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Demographic preferences towards careers in shared service centers: A factor analysis☆

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ABSTRACT

Talent attraction and employee retention are some of the main challenges that currently affect the growth of the shared service industry worldwide. Due to the market dynamics and the structure of the labor force, shared service centers (SSCs) in the region compete to attract well-trained candidates with appropriate knowledge and skills. To assess gender preferences towards careers in the SSCs, the article collects 1283 responses using an on-line questionnaire from university students in the Czech Republic. Respondents vary by study year, gender, age, course of study, and work preferences. The article analyzes gender and age preferences towards careers in the shared services. The article further ascertains the main factors that influence career decisions using the same demographic features. Using the factor analysis technique, the article further analyzes the variables with strong inter-correlations to evaluate the formation of preferences in SSCs. The research results provide insights into the target age and gender of students with job aspirations in SSCs. The findings could help recruitment agencies renew and redirect their search for talents in SSCs.

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1. Introduction

Performance improvement and cost reduction through the implementation of Shared Service Centers (SSCs) are recent strategic priorities for 75% of the Fortune 500 companies (Accenture, 2015). The consolidation of processes in business service centers (BSCs) allows companies to benefit from economies of scale, standardization of processes, sharing of resources, and processes transfer to less expensive locations (Boglund, Hallsten, & Thilander, 2011). A reasonable level of staff turnover also serves as a cost reduction tool and helps manage employee-associated expenses (SSON, 2015; Stewart, 2015). The need to maintain a certain level of employee turnover, while retaining the best employees, puts pressure on human resource professionals in the SSC industry. In a global study on 275 SSCs, talent attraction and retention are target areas for development and investment for over 70% of respondents (Dunkan, 2009).

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and the Czech Republic in particular, represents one of the most attractive destinations for SSCs globally (Tholons, 2014; Drygala, 2013). Based on a recent report, business services in CEE will continue to grow at an average of 30% annually,

creating approximately 100,000 new jobs in the region (Labaye et al., 2013). In the Czech Republic in 2015, the business services segment employed over 55,000 people (Business services, 2015). The SSCs industry growth rate in the country is even faster than in India, and the industry mainly achieves the expansion through increase of existing centers, with only 10% from new center arrivals (Stewart, 2015).

The growth of the centers increases competition for skilled candidates. Assessment and understanding of the underlying motives for job search and job choice behaviors of prospective candidates is important for attraction and retention strategy deployment by human resource professionals.

This article evaluates students' eagerness to start a career in the SSCs and the influence of gender and age as demographic features in the context of the Czech Republic. The article further interrogates the key tangents/characteristics that attract prospective candidates as well as the main drivers of students to SSC jobs. The article adds a factor analysis component to determine the inter-correlation of variables used.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Review of the relevant literature on gender preferences in employment

Researchers study preferences in the workplace in a wide range of dimensions including differences between sexes in occupation selection, leadership styles, and job satisfaction (Eddleston & Powell, 2008; Kismiantini, Jesús, & Emeterio, 2014; Konrad, Corrigan, Lieb, & Ritchie, 2000; Sutherland, 2011). Many publications suggest that for males, good pay and career advancement opportunities are crucial factors during the job selection process. Women generally choose jobs that offer

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good working conditions like flexible schedule, sick-leave policies and a less demanding job nature.

In a meta-analysis of 31 studies on managers and business students, men consider earnings and responsibility as more important than females do, who emphasize growth opportunities, challenging tasks, and job security (Konrad et al., 2000). Flexible working hours and good training provisions are identified as priorities for females in a study of 6829 opinions collected through a 2006 survey in the United States and United Kingdom. Males, on the other hand, are likely to have a higher preference for jobs that offer good salaries and promotion opportunities (Sutherland, 2011). A study on the job preferences of Generation Y candidates (a demographic group that represents today's graduates born between the 1980s and 2000s) establishes that recently-graduated women prioritize an interesting job and regular working hours as compared to men. The study also identifies the general tendency of both genders to emphasize importance of job security and a relaxed atmosphere over other job attributes (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014). Other studies suggest that representatives of this generation are attracted by jobs that offer long-term career opportunities and professional advancement (Broadbridge, Maxwell, & Ogden, 2007; Eisner, 2011; Terjesen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007).

