

**Edu World 2016**  
**7th International Conference**

**COMPETENCIES AND EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES IN HR  
MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: THE UKRAINIAN CASE STUDY**

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**Abstract**

In order to analyze training needs and educational objectives for HR managers this paper examines current expectations concerning the HR effectiveness: which notions about the HR effectiveness are common among the experts. The result of the group discussion indicates the most expected areas of HR competencies perceived by HR professionals in Ukraine: personal competencies dealing with the self and social competencies dealing with others. Also important feature is the transformation of HR manager into the strategic partner. However, there are very few expectations about cognitive competencies, as workforce planning and analytics, business knowledge, mastering HR processes and talent management. In other words effectiveness of HR manager depends mostly on relationships with colleagues and management, on social approval of his/her works by the chief rather than on indicators of the company success in the market. That indicates an insufficiency of systematic development of the HR profession in Ukraine and the lack of clear vocational standards of work performance and a nation-wide unified system of work-based qualifications.

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**Keywords:** HR competencies, training needs, educational objectives in HR management education, HR knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), expectations of HR manager's effectiveness.

## 1. Introduction

The main problem in the modern management education is how to find a way of developing 'competent people' who would be able to function well in a global business environment and at the same time, in local business environment. In order to be effective, an educational program for HR managers



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has to develop a set of competencies that enable them to improve their working performance. According to Boyatzis, Lingham and Passarelli (2010) there are two fundamental questions in management education. First, what competencies make managers effective? Second, how can we inspire managers to develop them? Management education can be divided into three categories: acquiring knowledge, learning to use that knowledge effectively, and discovering why one is driven to use one's knowledge and competencies. The aim of the study is to define expected educational objectives, training needs and core HR competencies by HR professionals which affect the perceived effectiveness of HR professionals.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Problem statement**

Nowadays, global HR competencies depend on the development of HR profession. According to Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, over the last 25 years the global development of HR profession has been going through several general stages (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013). At the first stage, the central tendency for HR departments was administrative and transactional. The second stage emphasized the design of innovative HR practices in sourcing, compensation or rewards, learning, communication, and so forth. The third one was focused on the connection of individual and integrated HR practices with business success through strategic HR. And now there is the fourth stage, which uses HR practices to derive and respond to external business conditions. HR practices must be innovative and integrated; and HR must turn strategic aspirations into HR actions (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012).

Special HR competencies and educational needs depend on the development of HR profession in local business environment which include national culture value orientations, general economic conditions, investment climate etc. Over the last 15 years, the HR profession in Ukraine has experienced the transformation from curiosity to a complete neglect in the business environment. It has begun as an administrative function with the focus on terms and conditions of work, and delivery of HR services. The transition to the second wave of the evolution of HR profession was very painful and difficult in Ukrainian reality. Wave 2 (by Ulrich, et al., 2012) emphasized the design of innovative HR practices in sourcing, compensation or rewards, learning, communication, and so forth. But unstable economic and political conditions, general social trends have not contributed to the development of the HR work in the company. The HR profession in Ukraine became to be perceived as useless function, which spends money and does not lead to the profit of the company. This caused a big gap between the international standards of the HR profession and the peculiarities of its development in Ukraine. The recent politic and economic situation in Ukraine has changed the perception of HR profession. Therefore it is very important to analyze the current expectations about the HR effectiveness in Ukraine among experts and to identify the difference between global and local trends in HR profession.

### **2.2. Competency-based approaches**

In the end of the 20th century the trend to use competency-based approaches has been utilized by business and industry in education and training, assessment, and development of workers. The competence approach starts from observing successful and effective job performers to determine how

they differ from less successful performers. This is the tradition followed by McClelland, Boyatzis, Spencer and Spencer who defined competency in terms of characteristics of people that are causally related to effective or superior performance in a job, generalizing across situations, and enduring for a reasonably long period of time (McClelland, & Boyatzis, 1980; Spencer and Spencer, 2008).

