to regional companies. A few years ago, regional organizations had many points of interaction in people's everyday lives. This point of contact has diminished more and more,"* explains Expert 1.

Understanding the youth to build the future

As this work aims to deliver a first exploratory insight into the developments of the dual-system in Vorarlberg and support the companies affected in positioning themselves more effectively regarding apprenticeships, it is crucial to consider another essential stakeholder group, namely,

young people. In order to be able to develop implications in the final part, which were validated by both parties, the adolescents were interviewed utilizing a survey on the topic of "Attractiveness of apprenticeship in Vorarlberg".

Methodology

The survey has been conducted anonymously and via an online questionnaire, which includes 36 responsively designed questions, which are divided into six categories. Because of the regional approach of the study, the questionnaire was conducted in German. A pre-test of the questionnaire has been conducted with ten individuals before its actual launch. One hundred eighty-four of the overall 250 obtained results were completed and exploitable; the 66 non-complete or non-valid responses were not considered in the analysis. At the time of the survey, all 184 participants were between 13-19 years old and lived in the Vorarlberg area. For a better differentiation and a higher degree of depth, the participants' answers were, after the collection of the data, filtered into two groups: students and apprentices. This ensures that the study reflects both perspectives regarding the dual-system, and optimally emphasizes the respective motivations of the individual groups. The extracted data and the detailed sequence of the questions and their format is provided in the Appendix.

Survey Results

Firstly, we examined the perception of apprenticeship system's image. The evaluation, taking into account the results of the expert interviews, produced a somewhat surprising result. For both target groups, the negative range answers, which rated the image as rather bad or poor, were relatively low. Among the adolescents who are already in an apprenticeship, only about one in ten (9.32%) stated that the dual system's image is rather negative. As expected, this value

was higher among students (17.07%), but still far below the extreme values insinuated by the expert interviews.

However, it should be noted that there is a difference between the general consideration of the apprenticeship system and the view of apprenticeship as a possible training path for oneself. In order to make this subtle but significant difference measurable, the reputation of the apprenticeship in Vorarlberg (individual perspective) was also examined, after the image of the apprenticeship (system perspective). In this second step, the survey results were closer to the expected values derived from the interviews. While the system's image coincides 100% with the personal assessment of the reputation among apprentices (also 9.32%), the situation is quite different among students. 26.83%, or only about one in four respondents, say that Vorarlberg's apprenticeship training enjoys a positive and high reputation. The extreme deviation from the upper value can primarily be explained by the system- and individual view differentiation mentioned above.

The picture that apprenticeships do not achieve the degree of prestige that they could and should be given due to the multitude of possibilities and advantages they offer is further reinforced when the respondents to the study were asked whether the dual system offers the same career opportunities as secondary school education. In this respect, 65.85% of the students surveyed answered that, in their opinion, apprenticeships do not offer the same employment chances. The apprentices themselves also view career opportunities as unbalanced. Only around half (48.31%) attested that apprenticeships offer equal chances in direct comparison with secondary schooling.

One thing both parties agree on is the entry point into the employment market. This is where the apprenticeship system achieves top ratings. None of the surveyed students and only 3.39% of the apprentices think vocational training is unsuitable as the ideal way to enter working life. Therefore, the marginal percentage seems to speak for the fact that young people see the apprenticeship as an excellent way to transmission into their professional life.

Exciting in the evaluation of the survey was also the question of where the young adults obtained their information on dual training. A similar picture emerged for both groups. Students primarily acquired their information from their teachers (73.17%), their parents (56.10%), as well as from friends and acquaintances (48.78%). The top contact points for information on apprenticeship training for apprentices were the same three circles of people, although there was a slight shift in the ranking compared to the students. Parents (61.86%) occupy first place among apprentices, followed by teachers (47.46%) and friends (42.37%).

The fact that the marketing measures chosen by the companies were hardly ever mentioned as a source of information should also be emphasized in this context. Furthermore, the public information offices are rarely called upon by adolescents. Only 12.20% of teenagers have obtained information on dual training from one of the educational or labor market institutions. This focus on relatively subjective and limited sources of information results in the situation that the young people surveyed appear to be relatively unaware of the opportunities available in connection with vocational training. Almost all apprentices (95.76%), as well as students (92.68%), are aware of the possibility to take the A levels (Matura) in parallel to their apprenticeship. However, only every third respondent is aware of further educational opportunities. The self-maintenance scholarship during a possible subsequent course of study is only known to about 15% of those surveyed. The study furthermore disproves the assumption

that young people would not like to have more information at their disposal. 43.9% of the interviewed students and 48.31% of the apprentices would have liked to have more information about the apprenticeship system.

The thesis moreover provides alarming results, especially from the perspective of people who have decided to pursue further school education. In this case, only 12.2% stated that they had actually included vocational training in the circle of possible choices for their future when they were faced with the decision between further schooling or a professional career. The survey also rejects the assumption that the picture will change at a later stage so that students will perceive an apprenticeship to be an acceptable option later on. Only 14.64% of the students indicated that an apprenticeship was or may become an option at some point in the future.

