

## EVALUATION OF MECHANISMS OF ETHICAL CREDIBILITY IN SELECTED SUBJECTS IN SLOVAKIA

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**Abstract:** Human resources are a considerable comparative advantage of each organization, as such they should not be stagnating, on the contrary, they should strive to improve their professional knowledge, but also to improve their so-called soft skills, such as interpersonal skills. Requirements for key competencies for university graduates from a technical university are continuously increasing. The aim of the paper is to assess and evaluate the ethical credibility of selected subjects in the field of soft skills based on our research conducted in 2018 at the Technical University in Zvolen. It is an evaluation of ethical credibility of selected subjects. We approached our research from two angles. On one hand, we surveyed students of TU in Zvolen, who are developing soft skills as part of their curriculum at the university. On the other hand, we focused our research of ethical credibility in selected organizations operating in Slovakia. We were interested to find out what soft skills organizations expect from university graduates, specifically from a technical university. We centred our attention on communication, teamwork, stress resilience, time management and conflict resolution. The result of our research is an evaluation of mechanisms of ethical credibility in selected subjects in Slovakia. We evaluated results from our research in terms of how prepared university graduates are, specifically from a technical university, contrasted by expectations of organizations in the above-indicated areas, soft skills.

**Keywords:** soft skills, ethical credibility, management, communication, research.

### 1. Introduction

The changing market environment and customer requirements bring into practice specific requirements for management processes. Organizations are challenged to reduce costs, improve performance and last but not least to improve quality. These requirements can be met by the implementation of progressive management approaches, but also at the same time by the adoption of rapid and correct decision making by lead workers and managers. From the historical and cultural point of view, higher education and successful graduation has always

been the main goal of individual's individual efforts in order to develop their own personal potential and at the same time they established social requirements for the preparation of professionals for the needs of particular areas of working environment (Martinkovičová, 2014, p. 144). Having the required level of competency at a professional level for the current demanding labour market means also adapting higher education for the needs of social practice. Modern learning strategies seek to structure the learning content and graduate profiles. To prepare a graduate – professional for a labour marker means paying adequate attention to the development of all competences within all the components of professionalism. The Bloom's taxonomy, based on four components, is often used in the context of the educational objectives (Bloom, Englehart, 1956):

- Cognitive competencies – represents the complex of knowledge necessary for the performance for a particular job, including the ability to effectively use this knowledge in practice;
- Functional Competencies – it is a sum of skills and abilities to perform activities aimed at achieving specific results;
- Personal competencies – are abilities to acquire the required forms of behaviour and negotiation skills in working and interpersonal relationships;
- Ethical Competencies – represents the observance of personal moral principles, the level of moral maturity, and the acceptance of desirable social standards.

The concept of competencies becomes the main category as a training process for performance in certain professions as well as in a study for application to the labour market. Authors often define competencies as a set of knowledge, abilities, skills and experiences as well as physical and psychological preparedness to use these qualities to efficiently perform assigned tasks and achieve the goals of the organization as a set of features used to achieve a certain level of performance. This term is often referred directly to the knowledge, skills and quality of efficient employees. (Donnelly et al., 1996; Hrehová, Cehlár, 2007). To have the required level of competencies at a professional level for the current demanding labour market it is necessary to undergo lectures and courses with considerable interdisciplinary dispersion during the higher education while at the same time utilize attractive, active and interaction requiring forms of teaching that allow optimal interconnection and use of theoretical knowledge through practical, model learning. Such a learning creates solid foundations for future career, integrates demands for professional erudition and practical competency and at the same time develops an important personal characteristic, attitudinal and volitional characteristics of a student's personality, which in practice will not only know what tasks to do and how to accomplish them, but also whether they do them right and well.

