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APPLICATION OF THE COMPETENCY MODEL IN BUSINESS ADMINISTARATION HIGHER EDUCATION IN HORIZON 2030

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to establish the extent to which the education in Business Administration at the University of National and World Economy helps to acquire the main key competencies included in the European Qualification Framework. In achieving this goal we first analyze the qualification characteristics of the curricula to determine the extent to which the key competencies from the Framework are included in the educational program. Secondly we analyze the curricula of specialized disciplines for Business Administration in order to determine which of the disciplines included in the curriculum, the acquisition of which competencies contribute. Thirdly we analyze the expert opinions of business representatives on the most important competencies that graduates must have for future. Finally, we conduct personal interviews with lecturers about their approaches to help students acquire key competencies, necessary for their realization. Our results show that UNWE provides good level of relevance with the European Qualification Framework, but in line of horizon 2030 there are three major areas as a trend in the development of Business Administration: Human Resources; Information technology and Innovations.

Keywords: competency model; competence; Business Administration

Introduction

The preparation of qualified workforce in the field of management according to the needs of the labor market depends on the connection of the educational system with the real needs of the business. For this purpose, the European educational standards, the European Qualifications Framework and the National Competence Framework are used most often. In search of a universal, basic model of compliance, modern higher education institutions are moving towards a competency-based approach to education. The competency approach to the management training of specialists with higher education should be realized through the qualification

characteristics and curricula, by updating the content and improving the quality of teaching and learning, by algorithmizing the feedback with employers. In this article we show to what extent Business Administration education at UNWE builds the necessary competences in students and what are the problem areas in this field that need to be addressed.

1. The essence of the concepts of "competency" and "competence"

The management literature offers many interpretations of the term "competency". McClelland (1973) called "competencies" the characteristics that distinguish excellent performers. American researcher Boyatzis (1982) defines competence as: "The ability of the manager to acquire an image that meets the requirements of work in a particular organizational environment and in this capacity is the reason for achieving the desired results."

There is not generally accepted understanding of the difference between "competency" and "competence". The terms are used either as synonyms or by "competency" is understood any ability of the individual, the main characteristic of which the owner is able to achieve high results in a particular activity, and "competence" – a combination of abilities, performance of human work at an appropriate level, corresponding to high labor performance (Mihalkova et al. 2011). According to the British Institute for Personnel Development (2001)[1], they are almost interchangeable, leading to some confusion as to whether the concept refers to an activity, personality trait, skill or even task. In the European Qualifications Framework, "competence" is interpreted as a proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and / or methodological skills in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competences are described in terms of the degree of responsibility and autonomy (European Commission, 2008)[2].

Zhuk (2009) defines competency as a generalized personal characteristic that determines the readiness to successfully solve professional, social and personal problems, and competence as a pronounced ability to apply knowledge, skills, experience, personal qualities to solve of professional, social and personal problems.

The Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce[3] distinguishes the concepts of "competency" and "competence" as follows:

Competencies: Competencies are a narrower concept that is considered in the context of demonstrated behavior in a specific situation and in the performance of a specific task, role, etc. Competency is closer to "know how" than to "know what". Competencies are always in dynamics and are proven permanently (assessed, measured) in a practical environment, in other words – how the employee copes with the work in the specific organization, the specific workplace, the specific tasks and problems manifesting itself in specific situations.

Unlike competencies, ***competence*** is:

– level of awareness, knowledge, experience and authoritative expertise in certain areas;

– a complex personal resource, providing the opportunity for effective interaction in one or another area of the surrounding world, depending on the degree of possession of the necessary competencies (i.e. competencies are part of the competence)]

– broader and integral concept, a set of personal qualities (values, knowledge, skills, habits, abilities), determined by experience and activity in certain socially and personally significant areas]

– a concept that is closer to the understanding of professional qualification (a measure of the degree of mastery of knowledge, skills and professionally significant qualities acquired through training and / or work experience – definition in the NCAP);

– ability to perform a specific position, functions and roles, which is formally proven by a relevant document (diploma, certificate, etc.), in accordance with the requirements of Bulgarian legislation.

We can conclude that "competence" is more comprehensive when it comes to its content and includes the motivation and attitude of the individual to apply in action the acquired knowledge, skills and experience to achieve a result in a given field.