In the UK during the 1980s a competence-based approach was introduced in order to establish a nation-wide unified system of work-based qualifications. Vocational qualifications (VQs) were based on occupational standards of competence, grounded in functional analysis of occupations in a variety of contexts (Le Deist, & Winterton, 2005). The definition of competence includes a mix of models: work expectations, input measures (knowledge and skills) and psychological attributes (Mansfield and Mitchell, 1996). With a functional competence-based approach, the emphasis is on functional competence as the ability to demonstrate performance to the standards required of employment in a work context; the ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills in performing to the standards required in employment. This includes solving problems and meeting changing demand (Le Deist, & Winterton, 2005).

Within German and Austrian scientific tradition the main emphasis is on specifying the necessary learning inputs, rather than outcomes, to master a trade. Occupational competence is related with vocational training theory and associated pedagogy. A standard typology of competences appears in terms of domain or cognitive competence, personal competence and social competence. Domain or cognitive competence is defined as skills and abilities for mastering tasks and developing appropriate problem-solving strategies. Personal competence comprises key qualifications for dealing with oneself and is defined in terms of ability and willingness to develop personally. Social competence is largely concerned with dealing with others and is defined as the ability and willingness to cooperate, to interact with others responsibly and to behave in a group and relationally oriented way (Archan and Tutschek, 2002). A balance of domain (cognitive), personal and social competence is the prerequisite for 'method and learning competence' which arises from the implementation of transversal strategies and processes of invention and problem-solving, while learning competence equates to the meta-competence 'learning how to learn' (Le Deist, & Winterton, 2005).

A review of theory-grounded approaches to competence reveals that there is no single use of the concept of competence and no broadly accepted definition or unifying theory (Rychen, & Salganik, 2003).

### **2.3. Educational needs and objectives for HR professionals**

According to recent researches about the greatest challenges to HR over the next 10 years, more than one-half of surveyed HR professionals chose 'retaining and rewarding the best employees' and 'developing the next generation of corporate leaders'. About one-third chose 'creating a corporate culture that attracts the best employees, 'remaining competitive in the talent marketplace', and 'finding employees with the increasingly specialized skills the organization needs.' Nowadays HR professionals are more concerned with 'remaining competitive in the talent marketplace', and 'developing future leaders' (Lee & Yu, 2013). Therefore it is extremely important to analyse the current notions about the

HR effectiveness in the local regions: which notions about the HR effectiveness are there among the HR experts and how they determine the local business environment.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The study is based on three focus groups of HR professionals from different companies in Ukraine which represent a diversified sample that covers organizations of various sizes and industries. Participants were 30 HR managers, involved in educational MA program in Human Resources and Organizational Development, Lviv Business School of UCU (LvBS). The sample consisted of 30 employees, 3 males and 27 females. Their ages ranged from 23 to 42 years, and the average age was 32 years (SD = 7.11).

#### **3.2. Methods**

The study is developed within a qualitative research framework. Methods of data collecting include the focus group discussions (FGDs). A focus group research is “a way of collecting qualitative data, which involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), "focused" around a particular topic or set of issues” (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 177). Participants are selected on the criteria that they would have something to say on the topic, have similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other (Rabiee, 2004). Interview standardization refers to whether the same questions are asked of every group. Moderator involvement refers to the management of the group dynamics—that is, the extent to which the moderator either controls the discussion or allows relatively free participation (Morgan, 1997). Structured group discussion and a high level of moderator involvement keep the discussion concentrated on the topics that interest the researcher rather than extraneous issues.

In order to identify expected HR competencies the participants of the focus group discussions (FGDs) were discussing the question: what competencies HR managers need to be effective? The procedure of the focus group discussions (FGDs) includes an individual and a small group work. The method of qualitative data analyzing is the content analysis. The tool for analysing data is the thematic manual analysis which consists of four stages: (1) coding; (2) categorization of the data, (3) integration of data and finding themes, and (4) integrating all of the data. According to Krueger (2000) and Rabiee (2004) there are several criteria, which suggest the following headings as a framework for interpreting coded data: words; context; internal consistency; frequency and extensiveness of comments; specificity of comments; intensity of comments; extensiveness; big ideas.

### **4. Results**

We analyzed sets of needs and expectation among HR managers about the effectiveness of their professional work and identified several clusters of skills, which nowadays are very important for the effectiveness of HR managers in Ukrainian business environment (see Table 1). As we see from the Table 1, there are 9 clusters of expected HR needs and competencies. The most important cluster of an

effectiveness of HR manager is the “Personal efficacy”. The term "Personal efficacy" is related to the psychological term self-efficacy. In this study the cluster “Personal efficacy” is slightly similar to the Emotional Intelligence competencies proposed by Boyatzis (2011) and refers to HR managers’ beliefs about their capability to accomplish challenging goals, and includes the ability to prioritize, to be flexible, to resist stress and to behave consistently in achieving goals.

