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**YOUTH INTEGRATION INTO THE LABOUR
MARKET: THE IMPORTANCE OF KEY
COMPETENCIES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Compared to previous generations, the current generation is undergoing very drastic changes such as globalization, technological progress or the evolution of communications. This has created many opportunities and challenges, but it has led to one of the main challenges the society face nowadays: how to ensure employment for all citizens (ILO, 2019).

As far as young people are concerned, education is one of the main factors explaining youth employment and unemployment. This requires a quality education system that is flexible and able to respond to the changing needs of today's developing society. However, the expansion of the professional competencies required has been much faster than the adaptation of these competencies in the education system, which has led to a clear mismatch in the competence profile required for the positions offered (Blázquez et al., 2019).

The close line between the reality of work and what is learned in university degrees is currently one of the biggest problems in many European countries, more specifically Spain, where the impact has been much more evident. Should the university adapt to the need of the labour market? Should the education system, companies and young people have a much closer relationship when it comes to implementing education policies? What is really hindering the transition from the education system to the labour market?

According to a multi-country report by McKinsey, only 43% of employers manage to find the skills or competencies they need in workers at the entry level (McKinsey and company, 2012). This shortfall could be one of the main reasons why youth unemployment is increasing every year around the world.

The main objective of this work is to capture the importance of the competence profile of young people with higher education and their subsequent integration into the world of work. To this end, the history of these data is investigated through theoretical research, trying to examine the evolution both in Spain and in Europe, in order to discover the current issues and their underlying causes. All this data is based on key competencies, employability, youth employment and training, among others. In addition, it will also illustrate the current reality of the student-company relationship in a practical way, where companies will be responsible for presenting their perspective on the recent needs of the

market and the integration of youth into the labour market, and then comparing it with the performance and competence profile of university students.

Taking into account the methodology for analysing the work, a case study will be carried out. It will focus on analysing several companies in Castellón and its surroundings from different sectors to understand the reality of the companies. The main points to deal with are: integration of young people into the labour market, the adequacy of the profiles demanded and found, the training of youth with higher education, recruitment and selection based on competencies, and the involvement of the companies themselves in these issues. To obtain this information, both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) data will be analysed in order to identify the main problems or shortcomings that companies have in integrating or recruiting, and at the same time providing recommendations or possible solutions to the issues discussed.

This work is structured into two main sections: the theoretical review and the case study. Section 2 provides several points: a theoretical review of the concepts used and the relationships between them, the development of employment and unemployment at both national and European level, and the presence and importance of the competence profile according to the three parties involved in this study. Section 3 describes the methodology and begins to pinch some ideas and analyses from the case study. Section 4 gives the results of both the questionnaires and the interviews carried out in an attempt to analyse in depth the situation of youth today and their relationship with competencies for employment and to make some recommendations. Section 5 will present the conclusions of the work and some proposals for further research. Finally, it will be found both the bibliography, where all the materials used for the elaboration of this work will appear, as well as the annexes with the questionnaire and the interview guide.

The contribution of this work, thus, can be summarized as follows. On the one hand, the work extensively develops a theoretical framework, which shows particularly valuable information for academics and agents involved in the topic and gives meaning and usefulness to the work itself, thus leading to the execution of the case study. On the other hand, the case study and the recommendations and conclusions derived help to explain the problems surrounding youth integration into the labour market, trying to provide guidance for both academic agents and companies.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, all the key concepts are going to be compiled and defined, and their subsequent classification and relationship in the proposed field of study, all under the framework of competencies and youth employability. Thus, it will review the current situation both at an international level and more specifically, in the Spanish case.

Therefore, it will emphasize the key argument of this study, which is the competence profile of young people in university stages and/or higher education who are soon to enter into the world of work, relying on the contribution of the 3 main agents: educational system, youth and employers.