When it comes to the decision to take up an apprenticeship or not, the same groups of people, as in the acquisition of information, have an essential role. Once again, parents, friends, and teachers are the most significant influencing factors. 90.24% of the students and 84.75% of the apprentices say that they discussed the decision primarily with their parents. Friends played the second-most important role in both groups, with respectively 68.29% and 57.63%. Every second pupil (51.22%) discussed the decision whether to pursue a school or a professional career with his teachers; among the apprentices, the figure was still around one in three (31.36%).

In this context, it was also examined how the interviewees perceived the attitudes of their caregivers towards the apprenticeship-system. The group of students stated that only 36.59% of friends and acquaintances and 39.02% of teachers were positively oriented towards vocational training. Parents were the most positive influential group in this respect, with around

half of them conveying a positive image of the apprenticeship to the respondents. Among the apprentices, it was primarily the parents who conveyed a somewhat different image of the dual system. Here 76.27% transmitted a positive impression to their children regarding apprenticeships. The proportion of teachers who encouraged young people to take up an apprenticeship is also higher in this group (58%).

Conclusion

The goal of the study, to provide an initial overview of the current state of dual training in Vorarlberg, can be seen as successful to the extent that several opportunities for improvement can be derived. Furthermore, the study opens the door for further academic research by highlighting the importance but also the research potential of this topic. Since this study, due to its exploratory form, has neither a purely qualitative nor a purely quantitative character, prospective possibilities for both analyses, based on this study, are provided. To provide a stringent picture of the recommendations for action, which are derived from the output of the survey and the interviews, the results are systemized in the summary of results table.

Table 2: Summary of Results

Results: Interviews (Companies)	Results: Questionnaire (Teenagers)
<p>Recruitment gets more complex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant to decreasing number of applicants. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Problem for growth-oriented companies ○ Lower birth rate • 60% of Austrian companies cannot fill the advertised positions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 65% of these positions remain open for more than 6 months 	<p>Teaching loses its stand as a serious option</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 15% of the students have considered an apprenticeship as a serious option • The number of students who could imagine starting an apprenticeship after completing the A-levels is marginal (5%)
<p>Decreasing Quality of Applicants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development from a heterogeneous to a homogeneous applicant pool • Applicants show less "drive" and less interest in company 	<p>Image of the apprenticeships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reputation of the dual-system has declined significantly in society • Highly talented people most likely stay in schooling

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreasing intrinsic motivation 	
<p>Extended schooling offering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lowering of admission criteria Expanded learning opportunities and increased capacity School vs. dual training: Direct Competition 	<p>Schools are perceived as superior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students and apprentices attribute higher career opportunities to schools than to the dual-system Apprenticeships are perceived as less worth striving for in society Teachers do not convey a positive image of apprenticeship training
<p>Growing Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tables have turned and the application process has been reversed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Companies apply to young people Young people want more than just a job <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Companies should be able to unite with the lives of young people and not the other way around. 	<p>Information is missing or very subjective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people increasingly obtain their information from subjective sources (Parents, teachers, friends). Fact-based agencies and information providers appear to be only marginally. According to young people, more information on dual training opportunities would be desirable. Opportunities, like the self-maintenance scholarship, that open up opportunities after completing an apprenticeship, have had limited infiltration among young people
<p>Alarming level of information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people do not realize the opportunities related to apprenticeships <p>Career opportunities after training do not make it into the perception of young people</p> <p>Image of the dual-system among young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting an apprenticeship means getting stuck on the career ladder Classical & physically demanding professions remain unoccupied despite advertisements Apprenticeship as a last resort: "Only those who don't make it through school do an apprenticeship". 	<p>The circle of influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents, friends, and teachers are the strongest influencers in the decision-making process Besides the parents of apprentices (76% positive), all groups have a rather negative perception of the dual-system and consequently influence the decisions of the young adults in a non-favorable way for the dual-system <p>Because of the transmission of partly false and purely subjective perceptions, and to some extent outdated-information, it is considerably difficult to break down the currently damaged image of dual vocational training.</p>
<p>Inter-company campaigns & state subsidies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many concepts - little impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The available Horsepower is not transmitted on the street" WKO is valued as a strong partner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bureaucracy-free platform Central contact point apart from WKO is missing One central point of contact for all funding and support is crucial 	

The shift from a heterogeneous to a homogeneous structure of applications reveals an enormous problem for all companies providing vocational training. Whereas in the past, it was possible to integrate the applications into a normal distribution, the quality is moving more and more in

the direction of the lower quality extreme values. The shift in the number of average applications towards the poorer ones and the almost complete lack of excellent applications poses a risk not only for the reputation of the apprenticeship but also for the quality promise of domestic companies. The main reason for this development can be derived from the low information level of the young people, as well as the subjective influence exerted by their decision mentors. Teachers and parents continue to play the two most pivotal roles, information source and counselor, in the decision-making process.

Since parents and teachers rarely deal in depth with the subject of dual-training and are, as a non-target group, excluded from the supply of information, they mostly do not have the necessary tools to fulfill their role as a source of information and facilitator, as well as a decision-making support.

To break this cycle, both parents and teachers need to be defined as a target group. It is hereby not enough to create awareness among them regarding the extent of their influence. Instead, future campaigns must enable and empower them through information to provide their protégés with a differentiated and educated view of the dual-system.