**Table 1.** Clustering needs and expectations: some examples of skills and behaviors which are important for the effectiveness of HR managers

	Cluster of expectations	%	Example of behavioral indicators
1	Personal Efficacy	24,7	Focuses on results and achieving personal work objectives; self-confident; works in a systematic and organized way; takes responsibility
2	Effective Communication	14,2	Communicates, listens, asks questions, says "no"; builds communication flexibly
3	Relationship Management	17,3	Builds effective relationships; understands others; establishes credibility; people-oriented; fosters effective teambuilding; resolves conflicts
4	Organizational Culture	5,6	Generates an employee loyalty; maintains a corporate culture; creates meaningful work environment
5	Strategic Contribution	15,4	Articulates strategic goals and priorities; analyzes the past and predicts future events; has strategic thinking
6	Business Knowledge	8,6	Understands industry dynamics and competitive forces; understands finance and business processes in organization
7	Workforce planning and analytics	6,2	Perform organizational diagnoses and audits; analyzes the career path of individual employees
8	Mastering HR processes	5,6	Identifies needs in accordance with the company's development; designs of reward programs; facilitates establishment of clear performance standards
9	Learning and development	2,5	Designs and delivers training programs; develops innovative, thought-leading learning and talent development approaches

The next three clusters of our study: “Effective communication”, “Relationship management” and “Organizational culture” correspond to the concept of Social competencies (Boyatzis, 2011; Archan and Tutschek, 2002). The “Relationship management” cluster is about building effective relationships; understanding others and establishing credibility and the "Effective communication" cluster refers to an effective communication between HR manager and owner and with people at all levels. The cluster “Organizational Culture” indicates on the importance of creating and maintaining organizational culture, creating a positive image through social media, enhancing employees’ participation and commitment.

The rest of the clusters can be roughly marked as cognitive competency which include systems thinking and problem solving (Boyatzis, 2011; Archan and Tutschek, 2002). The first cluster within the frame of cognitive competencies is the “Strategic contribution” which deals with such ideas as making strategic choices, having a strategic vision, creating a strategic agenda. These statements suggest that the important field in the HR work is building of strategic HR management and developing of relevant skills of HR managers. The next cluster “Business Knowledge” indicates the ability to understand the general business conditions (social, technological, economic, political, environmental, and demographic trends) that affect their industry. The cluster “Workforce planning and analytics” underlines analytical and system thinking of HR manager, in particular, the ability to perform organizational diagnoses and audits; analyze the career path of individual employees and predict future outcomes. The administrative work

also is important for HR professionals. The “Mastering HR processes” cluster means that HR managers resolve business problems through integrating innovative HR practices, facilitating establishment of clear performance standards, updating rewards system in an organization and managing employees’ relations. The latest cluster of HR competency expectation within the frame of cognitive competencies is the “Learning and personnel development” which focuses on designing and delivering training programs; developing innovative, thought-leading learning and talent development approaches.

## 5. Discussion

By applying some basic tenets of the behavioral approach to emotional, social and cognitive intelligence (Boyatzis, 2011) and a holistic competence framework (Archan and Tutschek, 2002; Le Deist, & Winterton, 2005), the present study defined the typology of expected educational needs and HR competencies in the Ukrainian business environment which includes three dimensions: personal, social and cognitive (Table 2). Personal competence comprises key qualifications for dealing with oneself and is defined in terms of ability and willingness to develop personally. Social competence is concerned with dealing with others and is defined as the ability and willingness to cooperate, to interact with others responsibly. Cognitive competency is an ability to think or analyze information and situations that leads to or causes effective or superior performance (Boyatzis, 2011; Archan and Tutschek, 2002).