Based on the extensive body of studies and the undertaken literature review, our study uses similar criteria for job preferences (high pay, flexible working hours, etc.) to assess gender differences in attitude towards careers in the shared service centers. To confirm research hypotheses and findings, the article employs a factor analysis.

2.2. Overview of gender structure of services employment

Changes in global employment trends go hand in hand with technological innovations and business process outsourcing, which enable companies to transfer their operations to countries with cheaper labor (Beneria, 2001; Jhabvala & Sinha, 2007; Solli-Saether & Gottschalk, 2015). Outsourcing and SSC establishment in Eastern European countries is a source of white-collar jobs for men and particularly women, and helps to broadly improve the quality of female employment (Mehra & Gammage, 1999). Globally, service industries predominantly employ women (World Bank, 2015; OECD, 2002), and this trend holds in the Visegrad countries as well. In 2012, the share of employment of women in services was 74% in the Czech Republic, 78% in Hungary, 71% in Poland and 77% in the Slovak Republic (European Commission, 2012). Females join the service industry mainly in the clerical, sales and support occupations (Horgan, 2001; Howcroft & Richardson, 2008; UNCTAD, 2005).

SSCs offer a wide range of positions in the area of accounting, finance, payroll, human resources, procurement, logistics, etc. As the complexity of the shared services keeps increasing in CEE, it provides a valuable career path for employees (Howcroft & Richardson, 2008; Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2013). The gender structure of the business services sector is balanced (Forbes Insights, 2012), which differs significantly from the global gender structure of the services industry, where females comprise the majority of employees. This provides implications for further research on the effect that gender has on the decision for joining SSCs as well as the underlying reasons for representatives of each gender to start a career in the centers.

2.3. Rationale behind selection of the research scope

This study focuses on the Czech Republic, a country with a high density of service centers (Tholons, 2014). The shared services sector is an important source of economic growth and a big employer in CEE, which means that a lack of skilled candidates creates limitations for industry development (Rothwell, Herbert, & Seal, 2011).

The article selects university students as the target group for the study because: 1) in the Czech Republic, 70% of the openings in the centers require a university degree (CzechInvest, 2015); 2) according to the Association of Business Service Leaders in the Czech Republic (ABSL), a

high number of employees combine their services careers with university studies (Drygala et al., 2014); and 3) many centers, including IBM, SAP, and Accenture establish partnerships with universities in order to attract talent early on (Drygala et al., 2014). The job search literature recommends that companies develop a sound understanding of graduates' career expectations and know what job and organizational characteristics influence their decisions during the job search process (Montgomery & Ramus, 2011).

Previous studies discover the influence of demographic traits such as age and gender on employee commitment (Islam et al., 2012; Meyer, Stanley, & Parfyonova, 2012; Meyer et al., 2011). According to Brimeyer, Perrucci, and Wadsworth (2010), age and gender positively correlate with commitment and interest in jobs. Giffords (2003) and Moynihan and Pandey (2007) corroborate the findings of Brimeyer that demographic traits are positively associated with interest and commitment to jobs. Contrarily, Naqvi and Bashir (2015) posit a negative correlation of age and gender to jobs in terms of IT professionals in Pakistan. Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnytsky (2002) also find a negative correlation of gender and age with employee commitment.

This article is important because it addresses the issue relevant for business services industry and fills a gap in the research on the motives that attract employees to shared service centers, given that few studies of this kind have been undertaken globally let alone in the Czech Republic. Research findings can serve as a tool for decision-making in design of attraction strategies by the BSCs. The article further attempts to justify whether demographic traits such as age and gender have a positive or negative correlation with interest in shared service jobs. The study also advances knowledge of the gender influence on employment behavior in the growing Czech market.

3. Research methodology

The analysis uses data collected from students in the Czech Republic. The questionnaire contains closed and multiple-choice responses. Survey collected the data using Google forms and was forwarded to respondents by email, using addresses from various student affairs offices. The respondents represent students of all university grades as well as different study programs. To achieve a larger response rate and make it easier for non-Czech speakers to comfortably respond, the survey presents both English and Czech language versions. The surveying phase of the research took place between May and October, 2015.

