



## ГИБКИЕ НАВЫКИ КАК КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ, ПОВЫШАЮЩИЕ КОНКУРЕНТОСПОСОБНОСТЬ ВЫПУСКНИКОВ ВУЗОВ

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*Аннотация.* В современных реалиях система высшего профессионального образования должна обладать способностью не только оперативно удовлетворять изменяющиеся запросы в различных отраслях промышленности в специалистах нужного профиля, но и способствовать их быстрому трудоустройству. Запрос времени состоит в том, что от выпускников вузов помимо фундаментальной общенаучной и профессиональной подготовки требуется также владение гибкими навыками, которые зачастую являются решающими при приеме на работу. Эксперты сходятся во мнении, что для успешной деятельности любому специалисту необходимы две категории навыков: *hard skills* и *soft skills*. Когда речь идет о *hard skills*, подразумеваются технические знания. Напротив, *soft skills* — это навыки, относящиеся к общению в коллективе, работе в команде, творчеству, решению проблем и другим личностным навыкам. Они представляют собой психологические качества, которые определяют, как люди учатся, думают и действуют. Измерение *soft skills* важно, поскольку они являются переменными, которые позволяют студентам прогнозировать свое профессиональное будущее и карьерную ориентацию. В данной статье представлены результаты исследований, которые были проведены для определения ключевых компетенций, которые современные выпускники ВУЗов должны иметь для получения желаемой работы. Также в работе затрагиваются основные методы и приемы, способствующие их усовершенствованию.

**Ключевые слова:** гибкие навыки; ключевые компетенции; обзор рынка труда; нехватка компетенций; работодатели; выпускники.

## SOFT SKILLS AS KEY COMPETENCES FOR SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

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*Abstract.* In modern world, the higher vocational education system must not only be able to promptly respond to the changing demands of different industries for specialists of the required majors, but also to facilitate their rapid employment. Graduates employability is an increasingly important issue. In addition to basic academic and vocational training, graduates are also required to possess flexible skills that are pivotal in transitioning from education to employment. So, for a successful activity, any specialist needs two categories of skills: hard and soft skills. When talking about hard skills, technical knowledge is meant. On the opposite, soft skills refer to communication, team work, creativity, problem solving and other personal skills. Experts agree that beside hard (technical) skills, soft (non-cognitive) skills are necessary. They represent psychological attributes that inform how people learn, think, and act. Measuring soft skills is important because they are variables that allow students to predict their professional future and career orientation. This paper presents the results of studies which have been conducted to identify key competences which today's graduates should have in order to get a desired job. Main methods and techniques that help to master and improve them are also discussed.

**Keywords:** soft skills; key competences; labour market survey; competence gap; employers; graduates.

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## Introduction

The market economy of Russia is changing from spontaneous to planned forms of organisation. Many companies consider organisational culture as an important regulatory mechanism in the organisational environment [1, p. 54]. In this respect, the attitude of employers towards the company's employees has greatly changed. National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) show that a high average score is still taken into account when applying for a job, although only high marks are not enough for this. For example, employers require the applicant to have a relevant work experience [2]. However, expertise and experience are not the only requirements, compliance with which enables the specialist to join the company. The latter is especially true for young graduates whose knowledge acquired at universities is not confirmed by experience in solving production or management problems. The lack of work experience is also reflected in the salary classification of young graduates. On the one hand, the risks for employers are very high, on the other hand, the important criterion for successfully passing a competition for a vacancy is the assessment of the personal potential of a young graduate. What can make inexperienced graduates competitive in the eyes of employers? How to identify the list of competences that increases the competitiveness of a graduate in the labour market and characterise the potential or professionally significant qualities of applicants [3, p. 20]. The purpose of the study is to compile a list of competences that increase the competitiveness of graduates in the labour market. Traditionally, indicators such as expertise, skills and experience were used to evaluate applicants. They were considered universal and therefore used in all organisations.

