

THE MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES OF STUDENTS OF SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: This paper deals with key competences of students and graduates at a selected public university with an economic orientation in the Slovak Republic. The students expect from the University to have access to quality education, but also after finishing their studies to be able to apply them in practice. The businesses and organizations expect from university graduates to be equipped with competencies needed to develop their businesses and maintain their competitiveness. This paper discusses the equipment of graduates with general competencies such as knowledge, skills, abilities, values and attitudes, as well as managerial competencies such as communication, planning, organization and control, analytical thinking, creativity, problem solving, management and leadership, teamwork, flexibility and digital skills, etc. The paper presents the results of a survey focused on the scope of skills and competencies of the graduates of the University of Žilina, the Faculty of Operation and Economics of Transport and Communications, the Economics and Business Management study program. There the student's profile is managerial oriented and the range of skills and competencies are considered to be the key factors for university graduates to be employed in a modern society.

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Introduction

Universities are primarily focused on developing knowledge and skills from a professional and theoretical background, which are, of course, very important for future career. But to a lesser extent, university study is devoted to development of competencies, respectively capabilities that have an impact on work performance. The sense of their use in organizational behaviour and management lies in the fact that an employee who has competencies relevant to a particular job position developed at a higher level usually achieves better performance at work. Competencies developed by students during higher education affect their performance in future career.

It should be noted that the purpose and goal of higher education institutions is not to prepare students for what specific employers require. Although employers and students might welcome such a possibility, but in terms of the labour market this would not be possible due to the sustainability of the workforce. However, employers consider specific competences as crucial and the probability of successful recruitment increases in graduate students who have these competences.

It would therefore be acceptable in the future if universities were to adapt the education system so that, in addition to the theoretical knowledge and skills required, students would also have the characteristics that their future employers and the overall labour market require.

Key competencies of graduate students

The concept of the competency model emerged in the 1970s in the United States. McClelland defined that success and performance in professional life cannot be predicted on the base of student achievements at school. The Oxford Dictionary defines the term of competence as the ability to perform a certain activity successfully or efficiently. In terms of organizational behaviour, the term competence means that if a person has a higher level of certain competence he or she is able to perform better at work. It is the difference between more efficient and less efficient workers.

These are characteristics that when developed in an individual, they are usually accompanied by success and higher performance in different professions.

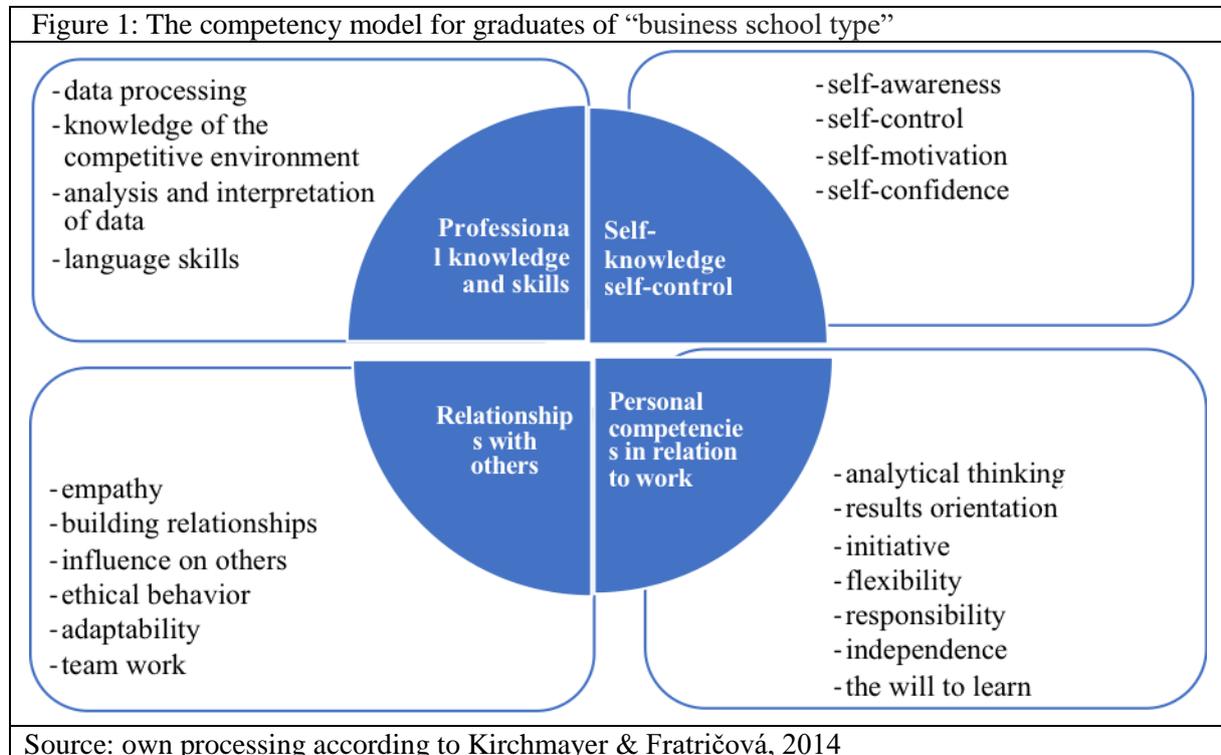
In the past, employers were primarily oriented to giving preference to candidates who excelled mainly in professional knowledge, skills and qualifications. Spencer stated that above all "it is effective for employers to recruit such candidates who have an appropriate competence profile and then invest in their expertise and skills"(Spencer, 1997). It is important to unify the views of what characteristics a student should have in order to succeed in the changing labour market.

