



## BEYOND COMPETENCIES: NEW CHALLENGES IN A DIGITAL SOCIETY

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### MODEL TO MANAGE THE PROCESS OF ACQUISITION OF COMPETENCES THROUGH INTERNSHIPS THE CASE OF BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS

#### 1. ABSTRACT:

Literature detects discrepancies among the competences that the higher education institutions include in their programs, the competences that students really acquire and the competences that are really required according to the employers.

The phases where these gaps are generated will be found. Additionally, causes of these discrepancies will be shown in each step. Results will be useful for higher education institutions and companies in order to close these gaps.

#### 2. RESUMEN:

La literatura detecta discrepancias entre las competencias que las instituciones de educación superior incluyen en sus programas, las competencias que realmente adquieren los estudiantes y las competencias que los empleadores certifican que han adquirido.

Se encontrarán las fases donde se generan estas brechas. Además, las causas de estas discrepancias se mostrarán en cada paso. Los resultados serán de utilidad para las instituciones de educación superior y las empresas para cerrar estas brechas.

#### 3. KEYWORDS: 4-6

Competences, Internship, Universities, Business and Administration

#### 4. PALABRAS CLAVE: 4-6

Competencias, Prácticas, Universidades, Administración y Empresa



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### 5. DESENVOLUPAMENT:

#### 1.- INTRODUCTION

Literature claims some gaps among the perceptions on students' competences acquisition from different agents. It is found out that the skills attempted to provide to students differ from that that they really acquired. Additionally, these real competences acquired might be not the most demanded by employers. These triple discrepancies will be analyzed (Hergert, 2009 and Stephen and Knouse, 2008).

Switching the learning strategy towards the idea of competences has provided large benefits to Higher Education; however, it faces some drawbacks, which deserve our attention (Milne and Caldicott, 2016). Employers state the presence of some gaps between the intended student competences, the demanded competences and the perceived ones (Beard, 2016). Whereas the last ones refer to how employers perceive and assess the competences they see that fresh graduates show; the first ones are defined as the level of competences students are supposed to have acquired before entering the firm, that are set by universities; and the second ones refer to those employers would like to effectively require. All and all, there is a sequence of discrepancies since the higher education institutions choose a competence that is included in academic programs, till the employees assess its level of acquisition (Figure 1).

<<Figure 1.- Discrepancies between intended competences, demanded competences and acquired competences.>>

#### 2.- OBJECTIVES

This research intends to improve the students' skills and competences in order to guarantee their success when entering into the labor market. Therefore, it will be required identifying the source of the skills and competences' mismatches and the exact moment and process when they arise, address the problem in an innovative way and implement potential solutions at the exact location where it has been identified.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to provide a model to identify, define and locate the stages of the competence acquisition process during internships for students of business and administration of higher education institutions.

Additionally, all steps -from the competence definition to the employee assessment of competence level performed in the real internship work- will be listed and analyzed.



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Each step will be scrutinized in order to find out how these gaps might emerge in each of these phases. Some possible causes will be proposed.

### 3.- METHODOLOGY

Different agents involved will provide their view in different ways. The higher education institutions will provide which are the competences embodied in the academic programs and the particular way are fostered in students through different methodologies.

Enterprises will decisively participate in the discussion and description of the main competences a future worker will need in order to come up with an agreement with respect to the list of competences upon which to develop the project. Therefore, companies involved will determine: (a) the standards they consider the students need to meet; (b) the level of competences students are supposed to possess at the end of their studies; (c) the level of students' competences perceived.

Students will also provide own perception related to these competences acquisition.

The project will be deployed in some steps. First, the list of competences to be analyzed will be chosen. This task will be performed by a mix-team, composed by employees, students and academics. High education institutions (HEIs) will share the handicaps and problems they face when deciding which competences to implement and how to do it. More specifically, they will participate in the meetings aimed at discussing the location of the main problems for an adequate acquisition of competences, finding out the possible reasons and wrong patterns followed. This will help elaborating the first perception analysis of the problem. Enterprises will decisively participate in the discussion and description of the main competences a future worker will need in order to come up with an agreement with respect to the list of competences.

Next, some scales to measure the perception of competences acquisition will be defined and validated: the first scale to measure the degree of competences that is intended by the higher education institutions; the second one to assess the degree of acquisition of the aimed competences during the degree acquisition according to the students, and third and last, the real acquisition degree according to the employers. This part will be attempted through data collection and its statistical analysis (exploratory analysis, reliability and validity analyses and last confirmatory analyses for each scale).

Last will be the analysis of the model shown in Figure 2 in order to find causes of discrepancies among the three players. It will be conducted through focuses groups composed by professionals from the three groups involved (higher education institutions, students and employers of organizations).



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### 4- MODEL

Figure 2 shows the decomposition of the process from the definition to the competences that will be included in the program of a university title to the final analysis between university and employees in order to assess the whole process. Once this last step is settled, the Figure 2 shows the circular shape that remains the PDCA Deming cycle. At the same time, the circular deployment of competences acquisition enables to find discrepancies, and end up placing the process in a continuous feedback loop.

<<Figure 2. Stages of the competences acquisition process>>

This would allow to suggest the necessary changes as well as the solutions to be implemented at every stage of the process:

- Locate the exact moment(s) along the competence acquisition process where the gap originates
- Find out the problems triggering the lower than required acquisition of the competence
- Examine the reasons for the problems deriving into the gaps

That is to say, we need to tackle the competences in order to track a safety way to acquire them. Our procedure will allow us to tackle the problems and so reduce the existing discrepancies by:

- Elaborating the measures and tasks to find out the problems and addressing them
- Developing measures and tasks for quality enhancement and quality assurance of the competences' acquisition

In fact, we can see the track as a loop: a never ending process, a continuous quality improvement, since once we get to the end, we find out that we need restarting again and again.



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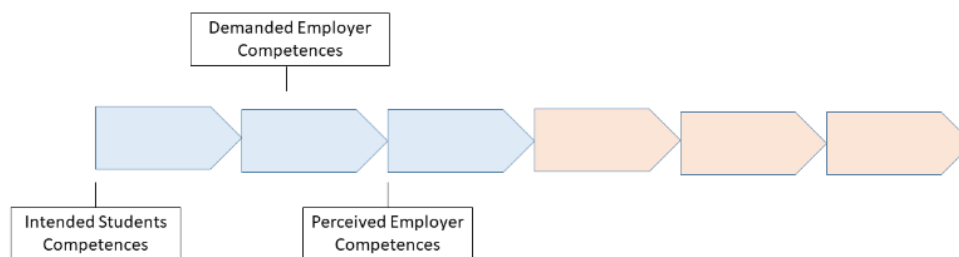
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### 5.- CONCLUSIONS

The project will define a model that describes the whole process of acquisition competences of the students in higher education of business and administration. It will provide a tool in order to gap the discrepancies between the intended competences and the real ones acquired. Additionally, the model will allow to find out which are the real causes for these gaps, and therefore it will allow to find effective measure to close these gaps. Additionally, the research can be extended providing a scale to measure the competence level acquisition, alongside with the demanded levels by employers, which in its turn might be useful for benchmarking purposes.

#### 5.1. FIGURA O IMAGEN 1

Figure 1.- Discrepancies between intended competences, demanded competences and acquired competences





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### 5.2. FIGURA O IMAGEN 2

Figure 2. Stages of the competences acquisition process.



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