



## Students internship: Career planning based on competences

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### Abstract

*Academic study programs adjustment to the needs of industry, as well as cooperation in students internship realization presents a challenge for adaptation and progress of the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management - Faculty of Technical Sciences in order to provide students more knowledge, skills and competencies that are relevant to employers' needs on the market. The existence of quality programme of students internships with competent students seems to be the prerequisite for a qualitative new approach to cooperation between industry and academia. Competences are related to personal characteristics of an individual/student, which can be examined (knowledge, skills, or work methods), and which are enabling them to achieve employability. In practice, there is a growing need for jobs that are based on the employees' competences. The aim is to develop companies that are flexible, efficient, proactive and directed towards universities - students as a target group. Management and harmonization of economic and academic competencies is the best possible way for human capital management since modern business is conditioned by employees' competencies. This paper presents significant work competencies of modern business that should be pursued due to improve economic development and development of awareness for career planning during the studies.*

**Key words:** *students internship, career planning, competencies, academia and industry adjustment*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Very high unemployment rates indicates the necessity of introducing changes, or in better words reforms, in the field of business and economy, and particularly in education and science. The field of career development needs to be approached in a holistic way considering the overall life course of an individual, and associating the cause-and-effect relations from different aspects of life. Actually, planning and developing student careers consist of a series of interrelated individual and organizational activities, and involves planning the course of career, education, improvement, and adaptation to changing socio-economic conditions [1]. The importance of the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management (DIEM) of the Faculty of Technical Sciences (FTS) is in the fact that it provides an effective system of support to academic community above all in connecting with business subjects, developing a variety of skills and knowledge helping in this way to better understand current world of business and demands of labour market. Career development

starts through the activities of internship at the DIEM, and it is later connected to the work in the business world. Modern organizations increasingly care for students' careers and their development. The importance of career arises also from the fact that it is the career through which individual and organizational goals and interests are linked and unified in the strongest and most obvious way. Career planning is a process through which individuals (students) identify and apply the steps and activities necessary to achieve career goals. Career development is a process which should be planned and developed; thus, the individual's course of professional development or developmental planning should be considered accordingly. Career development includes career planning, developing possible career paths, training and development activities, promotion, formal personnel policy, promotion criteria, assessment, counselling and encouragement of mentoring, in addition to career planning as a process through which an individual identifies, undertakes and directs necessary measures and activities for achieving professional goals [2].

## 2. COORDINATING INTERNSHIP WITH THE NEEDS OF ECONOMY

Career management is a process in which the organization's management and the DIEM systematically track, evaluate, allocate, direct and develop both the personnel and students and their potentials with the aim to ensure the necessary number of qualified people and optimal utilization of their knowledge, skills and capabilities in order to achieve organizational and individual interests and goals. Career planning and management involves coordinated activities undertaken by managers, individuals and human resource development services on one hand, and activities of the head of professional internship with his team on the other [3]. Systematic career planning provides significant support to students in the development of their individual potentials. By encouraging students in planning professional internship as the first step in career development, the DIEM shows that it is interested in students, which has a significant motivational effect for their future development [4]. The following are the most important activities of the DIEM in terms of assisting students in their development:

- assessing students' abilities and potentials,
- defining possible career paths,
- efforts to channel individual career-related interests in direction which is compatible with the organization's future needs in terms of human resources.

Hence, internship should be equally subject to attention of the organization in which the internship is being realized. Internship has both subjective and objective dimensions. The subjective dimension refers to individual attitudes, interests and motives, while the objective refers to organizational conditions, job structures, promotion criteria, etc [5].

Three levels of internship are usually distinguished: initial career planning includes initial assessment of interests and competences, participation in research and gaining work experience, developing initial professional resume, and developing an initial employment plan.

Work-based learning involves: enabling directly at job, recognized job experience, as well as broad field of training for various fields of work and mentoring at the job itself [6]. Activities of connecting include: familiarizing students with job opportunities and conditions; assistance in connecting what has been learned with the work process; connecting students, employers and employment services, helping students find right job or additional training in the work process itself; monitoring individuals' advancement.