The analysis of the above definitions shows, on the one hand, the variety of aspects of the problem of introducing a competency-based approach in education, on the other hand, it shows the following common theoretical and methodological positions of many researchers:

– the competence has an integrative, active, personal character and acts as a unity of knowledge and experience aimed at successful activity;

– the competence/competencies are used to express learning outcomes;

– competence determines the readiness and ability to solve not only typical tasks, but also problems with a high degree of complexity and uncertainty in the field of profession, as well as social and personal tasks;

– competence is a generalized characteristic of the professionalism the modern specialist; competence is a certain level of professionalism demonstrated by a person;

– competence is formed and developed on the basis of competencies in organic unity with the value orientations of the person, subordinated to his motivation, updating and self-regulation.

2. Competency approach in the field of higher education

The competency approach is the basis of modern and quality higher education. It became widespread at the beginning of the 21st century in connection with the discussions on the ways to modernize Bulgarian education in general and Bulgarian

higher education in particular. The competency approach presupposes not the acquisition by the student of knowledge and skills, separated from each other, but their mastering in a complex. Competency approach is an approach that focuses on the result of education, and the result is not considered the amount of information received, but the ability of the person to act in various problematic situations.

The university imposes certain requirements on graduates and presupposes not only a high level of professional training, but also broad erudition, competent speech, ability to behave in society, ability to interact with professionals from unrelated fields and adapt to the diversity of the modern world. For a successful professional activity today it is not enough to get a higher education, you need to constantly replenish your knowledge, to be able to study independently and constantly, supplementing your professional and cultural competencies with information from other fields of knowledge.

The innovative potential of the competency approach in the field of higher education is to justify and formulate the goals and results of education at the university in the form of competencies in the context of assessing and ensuring the quality of education. Researchers from Western European universities consider the problem of developing and justifying the relationship between the concepts of "learning outcomes" – "competencies" as the most important task for reforming education, developing new approaches to assessing and ensuring the quality of education (Baydenko 2005).

From the point of view of the competency approach, the principles of education in the field of higher education are:

1. The educational process must be aimed at achieving results expressed in the form of competencies.

2. Learners must consciously take responsibility for their own learning. To this end, learners need to actively interact.

3. Students should be given the opportunity to learn how to search, process and use information. It is necessary to abandon the practice of knowledge transfer.

4. Learners must be able to practice learned competencies in a large number of real-world contexts.

5. Individualization of learning: providing an opportunity for each student to master competencies at an individual pace (Krasnozhon 2012).

The competency approach at the level of organization of the educational process of the university is a system of requirements for the organization of the educational process and its management, which ensures the overall nature of vocational training of students at the university, defining learning outcomes in the form of academic, professional and socio-personal competencies that together ensure efficiency in solving problems of varying degrees of complexity, including in changing socio-economic conditions. The competency-based approach means that the goals of education are more closely linked to situations of applicability in the world of work.

In our opinion, the competency approach does not replace the academic (knowledge-oriented) approach to education and evaluation of its results, but rather deepens, expands and complements it. The competency approach is in line with market conditions, as it involves the development of universal key competencies that are in demand in today's labor market.

3. The education in Business Administration at UNWE from the point of view of the framework for the key competencies for lifelong learning

In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. The European Framework of Reference for Key Competences attached to it identified the competencies needed by each person for personal fulfillment and development, work, social inclusion and active citizenship. Member States were invited to use this reference framework to ensure that initial education and training provide all young people with the means and opportunity to develop key competences to a level that prepares them for life as adults, and that adults can develop and update their key competencies throughout their lives.

Within the framework of the Bulgarian Presidency, with the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 22 May 2018, these key competencies have already been updated, but without changing the understanding of them as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The competencies in the Recommendation are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, where:

1) knowledge is composed of facts and figures, concepts, ideas and theories that have already been established and support the understanding of a particular field or subject;

2) skills are defined as the ability and capacity of a person to reason and use existing knowledge to achieve results;

3) attitudes describe the predisposition and way of thinking about acting or reacting to ideas, persons or situations.