2.1. Definition of concepts

Historically, concepts such as competence and employability have been the focus of much controversy and there are many different thoughts about them. Under all these points, it starts with the apparently simple idea of “competence”, but like many other logical concepts, it turns out to be ambiguous and complex, with no consensus on its meaning, always with arguments from different experts (Gómez, 2016). Since 1970s, especially since McClelland’s articles (1958, 1973, 1985, 1987) at Harvard University, the concept of competence has been gaining more and more prominence and has evolved over time.

According to Eraut (2006), at the end of the last century, new factors emerged that influenced the discourse on competences. In the first place, one can count on the emergence of a strong movement in Anglo-Saxon countries to accredit prior learning or learning required outside of high education institutions. A second factor has been the emergence of the movement for accountability for learning and university efficiency. And third and finally, the expansion of competency-based approaches to training.

The initial use of the term “competence” (the minimum standard of professional behaviour or action) to the use of “competency” (behaviour that must be developed or learned to achieve a high level of performance) can result in a conceptual and professional shift (CIPD, 2009 cited in Jindal-Sanpe and Naulty, 2005, p.2). More recently, however, because of the growing consensus that work performance requires a combination of behaviour, attitude and skill, the terms are used interchangeably (CIPD,

2020). With respect to the approach of this paper, the term “competency” will be used more commonly, except when referring to occupational standards or when discussing the competence profile, then the term “competence” will be used.

Consequently, it is possible to analyse different meanings by different experts to define competencies, but considering the purpose of this work, two definitions have been selected that proposed an integrated and applicable vision to the training environment.

From the OECD DeSeco Project, it was defined as “the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a given context by mobilizing psychosocial prerequisites that include both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects” (Rychen and Salganik, 2003, p.74).

On the other hand, it is also recorded, as Hager et al. (2002, p.3) points out, a competency is:

A term widely used to refer to a range of qualities and capacities that are increasingly viewed as important in higher education. These include thinking skills such as logical and analytical reasoning, problem solving and, intellectual curiosity; effective communication skills, teamwork skills, and capacities to identify, access and manage knowledge and information; personal attributes such as imagination, creativity and intellectual rigour; and values such as ethical practice, persistence, integrity and tolerance. This diverse collection of qualities and capacities is distinguished from the discipline-specific knowledge and associated technical skills that traditionally are associated with higher education.

In addition, the concept of “employability” can be considered, also with different definitions, but with clearer ideas shared by the various experts in the field.

De Grip et al. (2004) had in mind the concept of employability as the ability and willingness of workers to remain attractive to the labour market (supply factors), to react to and anticipate changes in tasks and the working environment (demand factors) facilitated by the HRD instruments at their disposal (institutions).

And some organizations such as the International Labour Organization (2004, R.195 I.2 [d]) classified it as:

The transferable skills and qualifications that strengthen people’s ability to take advantage of education and training opportunities available to them to find and keep a

decent job, to progress in the enterprise or when changing jobs and to adapt to changes in technology, employment or labour market conditions.

As can be seen in both definitions, as well as by several experts such as Lantarón (2016), the adjustment between the training received and that required by the labour market, labour market insertion and working conditions, and also the acquisition of skills and competencies for job search are taken into account (a statement that will be explained in more detail in the section 2.3.).

2.2. Types of competencies

As well as with the definition of competency, there does not seem to be a common understanding of competencies' classification. The literature reviewed provides different classifications which, instead of adapting to specific theoretical methods or trends, each author follows its own standards. This paper will focus on the vision of authors such as Mertens (1996) and Pereda and Berrocal (2001), who classify competencies according to their direct relationship with the organizational strategy or job performance of a specific job.

For its part, Mertens (1996) identifies three blocks of competencies:

- Generic competencies: related to effective and necessary work behaviours and attitudes in all areas of the organization and, therefore, can be transferred to different work environments or contexts. Examples of generic competencies may include identification with the company's corporate culture, planning or teamwork.
- Specific competencies: respective to the technical aspects of a particular occupation. Thus, these competencies are not easily transferred to other work environments. The development of infrastructure projects and the operation of specialised machinery may be included in this type of competency.
- Basic competencies: those acquired during basic training and considered to be essential for a job, since they are essential competencies and transferable to different organizational contexts. Examples may be reading and writing, oral communication, or basic mathematical calculus.