The DIEM provides support to students in developing knowledge and skills necessary to find a job, counselling services to students who have dilemmas when choosing a career, as well as other career-related counselling and information services. In this way the DIEM significantly contributes to the process of planning and managing students' own career [7].

## 3. INTERNSHIP AT THE DIEM

As a form of instruction activity, it implies practical work done by students, aimed at supplementing theoretical, academic knowledge and linking with practical knowledge and experiences necessary for performing future job. It is important for students to become familiar with employer's requirements, to verify and improve their own competences and theoretical knowledge, to enable them to adapt to work processes in the company more quickly, with the ultimate result for students being in the possibility of finding employment in enterprises which profiles young students. Student internship presents an opportunity for students to gain insight into the operation of business systems [8]. Internship is a great way to build a link between theoretical knowledge acquired at the faculty and practical knowledge acquired during internship. It is important for students to become familiar with employer's requirements and ensure that they are in line with them, as in this way their expectations about themselves and future employment will become more realistic.

Interviews conducted with students point to the fact that internship is extremely important for them on the personal level, because they minimize the fear of the first job, provide them with insight in the new lifestyle, they feel more confident and encouraged for one work experience. Students, through their internship, provide themselves with better starting position than other candidates, as employers like to hear that candidates were engaged while studying [9].

Students receive incentives for first employment and further development in the framework of internship as part of the course, as they recognize that serious and responsible companies are future-oriented, and support employees who show willingness to learn, contribute, take initiative and be responsible for their work. Significant motivation for students for future jobs is the insight that knowledge is appreciated on the market. Through internship, students [10]:

- expand practical knowledge and experience, as well as new skills,
- become acquainted with the work of various industry sectors,
- gain insight into the functioning of the company and work of the management,
- gain CV references,
- have the possibility of being directly employed,
- have the possibility of shortening the internship period when finding job,
- have the opportunity to learn foreign languages and cultures,
- internship affects career choice.

The Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia 2020 emphasizes that it is necessary to achieve a stronger cooperation between the university (i.e. academic studies) and the economy by coordinating theoretical knowledge with the needs of the economy, where business competences represent a framework and guideline for harmonizing the competences of

students of final years of studies with work conditions [11].

#### 4. IDENTIFYING ACTUAL BUSINESS COMPETENCES IN THE MARKET

Identifying and introducing key competences in the work ensures success, continuous growth and survival for the organization. Well-defined and applied competences should be strategically and operatively maintained and strengthened. Successful organizational operation requires competence of its employees and continuous development of knowledge, abilities and skills.

Competency-based approach has become widespread in the theory and practice of human resource management. The fierce nature of free market imposed a need for the implementation of new organizational values and strategies, as well as a clear understanding of what employers expect of employees in terms of developing their competencies. In addition, by increasing the number of competences of each individual, his/her chances of employment also increase, which is of great importance in conditions of high unemployment. Competences are behaviours that encompass knowledge, skills and qualities required for performing the work successfully [12].

Competences relate to technical and functional expertise, which basically represents knowledge and skills, described in visible and measurable terms, which are necessary in order to perform a certain type or level of work activity. Technical and functional expertise usually reflects career and experience in work or professional field. The following are significant competences [13]:

##### **Competence for understanding business and how it operates (purpose and mission of the organization)**

*Indicators for employees:* understanding services the organization provides and organizational priorities, respecting political dynamics that exist inside and outside the organization, seeking ways to combine efforts to solve common problems, understanding how work affects business results, responding to external and internal forces affecting the work environment.

*Indicators for managers:* ensuring that employees understand roles and responsibilities, and how they relate to business results, harmonizing the team goals of the organization.

##### **Competences focused on the results and achieving goals**

*Indicators for employees:* continuing to work energetically, applying innovative ideas, adjusting to various business situations, flexible in approach to solving challenges, taking initiative with clear business purpose, constantly seeking to improve business processes.

*Indicators for managers:* innovative solutions, providing guidelines for improving work, creating a work culture that rewards teamwork and positive results.

##### **Competencies to meet the needs of internal and external clients**

*Indicators for employees:* anticipating customer needs, providing services in a polite way, providing services precisely and in time, establishing and maintaining

contacts with customers, proposing ways to improve processes in order to meet customer needs.