Furthermore, the knowledge of educational possibilities should not be a liability to be picked-up by teenagers. Much more, it is a direct mandate to all involved stakeholders. Due to the excessive growth of the educational landscape in Austria, teenagers no longer have the possibility to evaluate all career paths in a balanced and holistic manner.

The consequent information overload leads to a high resignation level regarding the obtainment of information beyond the singular paths in the immediate social environment. Not only does this promote further over-schooling, but it also increases social inequalities due to the lack of opportunity awareness, especially of those influencing the decisions of the young people. It is therefore essential that the state, as the initiator of the educational strategy and learning contents

for Austrian schools, integrates career development information into the mandatory curriculum of all Austrian students, securing the same information level for all students, no matter of the social or educational background of their parents.

The creation of an artificial competition between schools and organizations in the environment of dual education would ultimately be carried out on the backs of future generations. A joint approach, as well as moving away from the idea of competition, is the key to emphasizing the parity of the two educational paths. A first step in this direction would be to set up a joint platform where information on both, school and vocational training paths, are presented. Furthermore, the establishment of the format "Vorarlbergians that you know", which could show the different career paths of successful Vorarlbergians, could lead to a well balanced perception in society.

Table 3: Recommendations for action



Expanding target audience

Parents and teachers are not only among the most important sources of information, but are also the strongest influencing factors in the decision-making phase.

- ✓ Dedicated training for these two groups of people
- ✓ Emphasizing the advantages of apprenticeships
- ✓ Highlight career opportunities
- ✓ Outline educational pathways
- ✓ Make subsidies easily accessible

Reduction of Silo-Thinking

Dual training is losing the battle against schools. Only one in five students and one in two apprentices think the chances following an apprenticeship are the same as those after completing a secondary school education.

- ✓ Cooperation agreements with schools
- ✓ Joint platform (Future Days Vorarlberg - Apprenticeship and School).
- ✓ "Vorarlbergians that you know": Well-known Vorarlbergians talk about their different career paths

Approaching young people

Knowing educational paths in detail means more opportunities and less prejudice. But just making information available is not enough: Information about apprenticeships is a debt to bring, not a debt to fetch.

- ✓ Bringing information to young people
- ✓ Accompany and coach young people in their decision-making process
- ✓ Ensure equality of Information
- ✓ Objectively pointing out educational paths of all kinds

Limitations of the work

Through the 250 young people interviewed in the survey, a brief excerpt of the current mood could be reflected, which corresponds to the exploratory character of the study.

A conscious attempt was made to adapt the participant demographics to the various educational and social strata of the Vorarlberg population. However, in order to be able to draw a very detailed and accurate picture of the current apprenticeship situation and to depart from a mere sketch of the situation, a study with significantly higher demographic requirements and numbers of respondents would have to be carried out.

In this context, a subsequent study would require a number of participants of about 750 young people, in which the profiles to be evaluated reflect and match the socio-demographic population distribution of Vorarlberg more accurately than in this exploratory work.

Furthermore, the focus of the interviews predominantly rested on large companies. Thus, almost all of the largest apprenticeship training companies in Vorarlberg were surveyed in the expert interviews.

Since these naturally do not reflect the situation of all 2062 apprenticeship training companies, a further subsequent study would offer the opportunity to broaden the perspective on this issue. The different characteristics that SMEs exhibit in comparison to corporate enterprises also affect the acquisition of new apprentices and therefore call for an independent analysis extending beyond the scope of an exploratory study.

The topic of the attractiveness of apprenticeships certainly reflects one of the most important challenges for the region of Vorarlberg and therefore offers a broad field for further, in-depth studies since the layered nature and areas of influence of apprenticeships in the living space increase the level of complexity extremely.