## 1. Literature review

The literature analysis on key competences, key qualifications and competence development has grown in recent years and has now become almost unmanageable. Research programmes on this topic have been launched at national and international level. With some delay, they are also receiving increasing attention at universities and in university research [4, 5]. Publications on the significance of key competencies in higher education and their mastering by students are slowly but steadily increasing. Universities have not only begun to consider the acquisition of key qualifications in their teaching, but also to establish special institutions (e.g. Centre for Key Qualifications at the University of Freiburg, Institute for Future-Oriented Competence Development at the University of Applied Sciences in Bochum) or even professorships for key qualifications (e.g. at the University of Applied Sciences in Munich in the winter semester 2003/2004) [6, p. 52]. In the meantime, the term competence has overtaken the term qualification; instead of key qualifications, people are increasingly talking about key competences, and the terms continuing education and qualification have been replaced by the term competence development. The profound change in the world of work and life has also increased the pressure to pay more attention to these competences in educational and training processes. Key qualifications are on the agenda not only in research programmes, but also among education policy decision-makers (e.g. educational conference "КМК») and in education policy advisory bodies (e.g. educational forum "Forum Bildung») and are formulated in guidelines as an objective not only for school and vocational

education, but now also for higher educational establishments. The term “social competence” includes the explicit and implicit knowledge, the emotional behavioural repertoire and the reflection capacity that an individual can use as an ability and/or skill in specific social situations in order to achieve a balance between his or her own identity and the social one. Knowledge can be considered a basic prerequisite for attaining any competence. Key competences include a complex of skills, abilities, aptitudes and knowledge relevant for personal and social development in modern society, for overcoming complex demands of the professional world, for finding and fulfilling qualification-adequate professional activities in European and international labour markets and the task of lifelong learning. The key competences in studies are adapted to the requirements of the appropriate professional fields as well as the specific content of the corresponding subject [1, p. 34].

## 2. Materials and methods

In order to find the ways increasing productivity, a research on the characteristics of successful employees' work was conducted. This work made it possible to identify the qualities (competencies) due to which the best employees succeeded as opposed to mid-level ones. Therefore, a competency-based approach to the problem of personnel selection and evaluation is becoming more widespread, the essence of which is that effective job performance depends on the employee possessing certain qualities. In this respect future graduates cannot help thinking about career prospects, and of course, they want their future job to fulfill all dreams and expectations.

To observe the topic under consideration, research philosophy was chosen as a core method of scientific investigation. It is an important basis of every research, no matter what scientific field the paper is referred to. Also, with the help of research philosophy method, it was decided to use data collection which has been done by the authors while working. Comparative and qualitative analysis were used to understand and interpret definitions applied in the paper.

The research methodology is also based on the thorough analysis of the scientific research results of leading Russian and foreign scientists. It reflects modern approaches in the field of soft skills importance and their mastering techniques.

## 3. Research results

Most managers in Russia (about 75 %) see the point in hiring young graduates. The following arguments were used to determine this point of view:

- a great desire to use young energy, activity, open-mindedness and dynamism;
- the ability to use young potential at a lower salary than experienced professionals;
- the ability to infuse «young blood» and revitalise old workers;
- young people have the advantage of being easier integrated into the organisational culture of the company;
- it is easier to grow your own expert than to retrain those who have stable habits that do not conform to the company's organisational culture [7, p. 226].

Many employers emphasize that young graduates are taught new technologies, new techniques and business specifications, but they should also be a source of activity, dynamism and modern knowledge for the company. Employers deciding whether or not to accept a young graduate for work assume the graduate to have one out of two

market advantages [7, p. 226]. Special knowledge or hard skills (e.g., knowledge in the field of information technology, geophysics, microbiology, etc.) make graduates of certain disciplines competitive in their professional major. Hard skills are easily quantifiable. Interpersonal skills that have more to do with the personality are called soft skills. If someone wants to be successful in job, it is necessary to have not only professional skills. So-called soft skills are also becoming increasingly important. They are in demand both in everyday work and in job interviews. In Germany, for example, employers and employees have to change under various circumstances. However, these changes are familiar to everyone in the world of work. Being a part of complex economic and social systems, it is affected by changes in various areas. New technologies, changing international trade relations, new business models, demographic change — all these factors influence the design of work [8, p. 154].