*Indicators for managers:* ensuring consistency and flexibility as needed, enabling employees to improve their service delivery strategies, providing data on customer satisfaction measurement.

##### **Teamwork competences – cooperation in order to do the job successfully**

*Indicators for employees:* evaluating know-how information, asking for help when needed, providing assistance to other team members, building trust and respect among team members, leading procedures that show empathy, working with other team members towards a common goal.

*Indicators for managers:* communicating the clear vision of the team through goals and tasks, creating an environment in which team members share risks and benefits, focusing on team efforts on both processes and desired outcomes.

##### **Competencies for interpersonal communication – developing and maintaining positive relationships, exchanging ideas and opinions**

*Indicators for employees:* treating others respectfully, communicating openly and honestly, showing tact and patience, resolving conflicts in a positive sense, expressing himself in a clear and organized manner, expressing facts and thoughts in writing in a clear and organized way.

*Indicators for managers:* promoting cooperation, trust and open exchange of ideas, establishing processes for open communication, creating networks with others in order to achieve positive results.

##### **Leadership competences – motivating, influencing and supporting others to achieve organizational goals.**

*Indicators for managers:* using positions of power to support team and individual efforts, providing support to others for self-realization through work, using knowledge of organization and relationships to achieve results, communicating vision for organizational success, setting guidelines for future, as well as present, using knowledge about new trends in the field, cherishing behaviour that supports organizational values, facing inappropriate behaviours, communicating high standards of ethical behaviour.

##### **Competences for personal effectiveness - achieving results, solving problems, planning, organizing and managing the own time and work.**

*Indicators for employees:* developing himself/herself and others, constantly learning and advancing, identifying the own advantages and disadvantages, helping associates to learn and develop, defining and solving problems, taking responsibility for actions, considering costs, benefits and risks in making and implementing decisions.

*Indicators for managers:* encouraging a work culture of continuous learning, exchanging information and professional development, providing direction and support to team members and assigning challenging work, planning in advance, delegating work and authority, setting clear goals and tracking progress through evaluation.

Competencies used in the business environment for [14]:

- comparing the desired and current state of competences, that is, knowledge and skills within the team, work unit or organization;
- developing skills and behaviours that result in improved performance and productivity;
- aligning the behaviour of employees with organizational values and strategies;
- talent identification and development;
- providing a consistent framework for all activities within HRM functions.

Advantages of introducing the model of competences in the teaching process are the following [15]:

- enabling the usability of knowledge and skills in most working organizations during internship;
- enabling common understanding in terms of what kind of people are needed in the organization;
- enabling the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of each individual;
- enabling assessment of the overall human potential of the organization and determining the place and direction of further development;
- Strategy planning.

## 5. CONCLUSION

New ways of thinking are needed to redesign systems, and assign priority to people because organizations operate in an environment that requires different approaches, different ways of thinking and different structure. The studies suggest that employers on labour market need employees who will constantly adjust and improve their skills, communicate effectively and work independently. In other words, given the sophisticated and multifaceted nature of today's world, the new economy requires individuals who have a wide range of high-level skills and abilities, such as critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and decision making skills. People need to have high-level skills which enable them to act, respond, learn, and react to the variety of changes. Internship represents a bridge between academic community and economy because it directly relies on employability as well as ability to recruit high-quality young individuals. The success of any profession and any individual will largely depend on his/her ability to think, act, adapt, and communicate in a creative way [16]. Despite the fact that students lack practical experience, they belong to the generation that has a large amount of information and knowledge related to new technologies and modern tools. Having new ideas, high information literacy, and being untouched by old principles can generate useful and applicable results during the implementation of internship.

In line with such business activities, Internship is the first and landmark step in the work environment. Teachers represent a significant mediator between students and the economy, and the cooperation of teachers with the economy plays a significant role in the overall process [17]. The responsibility of teaching staff at universities is great in terms of mediating through the

subject of Internship as an initial step in making students aware and plan their further career. Networking with companies makes an ideal base for students in the form of receiving information, counselling and career management. Any opportunity that students have at the faculty should be made transparent in order to enable them to make informed decisions on the further course of their own development [18].

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