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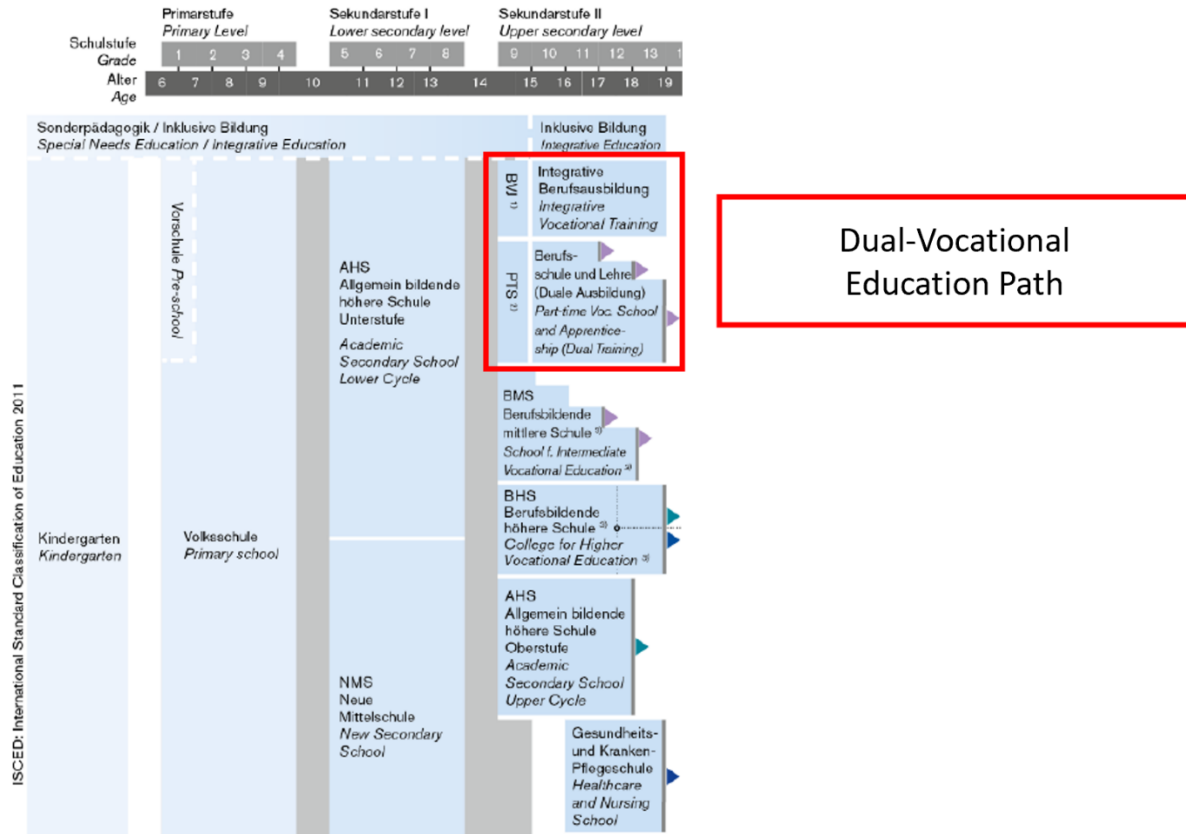
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Appendix

The **Austrian** Education System



Dual-Vocational Education Path

Appendix 1: The Austrian Education System (Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research of Austria 2019)

Benedikt Hagleitner | NOVA Business School
Study regarding the „Attractiveness of the apprenticeship system in the Vorarlberg region. “

Topic and Introduction into the study:

This study aims to develop a deeper understanding of the apprenticeship system and its key stakeholders in the region of Vorarlberg, Austria. The province has the highest rate of apprentices compared to all other areas of the country, and with the set goal of the regional government to become the “Hot-spot of apprenticeships in Europe,” it does not aim low for the future (WKO Vorarlberg, 2019).

However, several challenges are still ahead towards the ambitious goal, and to reach it, potential road bumps and problems have to be identified in order to set counter actions as early as possible and to support the strategy. Therefore, the study focuses on the two most important stakeholders, companies, and potential apprentices, to identify and close gaps and enable more efficient communication between the two parties.

With your consent, we would like to record the interview, so we do not have to rely on our memory solemnly but being able to track the exact course of our conversation. Naturally, the recording will be in direct accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. No personal data will be published or made available to other parties, then the creator of the study itself.

This interview guide is used by the interviewer only to steer the conversation, which does not imply that all the questions made available here have to be covered during the course of the interview.

If a question does seem unclear or does trigger irritation, please make the interviewer aware of it immediately. This allows a more focused conversation and evaluation of the interview.

Please do not gloss over in your answers. Providing straight forward insight helps us to have a more objective view of the current state of the apprenticeship system and therefore allows us to make more concrete and appropriate recommendations as a result.

Interviews can be held in German or English according to the preference of the interviewed expert.

1. Personal Information

- a) Name
- b) Age
- c) Position in the company
- d) How long have you been working at XY?

- e) Years of experience regarding management and recruitment of apprentices?

2. Company Facts

- a) Company Size (No. of employees in the organization)?
- b) The number of current apprentices in the company?
- c) Number of different apprenticeship programs in the company?
- d) Average number, over the last five years, of apprentices taken in per year?
- e) How much HR or Recruiting FTE's are purely dedicated to apprentices?
- f) The average age of persons applying for apprenticeships?
- g) Retention Rate of apprentices finishing their training?

3. Recruiting of young talent

- a) Has the recruiting process of future talent (apprentices) changed over the last 10years, and if so, how?
- b) How has the profile of potential applicants changed over the last 10years?
 - i. How has your company adjusted to these changes?
- c) Where do you see the biggest challenges in winning young talent for your organization?
- d) What processes, channels, and activities have your company in place to reach potential candidates?
 - i. What would you describe as your USP in terms of recruiting activities, and which one has proven to be the most significant activity?
 - ii. In which areas do you see the potential to do even better?
- e) How do you support the further development of young talent during and after their training?
e.g., Apprenticeship and A-Levels (Matura), Educational Leave to complete A-Levels, Dual-Studies, Sponsorship of Master Certificate (Meisterprüfung), ...
- f) How much time of an FTE working in HR would you estimate is spent on a single apprentice from raising enthusiasm to join the company until the end of his/her apprenticeship training?

4. New Applicants

- a) Are you experiencing a decline in the number of applicants over the last 10years, and if so, how would you explain this decline? (Note: Consider the population growth in Vorarlberg of 7% in this period).
- b) What have you found the most challenging part (cultural) when dealing with applicants from generation Z?
- c) How would you assess the overall quality level of new applicants, and what changes have you noticed in the last 10years?

