

THE DEVELOPMENT OF KEY COMPETENCES AS AN IMPORTANT TASK OF MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

The paper deals with the partial research of students' attitudes towards the education system in relation to the changing conditions on the European labor market and in relation to research conducted in the MSR titled "Key competences for the labor market" and the need for lifelong learning. Development of key competences is thus demonstrated in the paper as a task of management, whose development should be implemented throughout the professional life of individuals and companies, since – as shown by the results of the partial research – the education system does not prepare students adequately according to labor market conditions. The introduction outlines the importance of key competences for both personal and professional life of individuals, and also of the entire enterprise. They are also links indicated between the labor market and the education system. The next section presents a selection of relevant literature on the issue and explains the basic terminology of knowledge society, lifelong learning, and key competences.

On the example of the research on key competences "Key competences for the labor market," the need to develop competences throughout the working life of the individual is emphasized as the primary task of the company management. In the following section own research is introduced, whose subcomponent focuses on the research of attitudes towards the preparedness of the education system to face changing conditions in society and the related changes in the labor market. Based on the professional literature a hypothesis is formulated and the results of this partial research are summarized. Based on the results of the research possible solutions are recommended.

Key words: competence, education, educational system, knowledge, labour market, lifelong learning.

Introduction

In recent years competences have become a much discussed topic on many levels not only in this country but also abroad. The most essential areas include education, educational policy, management, labour market etc.

The Bologna Declaration of June 19, 1999 stressed the importance of expanding and deepening relations with other European States with the aim of creating a more comprehensive intellectual, cultural, social, scientific and technological base for the whole of Europe, whose priority is “Europe of knowledge”, as a factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable part of the consolidation and enrichment of European citizenship, which is able to provide citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with awareness of shared values and closely connected to a common social and cultural space (1999: 2).

The firm, which intends to succeed in the extremely competitive environment globally with active entities, will sooner or later have to realize that keeping up with them will mean to innovate and develop human capital. As reported by Zapletalová (2012: 84), the implementation of the business activities of small and medium-sized enterprises on international markets has become specifically a phenomenon of the last decade, although, as stated, not many enterprises can imagine their business in international markets.

The usefulness of knowledge and skills in different time and spatial variables seems to be the idea, which underpins ideological streams related to key competences; these should and have to face new challenges in the national, international and globalized environment in which one can hardly predict the further development in different sectors of human activity. Determining indicators for expected changes are mainly fast-evolving technologies and a mass dissemination of information, a pervasive cultural diversity supported not only by European society, which is subject to the openness of the worldwide global trends. All aspects presented here represent for the society not only opportunities and challenges, but also risks and threats. The more important is the preparation of education intended for a European and global context thinking (Bobáková, Chýlková 2014: 243).

1. Theoretical background

European educational policy aims to respond to the globalizing world economy, since it is aware of the connection between it, the education system and the need for the lifelong learning programme. Under this influence there is a priority – Europe of knowledge, which represents the concept of training on the new requirements of the labour market by means of key competences.

A detailed analysis of the sources and the origins of the concept of a knowledge society is dealt with by Dopita (2010). According to him, the knowledge society is the society of lifelong learning. According to him, we are of the opinion that the knowledge society is not automatically an educated society with the constant increasing numbers of education achieved or even population with tertiary education, since the feature of the knowledge society is the availability of knowledge not necessarily affirmed by institutional tertiary education (Dopita 2010).

The transformation in the approach to education policy brings a lot of incentives for the education system as well as for enterprises. The common denominators are flexibility, globalization, and focus on the world markets. The labour market involvement, as well as an increasingly wide-spread term “employability” e.g. in the German environment, is gaining more and more international dimensions as far as flexibility, globalization, and focusing on world markets are concerned.

The concept of competences is greatly expanded in today’s society, as it is used in various disciplines, in the context of globalisation tendencies it is increasingly appearing in the world of work (Haas 2012), and besides the pedagogy, didactics and andragogy it is present also in the area of human resource development and lifelong learning (Bünnagel 2013).

At this point it should be noted that inconsistencies in terminology as for the concept of key competences is one of the negative features accompanying this global endeavor. There are various terms used, such as qualification, which is used by (Mertens 1974) as well as competence (Belz, Siegrist 2001; Veteška, Tureckiová 2008).

Another aspect to be discussed is the standardization and evaluation of competences in different areas of knowledge, which would allow for the recognition of standardized competences at the European level. In this context, it should be borne in mind that the core competences in education may have completely different dimensions in specific European countries.

However, it is undeniable that lifelong learning presents a continuous connection between the different kinds of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning, the greater responsibility falls within company management in the implementation and development of human capital.