In the same line, Pereda and Berrocal (2001) categorize competencies as strategic (or generic) and specific, dividing the latter into two categories: common and technical.

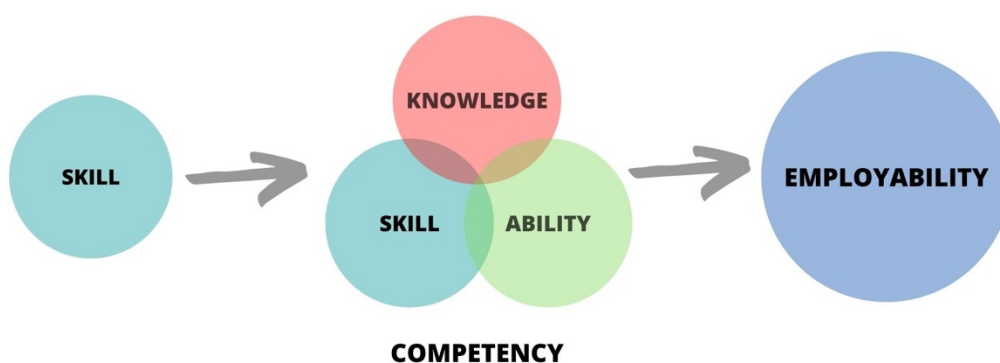
- Strategic (or generic) competencies are those required to achieve the strategic objectives of the organization, such as customer orientation, innovation, teamwork or flexibility. These competencies should be closely linked to the organization culture and corporate values.
- Specific competencies refer to the competencies of a job, divided into:
 - o Common competencies: these must be held by all employees at the same hierarchical level in the organization chart of the company. They are similar to strategic ones, but they do not necessarily have to be present in all members of the organization, only in those who share the same functional level in the organizational chart. Therefore, they may focus on attention to detail or information planning and analysis for all administrative staff, regardless of the specific functions of the position in which they are located.
 - o Technical competencies: related to the conduct of employees of a given job based on its content and speciality, such as preparing purchasing budgets, preparing a cost analysis or creating and designing an incentive plan.

Both classifications are related to job performance or directly connected to the strategy of the company, a fact that will take precedence in the development of the case study of this paper, using those generic or strategic competencies as the basis for it.

2.3. Relationship between skills, competencies and employability

As mentioned above, competencies and employability are closely interrelated, triggering each other as it is seen in Illustration 1.

Illustration 1: Relationship between skill, competency and employability.



Source: Own elaboration.

In this image it can be seen the relationship of the concepts starting with skills, which are specific activities or tasks that require dexterity and are acquired or developed through training or experience (Rigby and Sanchis, 2006). Especially in the world of work, it is considered to be a physical task learned in order to be able to perform one or more job functions.

These so-called skills are considered as one of the 3 key concepts in which competencies are composed of, taking into account that the other two are abilities and knowledge.

$$\text{Competencies} = \text{Skills} + \text{Abilities} + \text{Knowledge}$$

In some ways, a skill and a competency are similar because both can identify the skills that a person has acquired through training and experience. However, these concepts differ greatly in their role within the talent management process.

It is concluded that competencies are defined and considered within the professional environment in which they are put into practice. Competencies, therefore, are not an isolated knowledge, skill or attitude, but the integral and harmonious combination of all these concepts in a specific work activity (Le Boterf, Barzuchetti and Vincent, 1993).

Therefore, there is employability, which for most authors such as García-Manjón (2009), is related to the development of attributes, skills or competencies which are highly valued in the labour market. In other words, “the common denominator of employability is the usefulness of skills and its criterion is remuneration” (Kohler, 2004, p.4).