- d) Please outline the perfect applicant for an apprenticeship at your company very roughly.
- e) If you could sketch one, what would be the perfect career path starting with an apprenticeship in your organization from an HR and organizational perspective (15-20year period)?

5. General

- a) From a business perspective: Do you think that the federal investment regarding marketing and information distribution is sufficient?
- b) In your opinion: What are the most efficient federal sponsored activities?
- c) What activities are needed or should be created from stateside to create a more productive environment?
- d) Do you think that there are prejudices connected to apprenticeships, and if so, on what do you think they are based on?

6. Is there anything you would like to add that has not been addressed in this interview?

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Survey on the attractiveness of apprenticeships in the Vorarlberg region

Aim of the survey

This questionnaire serves to evaluate the attractiveness of the apprenticeship system among young people between the ages of 13 and 19 in the region of Vorarlberg.

All young adults are deliberately defined here as the target group since the purpose of this project is not only to survey the level of attractiveness among persons who are already in an apprenticeship but among all persons who could theoretically classify as potential apprentices.

In terms of content, the motives for deciding for or against an apprenticeship position will be emphasized. This should give both, the relevant public organizations, and private companies better insight into the motives of young adults when considering an apprenticeship. Consequently, this newly gained understanding should primarily serve as a support and optimization guideline for the adjustment of the current acquisition activities for vacant apprenticeships.

The final goal of the project is, therefore, to highlight the advantages of an apprenticeship in the Vorarlberg area adapted to the expectations, wishes, and fears of young adults revealed by the survey, in order to communicate these effectively to potential apprentices.

Basic methodological data

Target group: Young adults aged between 14 and 20 years, living in the Vorarlberg area

Survey type: Online survey

Survey period: 19 - 29.8.2020

Demographic data

Gender:

Age:

Place of residence:

Profession:

Highest completed education:

Question Characteristics

QCA: Very Bad – Rather Bad – Neutral – Rather Good – Very Good

QCB: Strongly Disagree – Rather Disagree – Neutral – Rather Agree – Strongly Agree

QCC: Multiple Choice

QCD: Open Question

QCE: True False

Overall attractiveness of apprenticeship

1. What is your personal impression of the image apprenticeships have in Vorarlberg? QCA
2. An apprenticeship provides the best possible conditions for starting a professional career. QCB
3. An apprenticeship offers the same career opportunities as the educational path through a secondary school (AHS, HAK, HTL, HLW, etc.). QCB
4. An apprenticeship is in general highly regarded in Vorarlberg. QCB
5. Even very good students should consider an apprenticeship as their career path. QCB

Advantages & disadvantages of an apprenticeship

6. Do you plan to start an apprenticeship in the next 1-2 years? QCE
 - a. Yes
 - i. Can you spontaneously enumerate three advantages of an apprenticeship? QCD
 - ii. Please name several disadvantages of an apprenticeship compared to secondary school education. QCD
 - b. No
 - i. Can you spontaneously enumerate three advantages of apprenticeship? QCD
 - ii. Please name several disadvantages of an apprenticeship compared to secondary school education. QCD
7. Which prejudices that are linked to apprenticeships would (or have) scare(d) you off? (Multiple Options Possible) QCC
 - a. Lower social acceptance (family, friends, acquaintances do not talk positively about an apprenticeship)
 - b. Social status lower than school education
 - c. Reduced career opportunities
 - d. Anyone can do it
 - e. Cheap labor - apprentices have to do the work that nobody else in the company wants to do
 - f. Less general education than people with secondary school qualifications

Sources of information

8. I have the information about the possibilities and opportunities that arise from an apprenticeship primarily from the following sources: (Multiple Options Possible) QCC
 - a. Parents
 - b. Friends
 - c. School / Teacher
 - d. Internet (information websites, etc.)
 - e. Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.)
 - f. Media (newspaper, radio, television)
 - g. Companies that offer apprenticeships / firms in Vorarlberg
 - h. Trade fairs and information events
 - i. Other organizations (AK, BFI, WKO, AMS...)
 - j. Holiday jobs and taster days

9. What opportunities for further training after completion and during the apprenticeship are known to you in detail: (Multiple Options Possible) QCC

- a. Apprenticeship with A-Levels (Simultaneously)
- b. University Entrance Exam
- c. Educational leave to finish A-levels after completion of apprenticeship (1-year program)
- d. Support scholarship during studies, etc.