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The authors Búciová and Fratričová conducted research to obtain information on what characteristics students should have in order to create a comprehensive competency model. Their research focused on students of economically focused universities who "can apply in areas of management from financial management, accountancy and controlling to marketing positions and human resources"(Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2014). The authors have created a competency model components of which are those characteristics most often required by graduates in such jobs as "entry-level jobs". These are the positions at which graduates begin to build their careers.



The competency model created for the needs of student graduates consists of four sections as seen in Figure 1. The first category is professional knowledge and skills, the next category is knowledge and self-management, then relationships with others and the last category is personal competence in relation to work. The first quadrant includes technically focused competencies and is directly related to the performance of the work. This includes knowledge of the competitive environment, data processing, analysis and interpretation of quantitative data, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data and foreign languages.

The next section comprises of competencies such as self-confidence, belief in achieving goals, and self-control, which the authors define as a way of controlling emotions and self-motivation. Very important characteristics represent the ability to building relationships at the workplace, empathy and the importance to respect others.

These are the skills that are associated with emotional intelligence. The emotional intelligence provides the basis for such competencies that have a significant impact on performance. The last quadrant, contains personal competencies in relation to work, and there are also skills that come from personal characteristics like willingness to participate in different items, learn something new, initiative or responsibility for work.

The authors Búciová and Fratričová carried out research with the conclusion that in order to be successful in professional life, university graduates should be oriented on an appropriate competency model. It would be certainly helpful for universities to define the areas in which they can start to focus more deeply in order to improve the future workforce (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2014).

Employers' Career Requirements for Students

Understanding the individual knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) and key demands of a job was traditionally seen as the cornerstone of human resource function (Brannick et al., 2007).

Recruiters have to find the applicants who match job classifications specifications and who are fit for their organisations (Kristof-Brown, 2000). This is done by classifying jobs in terms of the qualifications an individual needs to possess in order to fulfil a particular open position (Huffcutt & Youngcourt, 2007) or by specifying the personality characteristics and social skills associated with selecting individuals in team-based settings (Morgeson et al., 2005).

There are common competencies and abilities which are commonly required from graduates in the labour market. These are the skills required by almost all recruiters and employers who offer jobs to graduates. An important fact is that students have little or no knowledge from related disciplines. Almost half of the companies (43%) state that for the start of the student's career, it is also necessary to gain experience in related fields. Acquiring professional knowledge, skills and attitudes are essential for successful performance in a professional role (Navaitienė, 2014).