**Table 2.** A three-dimensional typology of the expected HR competencies by HR professionals which affect the perceived effectiveness of HR professionals

<b>Personal competencies</b>		
1	Personal Efficacy	the ability to prioritize, to be flexible, to be stress resistant and to accomplish challenging goals
<b>Social competencies</b>		
2	Effective communication	the ability to create a free exchange of information among stakeholders at all levels of the organization to produce desired outcomes
3	Relationship management	the ability to build personal relationships of trust, and to have effective relationships with key people both inside and outside their business
4	Organizational Culture	the ability to create an effective and strong organization in sustaining an organization’s success where employees find meaning and purpose at work, aligning strategy, culture, practices, and behavior
<b>Cognitive competencies</b>		
5	Strategic Contribution	the ability to create their organization’s strategic response to business conditions and customer expectations by helping frame and making strategic and organizational choices
6	Business Knowledge	the ability to understand the general business conditions that affect their industry and geography
7	Workforce planning and analytics	the ability to analytical and system thinking; to perform organizational diagnosis and audits; analyze the career path and predict outcomes
8	Mastering HR processes	the ability to apply the principles and practices of HRM to contribute to the organization’s success
9	Learning and development	the ability to design and deliver training programs; develop innovative, thought-leading learning and talent development approaches

As a result of the study the most expected areas of HR competencies perceived by HR professionals in Ukraine's business environment are personal competencies dealing with the self and social competencies dealing with others. Therefore the personal efficacy of HR manager and his/her

communication skills directly affect the effectiveness of the HR professional work. This idea is also related to results of the empirical study conducted by Luthans and Peterson, which indicate that the manager's self-efficacy is a partial mediator in the relationship between employees' engagement and the manager's rated effectiveness (Luthans, & Peterson, 2002). Other research has found that self-efficacy predicts several important work-related outcomes, including job attitudes, training proficiency and job performance (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001).

We also have found the support the idea that HR managers in Ukraine are focused on the connection of individual and integrated HR practices with business success through strategic HR. That result can indicate the third stage of the development of HR profession according to the Ulrich model (Ulrich, et al., 2012). Managers need to concentrate on how to align the HR systems and workforce investments at the level of the strategic business process (Becker, & Huselid, 2006).

However, very little attention was paid on the expectations of HR managers on such topics as workforce planning and analytics, business knowledge, and mastering HR processes which indicate the ability to understand general business conditions, the ability to analytical and system thinking, the ability to apply the principles and practices of HRM to contribute to the organization's success. Of particular note is the fact, that "Learning and personnel development" cluster scored lowest rate expectations about HR manager's effectiveness. The result runs counter to recent trends in HR management which emphasize the importance of talent development and innovation. We obtained very few expectations with regard to the innovative, thought-leading learning and talent development approaches. This may mean that HR management in Ukraine does not develop systematically and is based only on the personality of the HR manager and his/her ability to build personal relationships with people at all levels and to influence others in a positive way. The next question that arises in the course of our research: what does it mean the subjective success for HR manager? And our assumption is that subjective success for HR manager depends mostly on relationships with colleagues and management, on social approval of his/her works by the chief rather than on indicators of the company success in the market. These results point out limitations of the study and outline future directions of analysis.

## **6. Conclusions**

Summing up, the results of this study help to broaden our understanding about HR manager's effectiveness in Ukraine. The most expected areas of HR competencies perceived by HR professionals are personal competencies dealing with the self and social competencies dealing with others. Therefore the personal efficacy of HR manager and his/her ability to build constructive relationships directly affect the effectiveness of the HR professional work. Also important is the transformation of HR manager into the strategic partner which indicates the ability to create organization's strategic response to business conditions and requires new knowledge and skills, based on new style of thinking.

However, there are very few expectations about workforce planning and analytics, business knowledge, mastering HR processes which indicate the ability to analytical and system thinking to contribute to the organization's success. Moreover there are extremely few expectations about HR effectiveness with regard to the innovative, thought-leading learning and talent development approaches. This may mean that HR management in Ukraine does not develop systematically and is based mostly on

the personality of the HR manager and his/her ability to build personal relationships with people at all levels and to influence others in a positive way. This fact indicates the need to pay attention to the development of the HR profession in Ukraine, to analyze vocational standards of work performance and to establish a nation-wide unified system of work-based qualifications.

## Acknowledgements

We thank our colleagues from Lviv Business School of UCU (LvBS) who provided the great assistance in conducting our research.

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