The context of the concept of knowledge society with the concept of lifelong learning shows the following table by Rabušicová (2006: 15):

Table 1. The concept of society knowledge

The concept of society knowledge This concept reflects the key principles of the functioning of society and at the same time the direction of the further development of the type of society.	
target concepts: The concept of lifelong learning The concept of lifelong employability The concept of active citizenship These three concepts can be understood as the first objective, which is headed for in the context of the functioning and development of the society. All three arise at the level of the social policy of the state. The concept of lifelong learning can be seen as paramount, as it is oriented on the lifelong employability and active citizenship too. It is important that these target concepts represent a continuous process and not achieved or achievable conditions and that all involve the personal development of man.	
the means to achieve the target concepts Adult education Development of human resources Community education What these resources have in common is that in order to achieve the target concepts they utilize principles of pedagogical work (someone develops, someone educates), but at the same time, and perhaps mainly they work with motivation, interest, activity, independence and responsibility of the participants.	

Source: Rabušicová 2006: 15.

2. Methodology and hypothesis

The paper is based on the theoretical bases published in the professional literature and official documents related to the educational policy of the European Union, in particular the concepts of lifelong learning and key competences, and stems from the research of competences in the Moravian-Silesian region.

In the paper the results of the own partial research to the attitudes of potential graduates of SU OPF in Karviná to the education system are used. For the purposes of testing a working hypothesis, a sample of 163 students had been selected, who were submitted to the questionnaire. Although the selected number of students do not seem to be large, it is sufficient for the relevant interpretation of data distributed. The return of distributed questionnaires was 100%, but not always the questionnaires had been completed in all the surveyed items.

For the purpose of evaluating the questionnaire the semantic differential was used. In this paper, we limited ourselves to only an educational part, in which we had tried to map out, whether in terms of attitudes to the educational system there were more negative assessments in connection with more difficult graduates' applicability particularly on the labour market.

As part of this partial research, we had identified whether current students of the tertiary education sector were aware of the impact of the current political, social and cultural processes on their professional lives, and whether the educational system was preparing graduates for changing labour market conditions.

The aim of the research was to identify attitudes and evaluate both positive and negative connotations. For this purpose, we had set the following hypothesis:

The views of students on the readiness of the education system to respond to changing social and cultural conditions in Europe would be rather negative.

3. The results of the project “Competences for the labour market”

The fact that competences needed for the labor market are slowly penetrating also into the Moravian-Silesian region, is reflected by the project “Competences for the labour market” implemented in this region. Education and employment are in the period of the creation of a global society important for the applicability of the citizens on the labour market and at the same time they create a driving force for the development of the innovative potential in companies and it is only up to the management, whether they are likely to be appropriately developed and utilized.

One of the benefits of the above project is, inter alia, obtaining information from major employers in the region on the competences that are crucial in the area of human resources. The importance of the project lies also in the fact that the information thus obtained is relevant for both citizens and businesses, as well as for educational organizations.

1346 companies in the Moravian-Silesian region participated in the research and its realization took place from 2005 to 2008. 14 key competences were allocated in the framework of the project to:

1. the competence to communicate effectively;
2. competences to cooperation;
3. competence for entrepreneurship;
4. competence of the flexibility (and operational flexibility in thinking and behavior);
5. competence to meet customer needs (customer orientation);
6. competence to performance;
7. competence independence;
8. the competence to deal with the problem;
9. the competence to the planning and organizing of work;

10. competences for lifelong learning;
11. competence to the active approach;
12. the competence to deal with the load (resistance to stress);
13. the competence to explore and navigate the information;
14. the competence to communicate in foreign languages.

This project represents a source of valuable information about the Moravian-Silesian region from the perspective of key competences (PORTÁL 2005) due to the fact that the project focused on the development and validation of tools along with methodologies for the evaluation and development of selected competences for the target groups of employees, further on those interested in work and the unemployed, and finally on the creation of a system for the evaluation of the results of the development of competences and the creation of a regional system of analyses and forecasts for the labour market,

In the framework of the project competences were understood as characteristics and skills, which are not identical with professional qualifications. They include a summary of the universally applicable and portable knowledge, skills and attitudes for the needs of successful employment³.

The analysis of attitudes of employers in the Moravian-Silesian region towards competences clearly showed that the greatest importance is attached to independence, competences related to satisfying customer needs and performance. More detailed results to other competences and their importance from the point of view of employers are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The most important competence from the perspective of employees of the Moravian-Silesian region

Kind of competence	Attribution of importance
Effective communication	419
Cooperation	404
Entrepreneurship	97
Flexibility	277
Satisfying customer needs	631
Performance	572
Independence	714
Solutions to problems	508
Planning and organization	324
Lifelong learning	125
A proactive approach	496
Coping with the burden	131
Orientation in information	121
Knowledge of foreign languages	225

Source: PORTÁL 2005.