Until recently, human resources professionals have dominated, almost exclusively, candidates' expertise. Today, they are increasingly interested in the individual personality of each candidate. This means properties that cannot be included in the professional qualification. Not only in the AngloSaxon world, are they referred to as "soft-skills". Although we encounter

attempts to use the Slovak equivalent of “soft skills”, this term is usually not translated. Soft-skills are called personal properties which range from empathy or knowledge of people, through communicativeness or self-criticism, to the ability to assert themselves, lead a team or the ability to inspire others for a common goal. Their importance varies according to the specific requirements of the company. The common denominator is the ability to communicate.

What might seem self-evident in theory is, for many graduates, the greatest and most difficult test on your way to professional success. There are several reasons why individuals may try to develop soft skills during their studies. Educational institutions annually produce hundreds to thousands of graduates with the same or similar education. They have competed with graduates from previous years with acquired experience. The individual will only assert himself through the complex of superstructure competencies and the ability of their practical and effective application for the benefit of the employer.

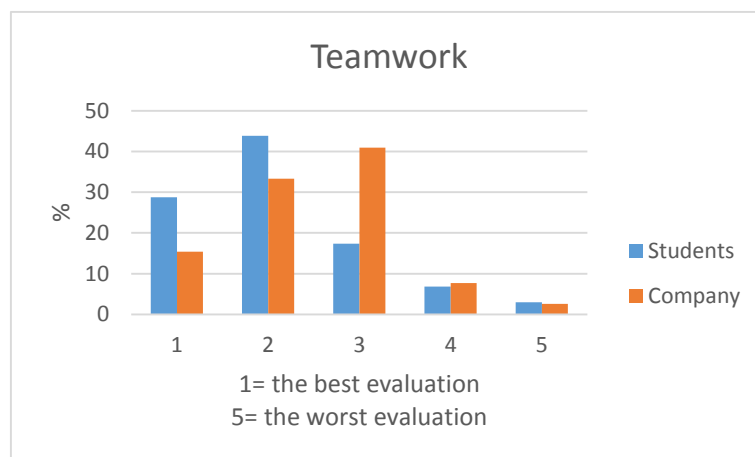
Human resources are an important competitive advantage for every organization. Organizations should not stagnate but seek to improve both the professional knowledge of their employees and also the so-called soft skills such as human behavioural skills, also known as interpersonal skills. These skills allow people to communicate, work together, act, resolve conflicts, organize, make decisions and so on and are related to emotional intelligence (EQ) (Čierna et al., 2018, p. 55).

## **2. Materials and methods**

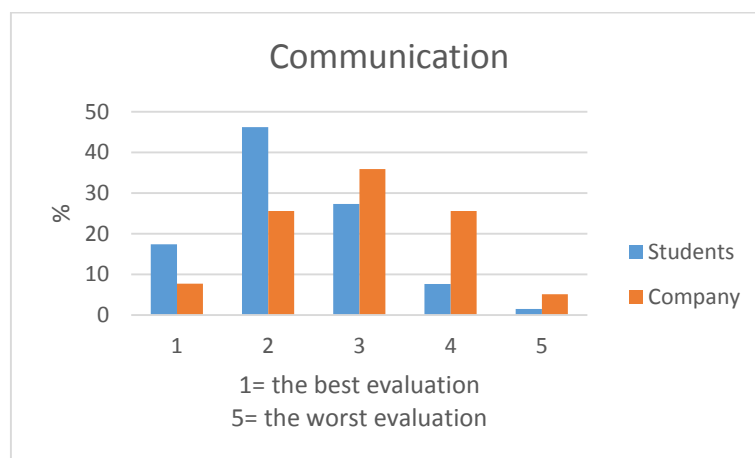
The aim of the research was to assess the requirements of practice for knowledge competencies of graduates of technical universities. Relevant areas of soft-skills assessment and information communication technologies (one of the areas of hard-skills) were specified for the analysis of knowledge competencies of university graduates of technical studies. The method of questionnaire survey which is standardly used for so oriented research objectives, was chosen for the execution of the research. There were two target groups of the questionnaire: respondents from companies who described the expected (or required) and actual state of competences of university graduates, and current university students who evaluated their own level of knowledge in the specified areas.

