

UNIVERSITY GRADUATES' COMPETENCES OF SELECTED FACULTIES IN COMPARISON TO EMPLOYERS' NEEDS

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Abstract: The following article deals with the issue of competences related to university graduates' profile. The objective is to point out the differences between actual graduate's profile in Slovakia, particularly the graduates of socio-scientific field and the actual needs of labour market. Labour market and working environment require from graduates not only specific theoretical knowledge but also certain level of competences. Data enabling comparative analysis of graduates' competences level with the level of competences required by employers were acquired by questionnaires, interviews with employers as well as by feedback from employers after one year of working experiences with employed graduates. Results of survey reveal compatibility degree of selected faculties graduates' profile with actual employers' needs.

Keywords: competences, university graduates' profile, employers' needs

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1. INTRODUCTION

The position of a graduate on the labour market depends on accordance of his or her competence profile acquired during the study with labour market demand. The accordance degree is influenced by how employers view a given field of study, and educational institution. Graduate's chances also depend on his or her complex profile comprising of professional education, competences, and previous work experiences.[5]

Competence can be defined as an ability to use knowledge, skills, and attitudes in practical activity. It represents a set of assumptions to a particular activity. It is such a type of behaviour that leads to high performance. It is possible to analyze and measure it.[1]

In Slovak specialized literature these two terms often appear to be interchanged. In Slovak language, competence means „kompetentnosť“ whilst most of the articles use the term „kompetencia“ meant as competence. However, the term „kompetencia“ means authority, authorization usually given by authority or belonged to an authority (an institution or an individual). The difference between these two terms could be described as follows: „kompetencia“ emphasises something given to an individual from outside based on consensus; „kompetentnosť“ emphasises the inner quality of individual that is a result of his development in a given moment enabling to perform in particular way. [6]

Competence is a relatively stable characteristics of an individual. It means that if the development level of competence is known, we are able to predict with a high probability the quality of individual's behaviour in a wide range of handling the situations and work tasks. [8] Competence indicates how its owner will behave and think in certain situations. Individual parts of one's personality which make the competence can be broken down into five categories> motives, traits, self/perception, knowledge, and abilities. [6]

Key competences are general abilities of individual exceeding the professional borders and playing an

important role in one's success on the labour market and performance in a particular work position during one's career. [2] The labour market and work environment require from graduate both theoretical knowledge in a specific field and key competences. They do not depend on individual school subjects, and can be developed as a part of general formation base. The key competences are basically categorized as follows:

1. *Competences concerning an individual* are represented by the application of learning techniques and techniques of mental work (approach to learning, evaluation and presentation of information), autonomy and responsibility, and stress resistance (both physical and psychical resistance).
2. *Problem solving competences*. It comprises, for instance, of planning, organizing, and the controlling the work results.
3. *Competences concerning the others*. Communication and cooperation (group behaviour, interpersonal contact and teamwork). [7]

Competence model contains the set of competences arranged in a certain way. It reflects the notion of an organization about an ideal employee for a particular type of work position. It contains all the traits, knowledge, abilities and values related to work which motivate an individual to do one's job effectively. It describes the behaviour leading to high work performance in an appropriate work position. Today there is no other tool than the competence model that would create a single explanatory frame for selection process, appraisal, development and education eventually compensation for employees. [3] It epitomises a bridge between company strategy and personnel strategy. It links organization management, organization values and human resources management. [4]

2. STATEMENT OF THE SURVEY PROBLEM

Graduates' transition from school to employment and success of their integration into labour market in Slovakia is

marked by several difficulties. Current situation of high education and the public discussion criticising the quality of teaching process at Slovak universities can influence employers in a negative way, particularly in case of graduates in human science field who make more than one half of unemployed graduates.

Current graduates' profile is not compatible with labour market needs. Theoretical preparation provided by universities makes only a part of what graduate needs to get closer one's competence profile to employers' needs. Work performance depends on ability to use the knowledge, personal characteristics, attitudes, and experiences in practice. University graduates have certain level of key competence. At the same time competences related to a certain work position in the given field of study is expected.

The first objective in our survey was to identify which competences should be a part of graduate's profile so that they would enable successful integration into the labour market. Then, our second objective was to identify to what extent the current level of graduates' competences corresponds to employers' needs.

3. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of data acquisition about the current competence profile of graduates we carried out the study and survey. We designed profile of graduates from Faculty of Management at Comenius University in Bratislava (FMCU) and Faculty of Law at Comenius University in Bratislava (FLCU). We compared real graduates' competences level with actual needs of employers of these graduates. Questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used as a survey tool. For processing the quantitative data and for interpretation of survey results, mathematical, and statistical methods (percentual calculation, table and graphical data processing), text analysis, deduction, induction, and comparison were used.

4. SAMPLING

Survey sample represents 137 respondents from above mentioned faculties. The respondents entered the labour market in 2010. Their faculties are those with human oriented studies in being successful on a labour market.

Survey sample of employers represent 101 employers who employed graduates from our survey sample. The employers gave us feed-back at the end 2011, after more than one year of employing the graduates.