The survey contains 1283 responses (668 females and 615 males) from five Czech state universities responded to the questionnaire out of a total of 1500 students. Respondents provide their gender, age, year and place of study. Additionally, students indicate their awareness of shared service centers, readiness to select shared service jobs and attitudes towards shared service jobs. A simple count of responses to options such as salary/money benefits, opportunities for self-fulfillment, flexible schedule, opportunities for career-advancement, etc., helps to identify attitudes and criteria for selecting shared service jobs. These options come from a pilot survey conducted at one of the universities to validate the questionnaire and test the reliability.

Responses in the Czech language were translated into English and merged with the responses in English. The data was cleaned for consistency as well as removing repetitions and missing responses. Using the Stata statistical analytical tool, the data was analyzed to produce results based on the listed hypotheses.

Reports from the industry and academic literature coupled with the initial analysis of the pilot study provide background for choosing relevant variables, objectives and hypotheses for this article:

1. Identify the gender and age interest in shared service jobs by students in the Czech Republic
2. Identify the key characteristics that attract students in the Czech Republic to shared service jobs

3. Discover whether age and gender have a positive or negative correlation with interest in shared service jobs

H1. Older students (e.g., 25+) view SSC jobs less favorably.

H2. Females are more inclined to accept shared service jobs than males.

The article applies a factor analysis to reduce the number of strong inter-correlated variables that tie in with the objectives. A factor analysis reduces a large number of related variables to a more efficient number to avoid redundancy. In measuring a particular construct on the demographic influence on SSC jobs, the use of a factor analysis becomes important since specific studies in the literature review in certain disciplines do not connote age and gender as influencers.

The factor analysis uses three steps in the article. The first step ascertains the suitability of the data. The second step extracts factors using the exploratory factor analysis. The third step is the interpretation of the factors. The Pearson chi-square tests the hypotheses. The strength of a relationship among variables of a correlation is more than 0.30, a BAT of $p < 0.50$ and absence of multicollinearity in the sample size greater than 1000, confirm the suitability of the data.

4. Analysis of the results

The collected data as well as identified objectives and hypotheses determine the structure of the analysis in this article. The 1283 responses provide an adequate representation to achieve the objectives of the study. Out of this number, 668 (52%) are females and 615 (48%) are males. The age distribution is equally spread and removes biases in the analysis. The number of respondents for under 20 years is 139 (11%), 20–24 years is 419 (33%), 25–29 years is 405 (32%) and above 30 years is 320 (24%).

4.1. Shared service career preferences by gender and age

In all, 498 (39%) females and 406 (32%) males state their disinterest in working with SSCs while 170 (13%) females and 209 (16%) males answer in the affirmative. In the age category 25–29, 331 (82%) respondents indicate the disinterest in shared service jobs; 268 (64%) out of 419 for ages 20–24 also respond in the negative. Fig. 1 details the responses.

4.2. Factors influencing attitudes towards SSCs

The section probes the reason(s) for interest or not in SSC employment opportunities. Gender is a key variable that tests the level of

interest and criteria in the selection of jobs as presented in Table 1. A greater number of females (51) exhibit non-interest in working with SSCs because they perceive them as offering little potential for career growth. The reason the 27 males have a low interests in working in SSCs is the dislike for support service jobs. Inadequate salaries, the routineness of the SSC jobs, an interest in being self-employed, stressfulness and the non-flexibility of SSC jobs are reasons the majority of females fall low in taking SSC jobs. (See Table 1.)

There are four main reasons for the respondents' positive interest in SSC career opportunities (Table 1). Most of the male respondents (43) who view SSC careers positively consider them as good career opportunities. A close proportion of both male and female respondents does not show discouragement from SSC career opportunities because the salary is good for recent graduates. The future intent of a person, the professional and academic background and other demographics determine individual selection criteria for shared service jobs. To clarify and possibly open a focal point of discussion for academia and industry in SSC careers, the article analyzes the criteria respondents have when choosing jobs, focusing on the gender and age of the respondents. According to the results in Table 1, 74 males select jobs based on opportunities for self-fulfillment, as opposed to only 31 females. Other criteria include salary/cash benefits, work flexibility, opportunities for professional growth, opportunities for self-realization and recognition, and the ability to contribute to the success of the company.