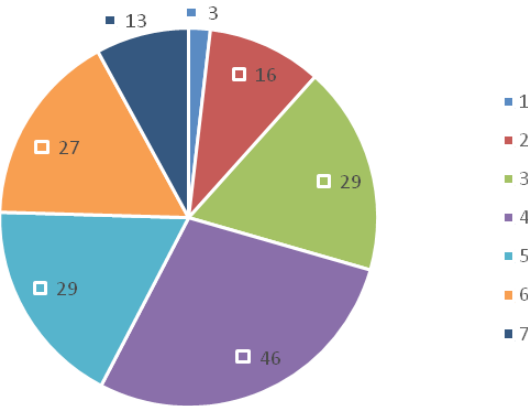
³ <http://kompetence.rza.cz/www/file.php?d=116>.

4. The results of the partial research to the readiness of the education system to changing conditions

Within the investigation of attitudes of students to the current education system in the context of the changing social and cultural conditions, it turned out that the attitudes of students to the observed issues were different. The response in the middle of the range of the semantic differential prevailed at Level 4, for this response 46 students opted, for Level 3 that was 29 students, and 27 of them voted for Level 6 and 13 students provided a definite answer for Level 7. Level 1 was chosen by 3 students, Level 2 only by 16 students. If we compare the number of responses located to the right and to the left of the center Answer 4, we can conclude that rather a negative evaluation dominated as for the current educational system. Accordingly a positive opinion on the current education system it could not be proven. The specific answer on the scale layout of the semantic differential provides the following Table 3 and Chart:

Table 3. Does the educational system prepare to the changing social and cultural conditions in Europe?

Sufficiently	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Insufficiently
	3	16	29	46	29	27	13	



5. Discussion

The active participation of individuals and enterprises in a society known as the knowledge society involves synergies between educational bodies and individuals. It represents at the same time the responsibility of the management in motivating employees during a routine as well as in selecting appropriate educational activities contributing to the development of both the individual as well as to the competitiveness of the enterprise.

Within the partial research the views of students on the readiness of the education system to respond to changing social and cultural conditions in Europe our hypothesis could not be confirmed. We had expected that students would be satisfied with the education system and the way it could respond flexibly to changing social and cultural conditions in Europe. It turned out, however, that students perceived their position of social and cultural events in the world today; they realized its importance and influence, and also the connection with the educational system. It would therefore be beneficial to carry out more research in the region, the Czech Republic, etc. and map a larger research sample.

Key competences are not newsworthy, yet what is new is the meaning and context, which is attributed to them. Based on the example of the research in the Moravian-Silesian region, we intended to draw on the requirements of employers to employees on key competences. It turned out, however, that the importance of effective communication was one of the priorities that were required on the labour market and should be paid greater care already in the course of the entire education system. The company management may develop then communication techniques with their employees in the framework of the targeted incentive activities, etc.

In the context of the focus of the paper we should mention the fact that employers do not consider lifelong learning as the most important factor that would play a role in the applicability on the labour market. Lifelong learning came third and was assigned less importance as compared to entrepreneurship and orientation in information.

In connection with this finding it would certainly be more than interesting to perform some further research, etc. within the region or regions, whether the company management or the organization is not familiar with the issue of key competences, their content and purpose. The results of the presented research have matched that.

Conclusions

The concepts of lifelong learning, lifelong education, information society, knowledge society, society knowledge, knowledge-based economy, etc. are becoming significant for programme, political and legislative documents, major publications about education, the development of human resources and educational policy.

It is more than obvious that the individual must take the journey of lifelong learning, if he/she wishes to succeed. The subcomponents of the research showed dissatisfaction with the education system, as it does not prepare to the changing conditions on the labour market. It is also apparent

that the company management concentrates power that they can deploy for the benefit of an individual and business. Core competences and orientation in them can only be beneficial for everyone.

However, we cannot value the core competences as immutable constants, as they vary in time and space, they will become old; therefore, from the perspective of the future, they will play an important role in the activities of the management especially in the professional further education in a life-long learning.

Therefore it is more than evident that core competences are an imaginary gate into an unknown future, whose purpose is to overcome the effects of time on knowledge and skills, information technology and society from the economic, cultural and social point of view. Their development throughout life should be a matter for all parties involved – the individual, enterprise management and the educational system.

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