Nowadays the incidence of stress is almost a common part of every individual's life. Therefore, the ability to work effectively under stress is a highly valued skill. An ability seen as particularly important is to deliver new, innovative solutions that speak about the creativity of an individual and their ability to see the interconnections between items (Neuschlová et al., 2015)

Companies that offer work to college students, especially in the field of economics, also require analytical thinking as one of the key competencies of students in the performance of individual professions. It is therefore a process of analysis, a review of phenomena, and their connectivity to solve a problem. Up to 60% of surveyed companies require the student graduates to have these skills at either an excellent or very good level. Another essential skill that students should have is the ability to learn quickly. This skill was required by almost every recruiter mentioned above. The percentage of companies that offered work to students and required the ability to quickly acquire new knowledge can be defined at a level that exceeds 90% of all advertising companies.

Among the other skills we must mention the ability to work in a team, the ability to prepare written documents and reports, effective negotiation, the ability to explain opinions to others, excellent self-presentation, active knowledge of at least one foreign language, computer skills and the Internet and other software the ability to coordinate activities, skills to mobilize the work capacity of others, the ability to recognize new opportunities.

A number of comparative views unfortunately indicate that Slovak higher education is not the best in this respect. Although it has expanded quantitatively in the last quarter of the century, the quality of higher education is declining. Employability in general as well as the employability of graduates is deteriorating and the qualifications that they come with to the labor market do not meet the employers' requirements. Also, their assessment of how higher education meets the needs of the Slovak economy and their competitiveness is very critical (Národný projekt, 2015).

Career anchors represent the reconciliation of knowledge, abilities and skills with employers' working motives. In terms of career needs a career needs to be defined on a base of the employer's requirements. The graduates should have a broad theoretical perspective not only from the field they are studying, but also from related disciplines. They should have the skills that are provided by higher education institutes in addition to language skills. We defined employer requirements from the perspective of employers. Most often students require sufficient theoretical knowledge and sufficient practical experience (Antalová, 2013).

Graduate students do not have practical experience or work habits, and they lack working contacts to make it easier for them to start a career (Kullová, 2011). Students of economic study programs should acquire the skills after graduation.

There is also knowledge of foreign languages, stress management, ability to find new and innovative solutions, sufficiently developed analytical thinking, acquiring new knowledge, the ability to work in a team, and the abilities to promote and self-present. An ideal candidate looks like a person who should be a positively tuned with excellent linguistic knowledge and practice in the field of study (Štofková & Stríček, 2014).

Methodology of the survey

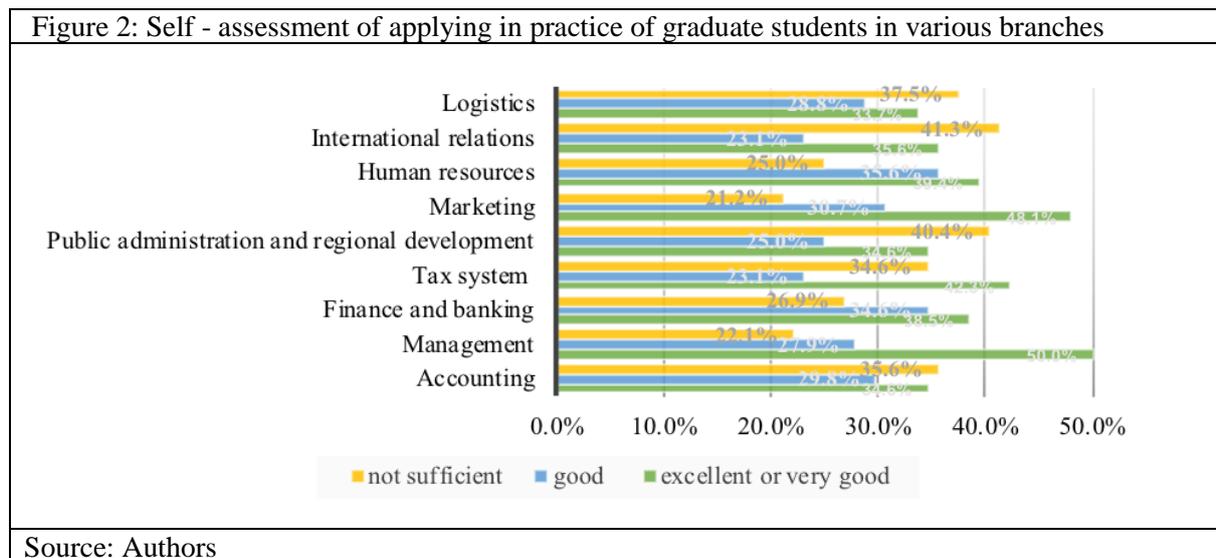
For the data collection technique, we used a semi-structured interview. In the case of the second data collection, we used an online interview through a questionnaire. The sample represented the university