The Reference Framework identifies eight key competences as follows: language literacy; multilingual competence; mathematical competence and competence in the field of exact sciences, technologies and engineering; digital competence; personal competence, social competence and competence for acquiring learning skills; civic competence; entrepreneurial competence and competence for cultural awareness and expression.

In order to establish the extent to which the training in Business Administration at University of National and World Economy (UNWE) helps to acquire the main key competencies included in the Framework, the following tasks were formulated:

1) To analyze the qualification characteristics of the curricula of the specialties "Business Administration" in Bachelor's, Business Administration and Business

Administration with specialization in Higher Management to determine the extent to which the key competencies included in the Framework are included in the educational program in Business Administration.

2) To analyze the curricula of specialized disciplines for Business Administration in order to determine which of the disciplines included in the curriculum, the acquisition of which competencies of the Framework contribute and what percentage of the studied disciplines form each of these 8 groups of competencies.

3) To analyze the expert opinions of business representatives in Bulgaria on the most important competencies that business administration graduates must have in order to be implemented in practice.

4) To conduct personal interviews with lecturers from the Department of Management, holders of specialized disciplines included in the curriculum of Business Administration, Bachelor's Degree, about their pedagogical approaches and technologies to help students acquire key competencies, necessary for their realization in business.

According to the first task, after an analysis of the qualification characteristics to the curricula for Business Administration in Bachelor's and Master's and Business Administration with specialization in Higher Management in Master's, we can conclude that some of the competencies set in them, that are expected to acquire these graduates can be referred to the 8 key competencies of the European Reference Framework for Key Competences.

– The following competencies set in the qualification characteristic can be referred to the *language literacy* of the Framework: skills for clear and accessible presentation of own ideas, problem formulations and possible solutions to specialized and non-specialized audience, using a wide range of techniques and approaches; ability to communicate both orally and in writing and to adapt their communication to the needs of the situation and the audience; ability to master a rich conceptual apparatus and ability for conceptual and abstract thinking, as well as a high degree of independence and easy orientation in complex learning content, applying their own approaches and methods to master it.

– *Multilingual literacy* can be attributed to the skills of full communication in some of the most common European languages.

– *Mathematical competence and competence in the field of exact sciences, technologies and engineering* can include: attitude and understanding of issues through the use of methods based on quantitative and qualitative descriptions and assessments; mastery of a rich conceptual apparatus and ability for conceptual and abstract thinking, etc.

– *Digital competence* can include: skills for collecting, processing and interpreting specialized information needed to solve complex problems in the field of management and administration;

– *Personal competence, social competence and competence for acquiring learning skills* can include: broad personal worldview, understanding and solidarity with others; forming and expressing one's own opinion on problems of public and ethical nature, arising in the process of work;

– *Civic competence* may include: the acquisition of skills for building and managing teams to solve complex problems; formulating policies and demonstrating leadership qualities for their implementation; abilities for adequate behavior and interaction in a professional and / or specialized environment; and others.

– *Entrepreneurial competence* can include: application of acquired knowledge and skills in new and / or unfamiliar conditions; used new strategic approaches; creativity and initiative in management; ability to solve problems in the conditions of insufficient available information, in a new unknown environment; ability to initiate change, etc.

– *The competence for cultural awareness and expression* may include: commitment to understanding, developing and expressing one's own ideas.

To implement *the second task*, all curricula in the specialized disciplines included in the curriculum of the specialty "Business Administration" were analyzed. Based on this analysis, it was concluded which of the disciplines included in the curriculum contribute to the development of the 8 key competencies in the Framework and what percentage of all specialized disciplines in the curriculum of Business Administration in Bachelor's degree. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion of key competencies in disciplines of the curriculum in "Business Administration"

Key competencies	% from all studies disciplines
Language literacy	61.29%
Multilingual competence	0%
Mathematical competence and competence in the field of exact sciences, technologies and engineering	29.03%
Digital competence	22,58%
Personal competence, social competence and competence for acquiring learning skills	83,87%
Civic competence	6.45%
Entrepreneurial competence	74,19%
Competence for cultural awareness and expression	22,58%

The conclusions that can be made on the basis of this analysis are:

1) The acquisition of multilingual competence is not represented in the studied disciplines in the specialty Business Administration at the UNWE.