4.3. Hypotheses

The Pearson chi-square results affirm the hypothesis that students from the older groups (e.g., 25+) tend to be less favorable towards SSC jobs (Table 2). The symmetric measures further confirms the results. The asymptotic standard error of 0.26 in Kendall's tau-b, using ordinal by ordinal measures, indicates that the result is reliable. In addition, a Phi and Cramer's V of 0.41 further confirms the output as reliable and appropriate. With the significance level of the test statistic being 0.00 using Pearson chi-square, the tests accepts the alternative hypothesis of older age groups less favoring SSC jobs.

The results rejects the hypothesis that females incline more to accept shared service jobs as compared to males. Based on the Pearson chi-square analysis, a significant value of 0.06 is more than the alpha value of 0.05; hence, the tests accept the null hypothesis that females are not more inclined to accept shared service jobs compared to males (Table 2).

4.4. Factor analysis

The use of a factor analysis helps in the reduction of data and the determination of variables with strong inter-correlations. It also helps to

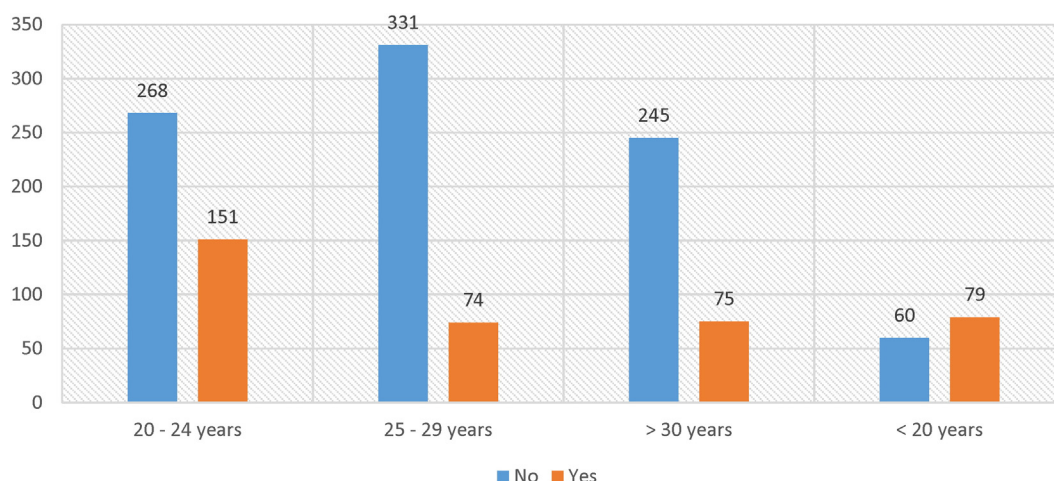


Fig. 1. Age, gender and interest in SSC jobs.

Table 1
Gender, interest in SSC jobs and reasons for being discouraged/not being discouraged from the position in the SSC.

Category	Females	Males	Total
<i>Reason for being discouraged from the SSC jobs</i>			
It is a very stressful job	7	0	7
Salary is not enough, the job is too routine	11	0	11
Do not understand SSC jobs	0	10	10
Do not like support jobs	0	17	17
No career growth potential	51	0	51
SSC jobs are not flexible	7	0	7
I want to be self-employed	11	0	11
<i>Reason for not being discouraged from the SSC jobs</i>			
Good reviews	8	31	39
There are good career opportunities	5	43	48
Salary is good for recent graduates	20	31	51
A good starting ground for professional growth	40	18	58
<i>Criteria for selecting jobs by gender</i>			
Salary/cash benefits	20	69	89
Opportunities for self-realization	32	69	101
Possibility of gaining recognition	27	27	54
Opportunities to contribute to company success	46	50	96
Work flexibility	24	53	77
Opportunities for quick professional growth	0	43	43
Opportunities for self-fulfillment	31	74	105

reduce redundancy in variables, since relevant variables for the purpose of the article are extracted. The article uses the exploratory factor analysis because it hypothesizes underlining concepts generated in the initial analysis or invalidates the findings and hypotheses.