students ending their bachelor, or master’s degree courses in economics. Potential employers were interviewed in the case of the semi-structured interview. In most cases, there were personnel agencies offering a wide range of possible job offers.

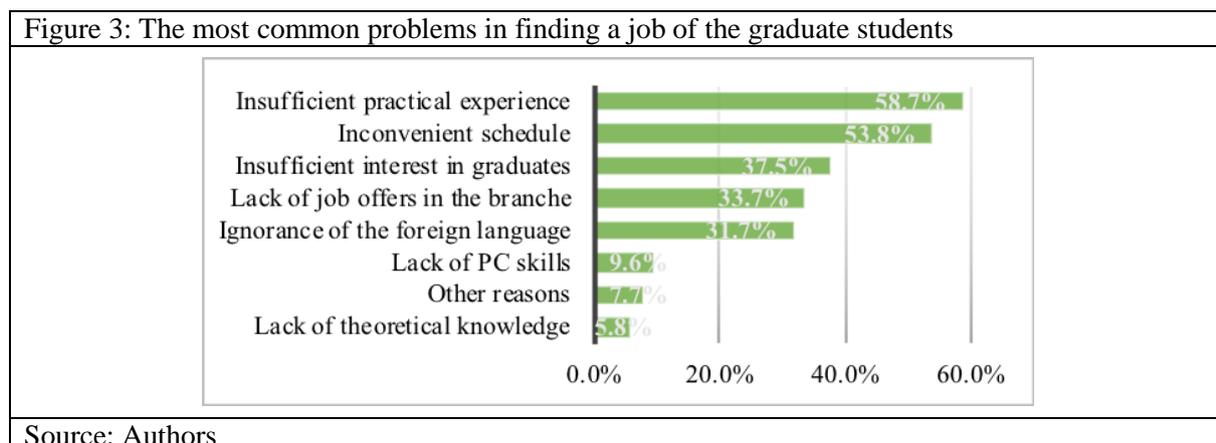
The semi-structured interview brought us important information about what employers require from future employees in this case, graduates of higher education institutions. This was especially important because the answers to the questions would be different for people with a certain professional background.

Results of the survey

One of the questions was aimed at the application in practice from a student perspective. Respondents rated their preparedness in their field of study as excellent, very good, good or poor level. The students’ management (50%) and marketing (48.1%) were the best prepared. The students evaluated their preparedness in Public administration, Regional development, and in International Relations branches as poor. The various self-assessment ratings can be seen in Figure 2.