5. RESULTS

Based on information from employers we identified a set of competences, knowledge, and practical skills in graduates' profile. *Competences* are as follows: *Creativity, Strategic orientation, Leadership and coaching, Teamwork, Effective communication, Stress resistance, Analytical thinking, Focusing on goals, Influence (the ability to assert one's opinion), Internal client focus, Foreign language communication, Acquiring knowledge and skills, Activity, Entrepreneurship, Cultural sensitivity, Task responsibility, Self-confidence. Theoretical knowledge* is as follows: *Amount of professional knowledge, Up-to-date professional knowledge, Interlinking the professional knowledge, Linking professional knowledge with practice, Language skills, Ability to work with PC. Practical experiences* are as follows: *Practical experiences in the field of study, PC work practice.*

As seen in Table 1 we created an outline of real level of competences, professional knowledge, and practical experiences of selected faculties' graduates. Further, the results show the actual needs of employers on these graduates. By comparison of these results discrepancy between real graduate's profile and employers' needs was confirmed.

Based on survey the order of competences, knowledge and practical experiences of monitored graduates is what was created to see those where readiness of respondents is best and those where readiness of graduates is low. Graduates of Faculty of management are best prepared in *Language skills, Foreign language communication, Linking of professional knowledge with practice, Amount of professional knowledge, Acquiring of new knowledge and skills*. Lower level of competences can be seen in case of *Activity, Entrepreneurship and Leadership and coaching*.

FLCU best prepared its graduates in these competences: *Influence, PC work practice, Up-to-date professional knowledge and Foreign language communication*. Lower level appeared in case of *Effective communication, Responsibility, Cultural sensitivity Teamwork, Creativity and Practical experience in the field of study*.

What most of the employers expect from graduates is a very good or excellent level of identified competences. In case of the graduates of FLCU there is an exemption only in competences *Cultural sensitivity* and *Practical experiences in field of study* where average or low level is expected. However, most of surveyed graduates don't reach the required level of competences expected by the employers.

Most of the graduates of FMCU reach average level in 8 competences – *Teamwork, Effective communication, Stress resistance, Foreign language communication, Acquiring of new knowledge and skills, Cultural sensitivity, Responsibility and Self-confidence*. As to graduates of FLCU, most of them reach the average level only in 4 competences – *Stress resistance, Influence, New knowledge acquisition orientation, Activity*. The level of the remaining competences of graduates of the both faculties is either low or zero.

Incompetence of the graduates of FMCU appeared particularly in *Leadership and coaching, Influence, Activity and Entrepreneurship*. The surveyed graduates do not have these competences but the employers declared the need of excellent level of these competences. Regarding FLCU graduates it was only in the competence *Teamwork* where we found a big difference, when graduates do not have this competence developed while employers expect them to have an excellent level of it.

Competences' level corresponds with employers' needs only in one competence – *Foreign language communication*, as for graduates of FMCU. Concerning the graduates of FLCU there was an accordance found in two competences – *Stress resistance and Influence*.

Emphasis on theoretical knowledge is put particularly on the graduates of FLCU. In this category most of the employers expect very good or excellent level. In the category of theoretical knowledge graduates' competences meet the employers' need only in the case of competence *Linking professional knowledge with practice*, especially in management graduates.

Table 1 Differences between labour market needs and the graduate's profile

Readiness of Graduates for Employers' requirements.	FMCU					FLCU				
	Zero	Low	Average	Very good	Excellent	Zero	Low	Average	Very good	Excellent
Competences										
Creativity										
Strategic Orientation										
Leadership and Coaching										
Teamwork										
Effective communication										
Stress resistance										
Analytical thinking										
Focusing on goals										
Influence										
Internal client focus										
Foreign language communication										
Acquiring knowledge and skills										
Activity										
Entrepreneurship										
Cultural sensitivity										
Task responsibility										
Self-confidence										
Theoretical knowledge										
Amount of professional knowledge										
Up-to-date professional knowledge										
Interlinking the professional knowledge										
Linking prof. knowledge with practice										
Language skills										
Ability to work with PC										
Practical experiences										
Practical experiences in the field of study										
PC work practice										

Legend:

Graduates' level of readiness

	15% respondents and more.
	50% respondents.
	Most of respondents.

Level of competence required by employers:

	15% employers and more.
	Most of employers.
	Accordance between graduates' readiness and employers' needs.

Source: Own processing based on the survey

Practical experiences in the field of study are not so important for most of the employers. They expect low or average level of them. Higher importance of practical experiences is connected to work with PC. As to graduates of FMCU, employers require excellent level but most of the graduates have an average level of this competence. As to graduates FLCU there is accordance between graduates' level of PC work practice and employers' needs.

6. CONCLUSION

Conducted survey confirmed discrepancy between competence profile of selected graduates and employers' needs. Together with this discrepancy individual competences and the level of differences were specified. The results of survey could serve as a background of a future development of graduates from surveyed faculties. Evidently, in no way can faculties perfectly adapt to employers' needs as the needs of each employer are individual. However, we assume that developing certain

students' related competences to work position in the field of study would make possible to get closer to general notion of targeted employers. Thus, both for universities and graduates it is inevitable to be provided with regular feedback about actual and needed competences on the labour market.

The universities should create for their future graduates conditions enabling the transformation of inputs (graduates'

set of personal characteristics, knowledge and experiences) into adequate and acceptable outputs (competences expressed in behaviour) while entering into labour market.

Graduate should know what the level of her or his competences is as well as the level of competences required by employers. Graduate should also know how to reach desired level of competences and what or his or her real chances on labour market are.

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