With an initial analysis to establish the suitability of a factor analysis for the data, a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s test confirms the appropriateness of the data. Also, a correlation matrix produces correlations between variables of 0.30 and above. A Bartlett’s test of sphericity is significant at 0.00 with a KMO of 0.60 as seen in Table 3.

In the extraction of components/variables, a total variance explained table produced two components with an Eigenvalue of more than 1.00. The two components as seen in Table 3 are age and gender, confirming that these are constructs that determine interest in SSC jobs. Age

Table 2
Hypothesis test.

Symmetric measures		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by nominal	Phi	.41			.00
	Cramer's V	.41			.00
Ordinal by ordinal	Kendall's tau-b	.37	.026	12.99	.00
	Kendall's tau-c	.34	.026	12.99	.00
	Gamma	.63	.03	12.99	.00
	Kappa	. ^c			
Measure of agreement		1283			
N of valid cases		1283			
a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.					
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.					
		Value	df	Prob.	
<i>Chi-square tests (Hypothesis 1)</i>					
Pearson Chi-Square		1022.05 ^a	1	.00	
Likelihood Ratio		1410.05	1		
Fisher's Exact Test		1205.99			
N of Valid Cases		1283			
<i>Chi-Square Tests (Hypothesis 2)</i>					
Pearson Chi-Square		1032.04	1	0.06	
Likelihood Ratio		1398.05	1		

Table 3
Exploratory factor analysis.

KMO and Bartlett's test						
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy			.60			
Bartlett's test of sphericity			Approx. Chi-square	565.53		
			df	10		
			Sig.	.00		
Total variance explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Age	1.76	35.18	35.18	1.76	35.18	35.18
Gender	1.21	24.15	59.33	1.21	24.15	59.33
Interested in working with SSCs	.78	15.62	74.95			
Not discouraged if job position is offered in the SSC	.70	13.92	88.87			
Discouraged if job position is offered in the SSC	.56	11.13	100.00			
Extraction method: principal component analysis.						
a. When analyzing a covariance matrix, the initial Eigenvalues are the same across the raw and rescaled solution.						

Pattern matrix (rotated component matrix)

Variable	Component	
	1	2
Age	.71	–.040
Gender	.74	–.35
Interested in working with SSCs	.41	.58
Decision be influenced if vacancy is offered in BSC	.72	.21
Discouraged if job position is offered in the SSC	–.16	.84
Extraction method: principal component analysis.		
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. ^a		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

explains 35.18% of the variance, while gender explains 24.15%. With a cumulative percentage explanation of variance at 59.33, the two components are key in analyzing the interest of students in business service jobs. As part of the confirmation of the two components extracted, the scree plot in Fig. 2 shows two components of Eigenvalues above 1.00. In addition, the Monte Carlo PCA software confirms the generated components. The component matrix further ascertains the level of the inter-relationship among variables. Variables such as age, gender, interest in working for SSCs, being discouraged or not if positions are offered in SSCs, load above 0.30 under the two components.

5. Discussion

Analyzed results in tandem with the objectives, hypotheses, and focus of the article, provide the following findings that serve as a pillar for further academic research.

The main reason to accept the offer of an SSC job is because it is a good career start for professional development, and salaries are good for a recent graduate, regardless of gender. SSC career opportunities decline primarily because of students' non-interest in support jobs, and these jobs are not flexible. Industry players in SSC career paths need to redefine the job areas with these factors in mind, to pick the interest of both males and female students in SSC career opportunities. Positive reviews are reasons why males embrace SSC jobs. Since peers are influential in the decisions of colleagues, the increased use of peer recommendations will further trigger the interest of males in SSC jobs.