This meaning of employability leads to an approximation of this term to the concept of competency, as proposed by Goleman (1999), and thus providing a greater richness of content with respect to what it means and entails to get a job (Renteria, 2004). In fact, the term “skills” has been considered increasingly important in the definition of employability, especially by those authors who relate it to education, higher education and recent graduates (e.g., De Cos and Reques, 2010; Harvey, 2003; Martin-Gonzalez, 2013; Mora, 2007; Watts, 2006).

Both the skills forming part of the competencies, as well as the competencies themselves, have meant that employability has come to be considered a question of individual capacity and of shared responsibility between people, organisations and institutions, a subject that will be dealt with in more detail in the following sections. The results of Renteria (2006) and Álvarez, Bustos and Valencia (2004) provide empirical support for this conclusion.

2.4. Youth employment, education and skills

For many years, young people have always been in the spotlight of both companies and institutions, considered as a valuable resource due to their freshness, motivation and willingness to learn. But indistinctly, current youth is not having things easy to be employed in Europe, and less so in Spain, which has a more complex situation than the European average because of the Spanish crisis (Sora, Caballer and Peiró, 2014).

2.4.1. International level

Regarding the international context, it will be focused specially on the European youth, commenting on the situation of youth employment and unemployment, over-education, and the maximum level of studies reached in the different European countries.

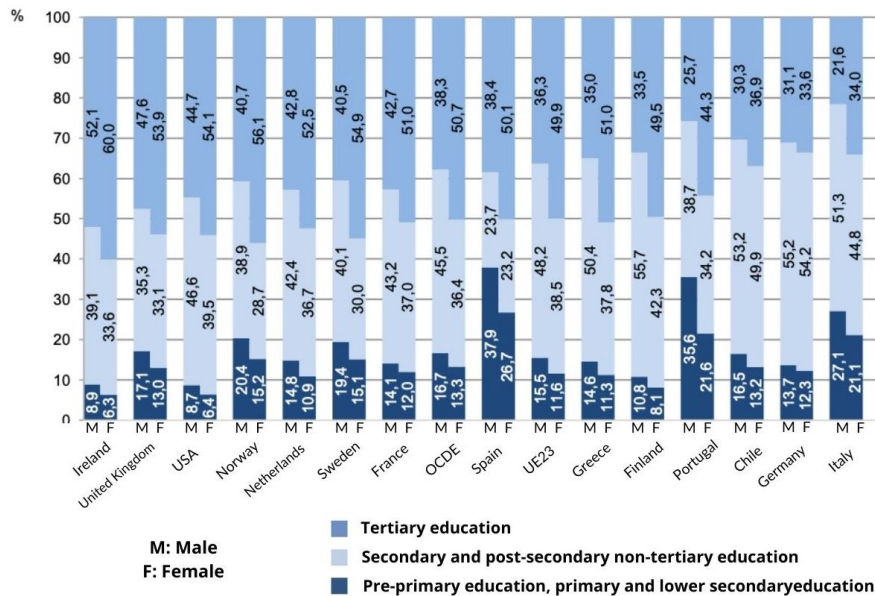
2.4.1.1. Global situation

The level of training received by youth during their studies is closely linked to their professional and employment situation. Similarly, the expansion of education has increased the number of qualified youths worldwide, with the likelihood that those with higher qualifications will be able to opt for better jobs, or be more likely to be employed. According to Education at Glance 2019, people with lower academic qualifications have

lower job expectations and tend to perform work according to routines that have a higher risk of automation in the short to medium term, which increases the probability of unemployment (Arntz et al., 2016).

In terms of the general trend in European countries to differentiate between genders, women achieve tertiary education to a greater extent than men, while, on the contrary, the number of men who fail to reach or only manage to stabilize at the second stage of secondary education is more common than that of women (Graph 1). One of the main causes is the type of work, since historically men have done jobs that are mostly focused on the labour force compared to women. This causes men to remain at lower levels of education, while women manage to achieve higher rates at higher levels of education.

Graph 1: Gender distribution of the adult population (25-34 years old) according to their level of education (2018).



Source: OCDE (2019).