2) The training with the help of which students have to acquire civic competence (6.45%) is very weak.

3) The specialized disciplines included in the curriculum of the specialty "Business Administration" support the most the acquisition of: personal competence, social competence and competence for acquiring learning skills (83.87%), entrepreneurial competence (74.19%) and language literacy (61.29%).

In order to gather the expert assessments of the business representatives on the most important competencies that the graduates of Business Administration should have for practice, two approaches were used:

– The opinions of the representatives of the practice, present and took part in the discussion during the Eighth Autumn Academy, organized within the university project "Improvement of the competitive position of the professional field Administration and Management at UNWE" were analyzed.

– A survey was created and sent to the members of the Alumni Club in Business Administration at the university with option to share with others.

The representatives of the business, who participated in the Eighth Autumn Academy, pointed out the following competencies as the most important for implementation in practice:

– Ability to negotiate
– Ability to form and manage teams
– Digital competences, incl. Working with Excel
– Business ethics
– Creative techniques
– Presentation skills
– Language competence in the mother tongue
– Mathematical competencies

The participants in the Eighth Autumn Academy also gave recommendations for expanding partnerships with more business organizations, increasing the number of internships and training practices, development of students' dissertations to be carried out in a real company environment with active business participation. These initiatives would improve the entrepreneurial competence of Business Administration students.

The survey, distributed mainly among members of the Alumni Business Administration, was attended by 29 people, including 19 with a master's degree, 4 bachelors, 4 doctors and 2 with secondary education. Respondents who took part in the survey rated the following competencies for the work in the field of management and business administration as the most important (Table 2):

Table 2. Most important competences for the Business Administration

Competence	Average grade*
Language literacy in Bulgarian	6,24
Personal, social and learning skills	5,93
Multilingual competence	5,90
Digital	5,69
Civil	5,52
Entrepreneurial	5,41
Cultural awareness and expression	5,31
Mathematics and exact sciences	5,24

(The average grade is formed on the basis of a Likert scale with grades from 1 to 7, where 1 is the lowest grade and 7 – the highest)

The three areas that the respondents consider the most important as a trend in the development of Business Administration in horizon 2030 are: Human Resources, Work with information technology and Innovation.

On the basis of the conducted interviews with the lecturers leading the special subjects from the curriculum of the specialty "Business Administration" is made a summary of the methods and approaches used in the educational process, which contributes to the inclusion of students experience in solving various problems on your own:

– The curriculum in each of the studied disciplines includes lectures and classes for independent preparation of the student in order to consolidate and apply knowledge in solving practical problems, self-control and verification through tests of results, self-assessment, etc. This way of working maintains a high level of cognitive activity and independence of students.

– Conducting research for educational purposes. During these studies, students learn to identify a problem situation, to collect data and experiment, to make analysis and conclusions. In the process of this research, students perform analysis, synthesis, summarization, classification, etc., which helps to develop their intelligence and research skills.

– Case studies, enabling students to analyze and propose solutions to various practical situations.

– Various active communication methods are used, such as brainstorming, discussion, dialogue, debate, etc., which help students to form universal skills for teamwork, goal setting, analysis and presentation of information and results, decision making, etc.

– Use of role-playing and business games, as well as business simulations, adequate to the future profession, through which students gain experience in solving

professional and social situations, which is the basis for the development of their personal, social and professional competencies.

– Work on various projects, where students learn to analyze data, meet deadlines, perform individual project activities, reflect the results, etc.

Conclusion

The competency approach provides an accessible and applicable tool for planning and organizing the educational process. By applying the described methodology for analysis, the potentials of the training can be revealed in relation to the practice in a permanent process of evaluation and updating of the training documentation and the actual implementation of the training. Our results show that UNWE provides good level of relevance with the European Qualification Framework, but in line of horizon 2030 there are three major areas as a trend in the development of Business Administration: Human Resources; Information technology and Innovations that have to be further developed in terms of practical performance and support business abilities of graduates for real practice.

NOTES

1. British Institute for Personnel Development, 2001, Competency Frameworks in UK Organizations (Research Report), London:CIPD.
2. European Commission, 2008. European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-tools/european-qualifications-framework .
3. Bulgarian Chamber of commerce https://mycompetence.bg/bg/static/9.

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