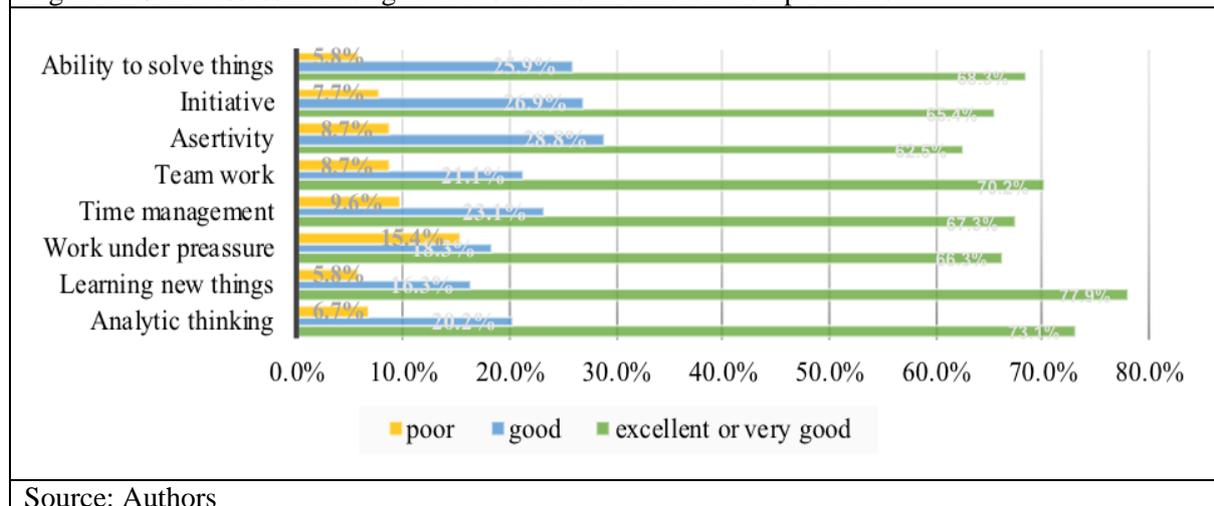


More than half of the respondents (53.8%) did not find relevant work during their studies at university on the basis of various problems. In first place, the students consider that they do not have enough practical experience reached (58.7%). The future employers require practical experience from university students. The most common problems in finding a job of the graduate students are shown in the Figure 3.



The results of the survey showed that respondents (students) evaluated their particular competencies positively, and the best abilities, as students indicated, were learning new things (77.9%) and analytical thinking (73.1%). Weak competencies respondents described were working under pressure (15%) and time management skills (10%). The results are displayed in the Figure 4. Most students said they only could speak one foreign language English or German (62.5%).

Figure 4: Self - assessment of graduate students in different competencies



Source: Authors

Among the most frequently occurring demands of employers required from their future employees belonged a willingness to learn, flexibility and adaptability, the ability to find new, innovative solutions and the ability to cope with stress, respectively the ability to work under pressure, language skills, to work in teams, creativeness, suggestion of new things and communication, etc. (Rievajová, 2006).

It is important to identify the competencies that are considered to be valuable for success in important areas of life. The employers have growing requirements for job applicants. Among the most frequently demanded competencies of graduate students of economic branches belong the ability to learn and acquire new knowledge and the ability to find new solutions.

In addition, it was the flexibility and other skills that are placed among the student's personal competencies in relation to the work (listed in the Competency Model) problem solving, decision making, analytical thinking, creativity, time management, capability of team work, initiative, and working under pressure (Medvecká et al., 2017).

The positions offered by employers were the position of a junior accountant, junior consultant, junior auditor, customer support position as well as administrative staff. The criteria that are considered to be the most important when considering a candidate or graduate is their knowledge of a foreign language at a communicative level. The knowledge of foreign language is not required on all positions, but without speaking fluently at least one foreign language, career progression is not expected.

Other criteria required from the side of employers were appropriate personal characteristics. The students have often high wage expectation and poor self-presentation and an insufficient level of communication skills. In addition, students should have some experience in practice in their field of study. In particular, the students' initiative to find at least part-time job or internship was not sufficiently satisfying

Conclusion

The employers expect graduates not only to acquire knowledge but also to develop competencies and practical skills. The graduate students who have these competences have a higher probability of successful job recruitment.

The feature that is considered to be important in graduates is the competency of foreign languages. Other criteria required from the side of employers are appropriate personal characteristics and self-presentation and communication skills as well as experience in practice in their field of study.

Therefore, it is important that higher education institutions adapt the educational process with the intention to improve the students' competences that the employers require. The need for key competences and managerial competencies have a growing tendency and are necessary for prosperity, effectiveness and further development of companies.

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