In addition, it is observed that in countries with a low percentage of young adults with only basic education, there is a greater balance between the share of secondary and non-tertiary post-secondary graduates and tertiary graduates, thus minimizing gaps in the labour market in an attempt to reduce social inequalities in those countries.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the increase in the number of qualified youths has triggered another of the current problems facing young people in Europe: overeducation. When young people enter the labour market, they may find themselves in a job that does not correspond to their training, suffering what is known as an educational mismatch (OCDE, 2013). This irregularity occurs when the education

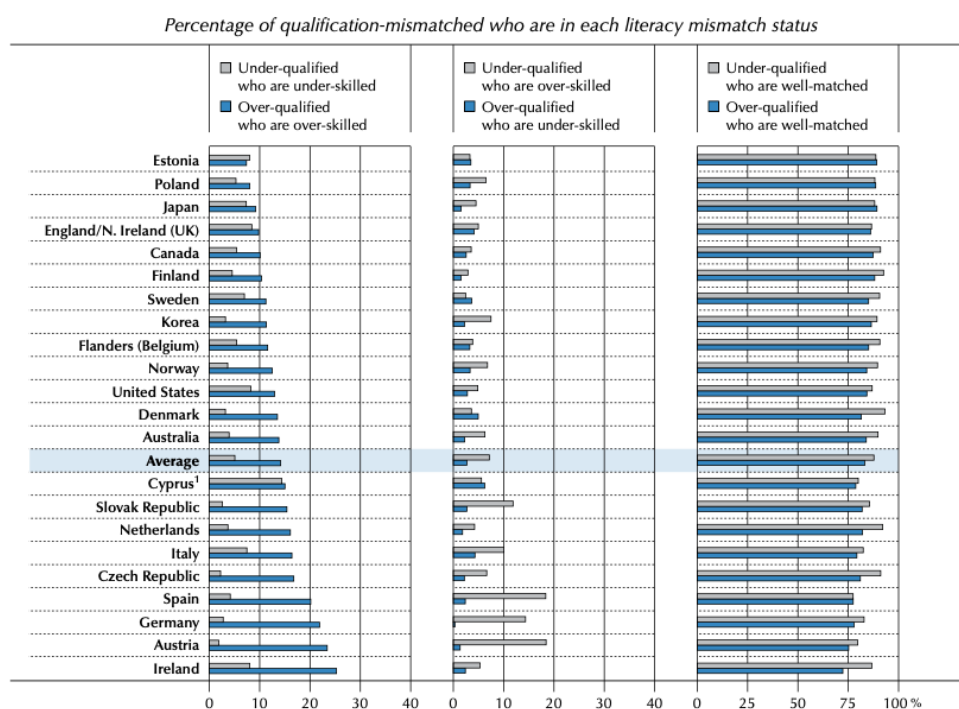
attained by the individual does not correspond to the requirements of the job, either below or above expectations (over-education or under-education).

Historical data show that over-qualification among young people is particularly prevalent among staff working part-time or on fixed-term contracts. Over-qualification implies not only an impact on wages, but also a wasting of human capital, as over-qualified staff often under-use their skills. However, some of these discrepancies also imply the opposite, a lower-than-expected mastery of skills, either because of previous poor performance or because of the depreciation of skills overtime. In contrast, low-skilled staff tend to have the skills required for the job they do, but not the qualifications to prove that they do.

This means that the mismatch in the labour market today resides more in the generic or specific skills of the jobs independently of the formal qualifications of the applicants, adapting the work tasks accordingly.

As can be seen from Graph 2, the discrepancy between qualification and skills are interrelated. According to the OECD skills mismatch measure, 14% of overqualified workers are also over-skilled, confirming that qualifications are an imperfect substitute for skills, suggesting that other skills are under-utilized due to over-qualification.

Graph 2: Overlap between qualification- and skills-mismatch measures



Source: Survey of Adults Skills (PIAAC) (2012), Table A4.26.