At the theoretical-methodological level, at the background of the latest trends of applied ethics, the emphasis was applied to the critical reflection of the current situation (especially in business ethics, organizational ethics and professional ethics); enforcement of contextual approach (the specifics of the moral-value environment in Slovakia) and application of coherent methodologies (systematic balance).

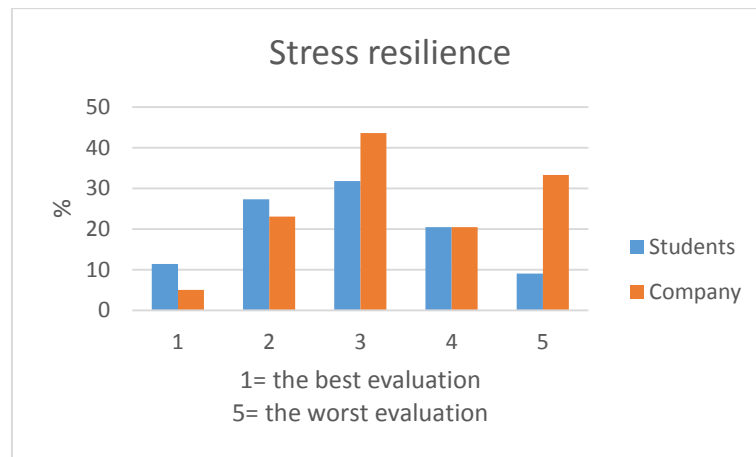
The aim of the paper is to evaluate the ethical credibility of selected subjects based on the analysis and partial conclusions of the research that we conducted in 2018 at the Technical University in Zvolen. Ethical credibility of the subjects was determined by so-called personal skills – soft skills. These behavioural skills and are also known as interpersonal skills. Soft skills are combination of skills to communicate, work together, act, resolve conflicts, organize, make decisions and so on. They are complementary to the so-called technical skills – hard skills (Čierna et al., 2018, p. 55). On one hand the selected subjects were students of the faculties of the Technical University in Zvolen and on the other hand the subjects were the organizations, representatives of organizations who employ our graduates and have personal experience with them. We address only few areas of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, stress resistance, conflict resolution and time management. The evaluations and conclusions for selected areas of soft skills are on the one hand from the point of view of the professional public about the knowledge competencies of the graduates and on the other hand the opinions of students on the development of soft skills within the educational process in the field of study they attend. Conclusions and evaluations are presented in the following charts.



**Figure 1.** Teamwork column chart.



**Figure 2.** Communication column chart.



**Figure 3.** Stress resilience column chart.



**Figure 4.** Conflict resolution column chart.



**Figure 5.** Time management column chart.

As indicated by the charts, surveyed students, respondents stated that they are well prepared in all of the above-mentioned areas of soft skills for excellent or good level, except for stress resistance, where they tend to think about unpreparedness and inattention for this area within the educational process. The opinions of the professionals from organizations whose contact are directly to the technical university graduates are very important for us as educators to

evaluate. Their views on graduate preparedness to overcome complicated working relationships, problematic and stressful situations show us that students have good time management skills, can resolve conflicts, can work in a team and have good communication skills. Interesting finding was that both students and the organizations are aware that students are not prepared to manage stress and are not stress-resistant enough.

### **3. Results and discussion**

In general, the current labour market dynamics are causing a major change in the original orientation of higher education. In addition to what a graduate is to know in terms of the knowledge theoretically acquired, the labour market today defines quite clearly the specific requirements in terms of what a graduate should be able to do, provide for, organize, including the demands related to their competences.