Nowadays, a good education, excellent final grades or numerous successfully completed further and advanced training courses are no longer enough to get a coveted job. There is a demand for goal-oriented people at work. Being goal-oriented is the ability to direct one's thoughts, feelings and actions towards a specific goal, even for quite a long period of time. Goal-oriented people proceed in a planned and systematic way and do their best to achieve the goal set. They try to overcome any difficulties. But what is meant by the term "soft skills"? What is the difference between hard skills and soft skills?

Hard skills are technical abilities. These may have been acquired, for example, during vocational or university training. The most valuable professional skills are regularly applied in professional life. Soft skills are also called key competences. As far as soft skills are concerned, these social skills are in great demand nowadays [9, p. 260]. These are interdisciplinary qualities and qualifications that are more related to personality, character and behaviour. These are not professional qualifications, but social competences in dealing with other people. So why are social skills becoming increasingly important in today's working world?

New technologies and products make people adapt to new conditions by being able to navigate the flow of information, select what is needed, interpret the data and adjust the information obtained to one's professional needs.

Moreover, a good professional today is a public professional who is able to choose, in a mobile and integrative way, a productive way of interacting with an environment consisting of many elements whose dynamic changes and transformations depend on the situation of immersion in that environment. Sometimes, it is lack of soft skills that unables people to achieve their full potential [10].

Soft skills are also required in order to climb the corporate ladder, to score points with your employer. HR managers expect young graduates to have perfect hard skills and qualifications, but in the end it is usually the personality that determines the choice in their favour. That is why soft skills are extremely important. Soft skills are related to students individual character. They are rooted in strengths and talents as well as in the skills that have been acquired in childhood and adolescence and in social environment.

The most important soft skills for career starters include:

- problem-solving skills;
- being a self-starter;
- analytical thinking skills.

These are the results of a survey among recruiters and managers published on the online portal Statista [11].

Emotional intelligence is considered to be one of the most important soft skills. It makes many other soft skills possible in the first place. Emotional intelligence refers to emotions both towards oneself and in relation to others. Emotional intelligence describes first of all the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions and those of others. This results in an action that can be found in many personal and social competences. For each soft skill there is a core set of competences that are necessary for successful skill development.

First, different personal competences will be analyzed. They describe character and the qualities a person should have. Personal competences include reliability, independence, initiative, decision-making ability, self-reflection and critical faculties.

Social competences include the ability to work in a team, empathy, conflict management, communication skills, conversational skills, intercultural competence.

When talking about methodological skills, analytical thinking, organisational talent, goal orientation, presentation techniques are meant.

Due to the fact that soft skills are becoming more and more important in job applications, many graduates unfortunately present information that does not correspond with reality in their cover letters and CVs. The following recommendations should be taken into account in order to overcome any misunderstanding:

- to focus strictly on actual skills;
- to analyze the initial situation;
- to filter out which soft skills are being sought;
- to pay attention to the wording of your skills;

It is also necessary for young graduates to carry out self-analysis. It will help identify the most important soft skills that they should definitely work on. Find out what soft skills are particularly relevant and in demand. In this regard further training opportunities should be looked for.

#### 4. Discussion

In today's rapidly developing world, it is possible to find almost any information and educational course that a student might be interested in. As a consequence, there is a tendency for the value of knowledge in a particular professional field to gradually diminish due to its availability. Moreover, knowledge gets outdated too quickly, so in addition to professional skills, soft skills are in great demand nowadays. Many employers agree that they want their employees to be able to think critically and analytically, interact effectively with colleagues, organize their own work and teamwork in a high-quality manner, gather information from various sources, analyze and deal with problems in workplace, and make informed decisions. These competences help to adapt to changes, solve complex tasks and build relationships with other people in the workplace. So, soft skills development is a continuous process. They cannot be mastered once and for all. Start by choosing the top skills to master, then work towards growing those skills through self-reflection, classes, feedback, and more. Showing employees have the soft skills demonstrates the employers that they can grow with the company and handle any changes that may occur.

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