Characteristics such as opportunities for self-fulfillment, salary benefits and work flexibility are prominent in choosing jobs. A good number of male and female respondents show interest in careers that offer

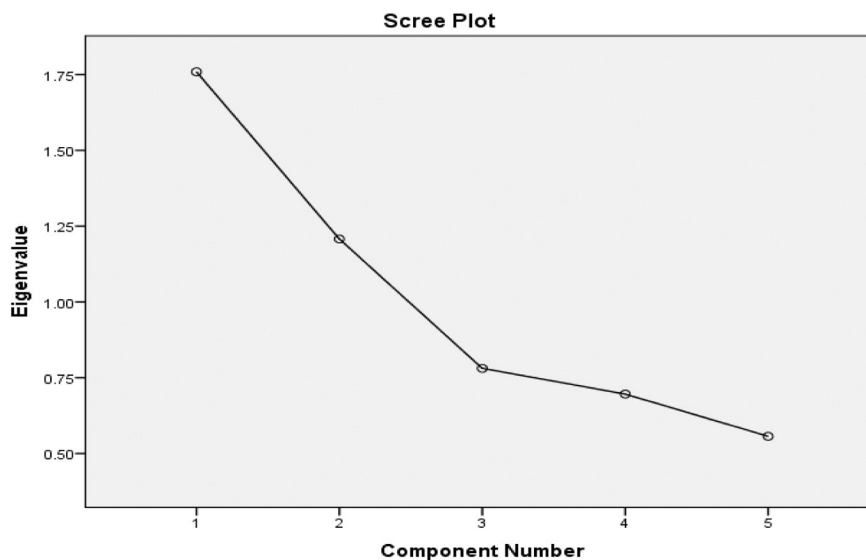


Fig. 2. Scree plot for total variance.

an opportunity to contribute to the company's growth. They would further consider a job in a company that shows recognition both inside and outside of the company. While cash benefits are also categorized as important for males, females tend to be less concerned about the criterion. The parameters for the choice of jobs and gender appropriation can be filtered by industry and aligned to company policy for employment.

Among all surveyed age groups, females in the age group of 20–24 are less likely to start careers in the SSCs than their male counterparts. Sixty percent of females (412 out of 668) respond of not being ready to start a career in a SSC, though the service industry is perceived as a “female” occupation. Within the same age group, 295 males will not start jobs in SSCs. The reasons mentioned earlier for the non-willingness of this age group need careful examination by industry players. The results show an attraction of males above age 35 to SSC jobs.

In the age group 20–24, 82% (704 out of 855) of respondents say they would not start a career in the SSCs, while 60% of respondents between 25 and 29 years of age (113 out of 187) indicate a negative attitude to SSC careers. About 24% (24 out of 99) of age 30+ respondents are not interested in SSC careers. This finding may be a clue for changing the sourcing strategy for SSCs. Currently, graduates represent the main hiring pool for most jobs, and SSC attraction strategies should target different age and gender groups appropriately.

The factor analysis confirms that demographics such as age and gender are critical in choosing a career in the SSCs. Other variables are also seen as cogent in the decision tree. These findings should encourage discourse within the industry and among academics.

6. Conclusion

The article analyzes data collected from students of five Czech Universities between May and October, 2015 on career preferences in Shared Service Centers. Based on the stated objectives and hypotheses, the data is analyzed using the Stata statistical analytical tool. Discussion of results is in line with the objectives of the article. Using a factor analysis, the extraction of components to confirm the relevant variables in determination of career preferences in SSC jobs prevails.

The findings in this study corroborate that of Brimeyer et al. (2010); Giffords (2003) and Moynihan and Pandey (2007) that age and gender are cardinal demographic traits in job interest and commitment. Specifically in the field of SSCs, the study confirms that age and gender are positively correlated with interest and commitment to SSC jobs in Czech Republic. The findings equally tie in with that of Eddleston and Powell (2008); Kismiantini et al. (2014) and Sutherland (2011) that

good pay and career advancement opportunities attract males to jobs while females look for opportunities to contribute to company success. The findings of Broadbridge et al. (2007); Eisner (2011) and Terjesen et al. (2007) that generation Y males and females choose jobs that offer long-term career opportunities and professional advancement is proven in regard to SSC jobs.

The findings present employers and recruitment agencies with an improved platform for establishing an SSC workforce. The findings are not generalized due to cultural and other parametric differences but do proffer cogent areas of interest and pave the way for future comparative analysis.

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