To have competence means that a person possesses a set of interrelated knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes, which enables them to successfully handle various life (personal, work, social) situations. Competence is understood as the penetration of acquired knowledge, acquired skills, skills forming attitudes, value orientation, motives for action. Competence is a behaviour (activity, complex of activities) that characterizes excellent performance in a certain area of activity. Competence has the ability to develop continuously, so it can be the basis of lifelong learning and personal flexibility of the individual. The acquisition of key competences is not only a matter of the individual's personal efforts and efforts but also requires favourable conditions in the social and economic environment. It is clear from the above that there is a link between quality work and competences with the possibility of great impact not only on the educational process.

The result of our research is evaluation of some mechanisms of ethical credibility of selected subjects in Slovakia. We evaluated and concluded our research from the perspective of the preparedness of students of the technical university in Slovakia compared to expectations to achievement or unfulfillment the necessary level of skills in selected areas of soft skills from the perspective of organizations.

Human resources are a significant competitive advantage for any organization, and therefore organizations should strive to improve expertise, skills and soft skills, such as human behavioural skills, also known as interpersonal skills of their employee. However, they can only apply and develop this topic in a cultured ethical environment of organizations. To have the required level of competencies for the current demanding labour market at a professional level means to attend not only professional subjects during university education, but also attend the subjects or courses with considerable interpersonal variance. The demands on key competencies of graduates from technical university tend to rise continuously.

The aim of the questionnaire research was to summarize the knowledge of the student – graduate of a technical or technological university and find out which of them are the priority for their successful employment in practice or what competencies of the graduates need to be improved within the study. Educational institutions gained important feedback by analysing and evaluating the questionnaire. Further, the results were compared with the level of education provided in the relevant areas – soft skills

#### **4. Conclusions**

When science and technology development is constantly accelerating and the time of innovation cycles is shorter, we can say that precisely delimited boundaries between individual departments are disappearing, causing the fields of study to become interdisciplinary. The successful and competitive higher education graduate from technical, managerial and economical university requires not only specific knowledge and skills in the relevant field of study, but also an overall system overview, which should be based on the ultimate goal of the company to be successful and competitive. Practical application of this concept means controlling a wide range of knowledge and skills that are unconditionally present while managing a business in a successful business environment.

Increasing demands on the efficiency and effectiveness of business entities are inevitably generating efforts to introduce improved management systems that take into account a number of rules and documents, thus changing labour market requirements. Employers' demands on candidates' expertise change, with the individual personality of each candidate coming to the forefront. These are features that are not usually included in qualification training.

In this context, there is a controversy as to how the higher education institutions in Slovakia are prepared for the change of the attitude of employers to their future employees. Higher education and its successful completion from the historical and cultural point of view has always represented a paramount of one's effort in developing their own personality potential, and at the same time embodied the concentrated social requirements for training of professionals for the needs of individual areas of practice. The form of higher education in our conditions has undergone fundamental changes, reforms or transformation processes in the last decades. Their results and, more importantly, the consequences, in the form of the level and quality of university training of future professionals, will be verified only by the practice and the labour market itself. Today's labour market is characterized by its global nature, which is a challenge to present the required knowledge competencies and represents a choice for university graduates to work in a domestic or multinational context.

At present, several dozen qualified graduates with the same or similar educational background often apply for a job. What gives one candidate an advantage over others is the added value showed by various professional certificates presenting hard-skills or one's interpersonal skills represented by soft-skills. Its added value can be candidate's ability to respond flexibly and efficiently to these parameters before the first contact with a future employer, the ability to conduct successful negotiations with supervisors, subordinates and colleagues, business partners or customers, or the ability to lead a team or to take a back seat and participate in team's work and others.

It is the task of universities to produce quality graduate with a wide range of soft skills. In our research, we focused on the analysis of soft-skills and summarizing the requirements for the soft skills competences of university graduates in terms of employers' expectations. The research was carried out in the form of a questionnaire survey, in which the respondents – employees of companies evaluated the expected and actual state of competences of soft-skills of university graduates.

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