10. I would have liked to have been better explained the many possibilities that exist in connection with an apprenticeship. QCB

Role models and career aspirations

11. Is there a person in your immediate environment whom you see as a role model in terms of education and profession? QCE

- i. Yes
 - b. If yes, where would you assign this person? (Choose only one!) QCC
 - 1. family member and relatives
 - 2. friends
 - 3. acquaintances
 - 4. other:
- ii. No

12. Do you currently have a specific career choice? QCE

- a. If yes, which one? QCD
- b. Could a company offer you the opportunity to fulfill this career aspiration in combination with an apprenticeship? QCB

Personal details

13. School so far, was very easy for me. QCB

14. An apprenticeship is/was an option for me. QCB

15. I have found an exciting apprenticeship for me and included it in my decision on how to proceed in the future. QCB

16. I can imagine starting an apprenticeship after my current training. QCB

17. I would like to study at a university at a later date. QCB

18. In my immediate environment (friends, family, acquaintances), many people have completed an apprenticeship. QCB

19. My parents have completed an apprenticeship. QCE

20. One of my brothers and sisters is in apprenticeship training or has completed such training. QCE

21. My parents hold a degree from a university. QCE

22. One of my siblings has studied at university or is still studying. QCE

23. My GPA is

- a. between A to B+
- b. between B to C+
- c. between C to D+
- d. Lower than D+

Factors influencing the decision-making process

24. I have discussed my decision to pursue an apprenticeship or secondary schooling, primarily with the following people: (Multiple Options Possible) [QCC](#)

- a. Parents
- b. Relatives
- c. Friends
- d. Teacher
- e. Friends
- f. Information centers
- g. Companies and apprenticeship enterprises

25. My teachers have given me a positive image of an apprenticeship. [QCB](#)

26. My parents have given me a positive image of an apprenticeship. [QCB](#)

27. My friends and acquaintances have given me a positive image of an apprenticeship. [QCB](#)

Table 3: Interview Results

Questions	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5
a) Name					
b) Age	25	28; 44	24	50	36
c) Position in the company	Apprenticeship Manager	Recruiter, Apprenticeship Manager;	Apprenticeship Manager for IT - Systems	Apprenticeship Manager	Apprenticeship Manager
d) How long have you been working at your company?	8 years	4.5 years; 6 years	2.5 years	35 years	1 year
e) Years of experience regarding management and recruitment of apprentices?	4 years	3 years; 15 years	1.5 years	22 years	7 years
a) Company Size (No. of employees in the organization)?	44.000 in Austria, 3.500 in Vorarlberg	1300 in Vorarlberg	5.500 of which 1.200 are in Vorarlberg	1600 in Vorarlberg	1500
b) The number of current apprentices in the company?	198 Apprentices in Vorarlberg	100 Apprentices in Vorarlberg	90 Apprentices in Vorarlberg	126 Apprentices in Vorarlberg	125 Apprentices in Vorarlberg
c) Number of different apprenticeship programs in the company?	14 in Vorarlberg; Main programs are Retail Salesman, Office Administrator, Logistics Operator	10 different programs; Main programs are: Metal Technology Expert, Electro Technology Expert, IT Expert, Cableway Expert	8 different programs; Main programs are: Electro Technology Expert, Injection Moulding Technician, Mechanical Technician	8 different programs; Main programs are: Electro Technology Expert, Constructional Steel Work Technician, Mechanical Technician	5 different programs; Main programs are: Constructional Steel Work Technician, Cableway Expert, Mechanical Technician
a) Average number, over the last five years, of apprentices taken in per year)	65 are taken in per year on average. Advertised are on average 85 (Gap of 25-30 open positions per year)		20	35	31
e) How much HR or Recruiting FTE's are purely dedicated to apprentices?	2	3	1	2	1.5
f) The average age of persons applying for apprenticeships?	15-16 years	16	15	15	16.5
g) Retention Rate of apprentices finishing their training?	70-75%	80%	80%	85%	75%

Question:	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5
a) Has the recruiting process of future talent (apprentices) changed over the last 10 years, and if so, how?	<p>Companies need to reach out to young people much more than it was necessary just a few years ago. => More advertising power is needed</p> <p>Companies apply to young people and not vice versa</p> <p>Pressure to attend school leads to loss of fun in learning - Some would be happier with a more practically oriented education (apprenticeship), but do not dare to do so due to social pressure</p>	<p>Companies must market themselves as employers: Word of Mouth is no longer sufficient</p> <p>The job market has become tighter: Less Influx - higher demand</p>	<p>Change towards the company's application to the applicant</p> <p>Apprentices look for companies that can show them clear career developments</p> <p>Applicants do not want conservative companies, but an environment in which they feel comfortable Development from a pure work place to a "Workplace of the Future" place</p> <p>As a company, you have to remain permanently attractive - not only in recruiting</p>	<p>Companies have to actively approach young people</p> <p>Less applicants in recent years</p>	<p>Companies need to reach out more to young people</p> <p>Must again emphasize apprenticeships as a career opportunity</p> <p>Decreased level of applicants - Number of high potentials has decreased</p>
b) How has the profile of potential applicants changed over the last 10 years?	<p>Less Independence</p> <p>More interference of parents in the decisions of the young (growing up is slowed down)</p> <p>Greater gender mix (increase in the number of male applicants in "typical female" jobs)</p> <p>Generational differences: In the past, "How do I do something?"; Today, "Why do I do it?"</p> <p>Applicants plan for the long term: Want precise career options and plans</p>	<p>Contact to manual labor in everyday life less and less available</p> <p>Increased prosperity: Physical work less attractive, short-term enthusiasm and greater willingness to change</p> <p>Trend to earn one's own money is declining</p> <p>Less stamina: Higher apprenticeship drop-out rate</p>	<p>Must be more strongly motivated</p> <p>Lower attention rate</p> <p>Want to be shown future possibilities at an early phase</p>	<p>Less and less high-potentials are considering an apprenticeship</p> <p>Work attitude and values - Respect and commitment have decreased</p> <p>Need tighter supervision</p> <p>Interference of parents has become normal - Reduces independency of teenagers</p>	<p>Less Independence and maturity</p> <p>Work setting (Drive) has fallen</p> <p>General Interest is decreasing</p>
c) Where do you see the biggest challenges in winning young talent for your organization?	<p>Extreme regional competitive pressure: Vorarlberg is known for its strong training companies and the choice is immense</p> <p>Too strong diversification of the school system => Class filling without filtering => Fewer young people - Greater choice in the school education system</p> <p>Image of retail is not the best</p> <p>Keeping a finger on the pulse of youth: Using the right channels and permanently expanding communication with young people</p>	<p>Trend towards school: Enough space available in schools, restrictions are falling more and more</p> <p>Traditional apprenticeships become more difficult to fill</p> <p>Managing expectations and attitudes of young people</p>	<p>Unattractiveness of the block school</p> <p>Adaptation of conservative structures to the needs of the younger generation</p> <p>Regional competition is further fuelled by lower influx of new applicants</p>	<p>Educational offerings have grown enormously (over-saturation); cannibalization of apprenticeship places due to oversupply in the educational system (schools vs. training companies); reduction of requirements for secondary schools</p> <p>Hard physical work is not attractive anymore</p>	<p>Diversification of the education possibility cuts the number of applicants from the apprenticeship system and lowers the overall quality of the remaining applicants</p> <p>To be viewed as an option in the minds of the young people</p> <p>Communicating apprenticeships as equal opportunity to school education</p>
d) What processes, channels, and activities have your company in place to reach potential candidates?	<p>The XX company is an institution and a strong brand itself</p> <p>Print advertising only in the marginal areas</p> <p>Mainly digital presence, advertising in own markets, billboards, trade fairs</p> <p>Personal contact is the best The brand as well as personal conversations</p>	<p>Print only minimal (about 10%)</p> <p>A lot about online (website, social media, ...), trade fairs and posters</p> <p>Main focus on schools (Polytechnic School)</p> <p>Personal Conversations (Fairs, Trade Days)</p>	<p>Print Ads decrease continuously (currently about 10%)</p> <p>Digital Media Channels (80%)</p> <p>Fairs & Events (20%)</p> <p>Trade days and goodwill (10%)</p> <p>Trade days</p>	<p>Very reduced marketing activities - Brand name and word of mouth is sufficient</p> <p>Strong communication and partnership with polytechnic schools</p> <p>Word of mouth by apprentice and employees</p>	<p>Very minimal marketing until recent years - Are currently building new marketing activities, initiatives and channels - Major restructuring in progress</p> <p>The Product</p>
i. What would you describe as your USP (Unique Selling Point) in terms of recruiting activities, and which one has proven to be the most significant? ii. In which areas do you see the potential to do even better?	<p>During the apprenticeship: Seminar Personality development and teambuilding events Career Workshops</p> <p>After the apprenticeship: 2 different in-house management programs for the internal development of future sales managers</p> <p>Further development into different areas: More than 50% of all employees of the Spar headquarters have been apprentices at Spar</p> <p>External possibilities: As an employer, Spar is open to support any training that contributes to career development within the company</p>	<p>Individualization of the apprenticeship</p> <p>Company apartment during the HTL advanced training course as well as any subsidies that support professional advancement in the company</p>	<p>Marketing and Communication of Apprenticeships</p> <p>Development of young talents: Bonus systems and promotion of careers, but also personal development (stays abroad, etc.)</p> <p>Installation of an in-house academy</p> <p>Development of managers using own employees</p> <p>Individualization of career development opportunities</p> <p>Exchange with other apprentices from different companies</p> <p>Any other support that will help the employee in his work and advance his career</p>	<p>More targeted search</p> <p>Individualization and tailoring of training programs - Company develops additional training programs with partners</p> <p>Strong openness in all directions regarding the further development of apprentice</p>	<p>Apprenticeship Ambassadors - Apprentices who present the apprenticeship and the company in schools are the most effective marketing tool at present</p> <p>Passive support in the direction of 2nd educational path</p> <p>However, if interested and proactive, support is provided</p>
e) How do you support the further development of young talent during and after their training? e.g., Apprenticeship and A-Levels (Matura), Educational Leave to complete A-Levels, Dual-Studies, Sponsorship of Master Certificate (Meisterprüfung), ...					

Question:	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5
a) Are you experiencing a decline in the number of applicants over the last 10years, and if so, how would you explain this decline? (Note: Consider the population growth in Vorarlberg of 7% in this period).	Number of applicants remains the same despite 7% population growth Retail is not the most attractive industry outwardly, however there were more applicants through COVID-19, because the sector is considered crisis-proof	Consistent to slightly decline in the number of applicants, especially in more conservative professions Increased competition in the region and less influx of qualified applicants	Slightly more applicants (mainly due to strong partnerships) But depending on the professions also no candidates in some cases - Some professions have a fair or no image in the public	Not fewer applicants but less suitable applicants There is a huge deficit, when it comes to the knowledge regarding the dual-system and its possibilities	Completely wrong picture of apprenticeships Decreasing numbers Mainly decrease in the conservative professions
b) What have you found the most challenging part (cultural) when dealing with applicants from generation Z?	It didn't become more difficult - just different Reaching the young people themselves is incredibly difficult as they are bombarded with impressions and advertising from all sides. Less independence Companies are moving further and further back in the lists of young people and are therefore no longer as present Collectivism is more and more replaced by egoism	Longer teach-in/onboarding time Less technical and manual understanding Need more investment and support (internal tutoring,...) Motivational problems	Greater switching frequency Interest in getting to know companies is very low Very low level of motivation	Parenting: Strongly overestimated and exaggerated protection of the parents Different respect levels No work attitude Less maturity	Weak distribution between school and apprenticeship Less independence Less maturity Work stoppage has fallen sharply Very superficial interest in the company and the work No enthusiasm to be recognized
c) How would you assess the overall quality level of new applicants, and what changes have you noticed in the last 10years?	Consistent in retail - focus is not on high potential, but on average students In It needs more care and investment than it did a few years ago	It has become more difficult to find ideal candidates Young adults have less contact with non-social or industrial technology and craftsmanship School catches more high potentials	Overall quality of applicants has decreased significantly Lack of motivation Early school leavers are generally stronger than people from the Polytechnic School	Quality in terms of skills and intelligence has not decreased, but the attitude towards work has been almost completely lost (respect, Differentiation job/Private, especially with cellphones) Lack of motivation	Declining quality in recent years High-performing candidates tend more towards school education

Question	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5
<p>a) From a business perspective: Do you think that the federal investment regarding marketing and information distribution is sufficient?</p> <p>Grade the activities provided from 1 to 5 (1: Very good; 5: not sufficient)</p>	<p>Overall Grade: 3 (Not bad but also not perfect)</p> <p>Many concepts - little implementation "We can't get the horsepower on the road"</p> <p>Schools do a better job of marketing themselves</p> <p>Good cooperation and strong funding measures</p>	<p>Overall Grade: 2 (Good)</p> <p>Very high standards in Vorrating</p> <p>Partners work extremely well together</p> <p>Chamber of Commerce = Main contact person that is familiar with all subsidy options and however, it must be worked more effectively.</p> <p>High amount of initiatives - it is better to have fewer initiatives, but more central control and more effective measures</p>	<p>Overall Grade: 3 (Not bad but also not perfect)</p> <p>WMO is a strong and supportive partner</p> <p>Bureaucratic effort too great for some subsidies - A central contact point is needed</p> <p>Chamber of Commerce is a great contact - often too reduces workload for companies enormously</p> <p>Actors are more a symptom treatment than a treatment of the disease</p> <p>Campaigns to enhance the status of apprenticeship and the Polytechnic School have not yet succeeded</p>	<p>Overall Grade: 3 (Not bad but also not perfect)</p> <p>Teaching is not put on the right pedestal - skilled workers dying is a much bigger problem than indicated</p> <p>Chamber of Commerce is a great contact - often too reduces workload for companies enormously</p> <p>Apprenticeship is absent - The balance between school and apprenticeship does not fit</p> <p>Many concepts and little impact</p>	<p>Overall Grade: 3 (Not bad but also not perfect)</p> <p>Chamber of Commerce strong partner</p> <p>Image of apprenticeship falls by the wayside and the initiatives simply do not work</p> <p>Apprenticeship is absent - The balance between school and apprenticeship does not fit</p> <p>Many concepts and little impact</p>
<p>b) In your opinion: What are the most efficient federal sponsored activities?</p>	<p>Start-up company support and subsidies for companies</p> <p>We cannot afford apprenticeship is just an excuse - More than enough help from the state!</p>	<p>Cooperation, common platform and branding</p>	<p>Not specified</p>	<p>Communication between partners and companies</p>	<p>Not specified</p>
<p>c) What activities are needed or should be created from state-side to create a more productive environment?</p>	<p>Really bring information to the young people - Approaching the youth!</p> <p>Less planning more action</p> <p>Highlighting the advantages of apprenticeship and setting initiatives much earlier</p>	<p>Even more personalization (further extend the advantage over the school)</p> <p>Upgrading apprenticeships and better communication of the benefits - Changing the image of apprenticeships</p>	<p>More exchange - Not only regarding economic aspects (educational relation)</p> <p>More information spreading in schools!</p> <p>Reduction of the classical educational pathways towards modular solutions</p>	<p>Change image in people's minds</p> <p>Enabling and strengthening the orientation phase for young people - Introduction of a social and orientation year</p> <p>Change image in people's minds</p> <p>Enabling and strengthening the orientation phase for young people</p> <p>Central contact point for the topic of subsidies is completely missing</p> <p>Upgrading of the Polytechnic School (Extremely important partner and does not receive the appreciation it should get!)</p> <p>Promote and create cooperation between technical schools and teaching</p>	<p>Image, image, image - branding of apprenticeship is extremely poor and needs improvement</p> <p>Strengthen the distribution of information in relation to apprenticeships and highlight opportunities</p> <p>Inform young adults about the possibilities early (Schools, etc.)</p> <p>Central contact point for the topic of subsidies is completely missing</p>