Another key point in this mismatch is under-qualification or under-skilling. In countries such as Germany and Spain, there is a large number of low-qualified workers who, on the other hand, are over-skilled. This is known as “skill inflation” (OCDE, 2013), because more graduates in the workforce are now inflating skill requirements, and many others who have acquired the skills or knowledge needed for work by other means without formal education certification may be left behind.

Finally, drawing on all the comments made in the paragraph, it can be concluded that, given the growing trend in the number of people with higher education, a large number of high-quality jobs are needed to absorb the large number of skilled workers. Therefore, as Romero (2018) comments, to reduce the proportion of young people with higher education, it may be necessary to establish a stronger link between the education system and the labour market so that the training provided is sufficient to meet the occupational needs of the labour market, thus reducing unemployment and the educational mismatch as much as possible both up and down.

2.4.1.2. Youth employment

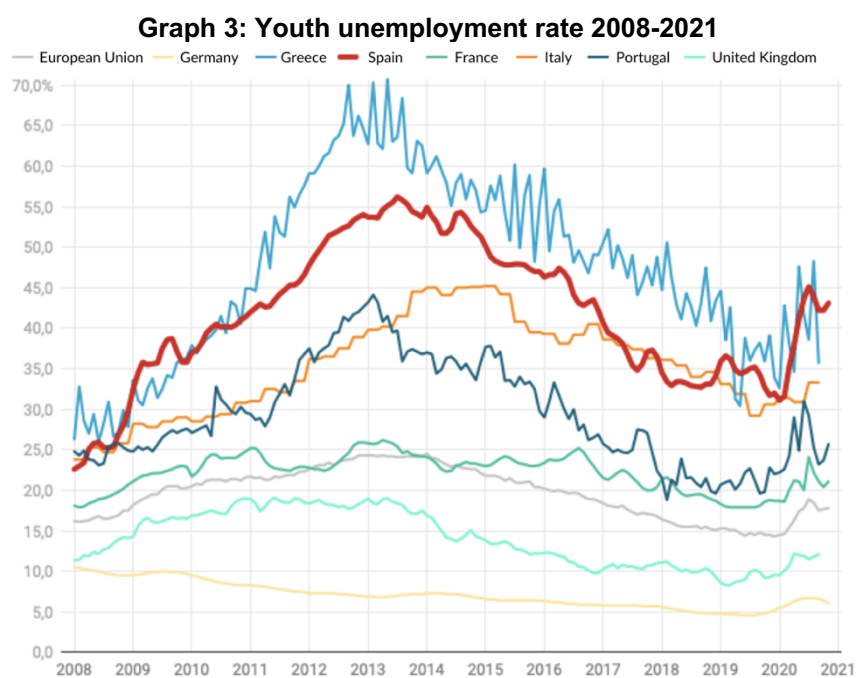
As regards the problem of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, there are worrying particularities in Europe. It maintains a high rate and a high proportion of unwanted part-time temporary jobs, all caused by factors such as the low educational attainment of young people, the inefficiency of current policies and inflexibility.

Youth in Europe is still the people most affected by the current situation. Elements such as globalization, the development of communications and transport, the advancement of science and technology, and the growth of migration have contributed to the disappearance or neglect of many economic, geographical or social barriers (Fuentes Gantenbein de Semrau, 2010). These changes have created undoubted opportunities in all sectors, but they have also brought challenges to the country, entrepreneurs and citizens themselves.

One of the main complications that these challenges have posed for governments, and for practically the entire population, is how to guarantee employment for citizens, particularly young generations.

Youth unemployment remains very high compared to adult unemployment, the quality of employment is deteriorating overtime rather than improving, and the transition time from school to work is becoming increasingly hard. All this has created a great sense of detachment from the labour market, a lack of security and, above all, frustration and talent drain (Blázquez et al., 2019).

Graph 3 shows how the youth employment rate has been very un-even in the different European countries over the years 2008-2021, observing that in recent months Greece has ceased to lead the graph after time and consistently ranked as the European country with the highest youth unemployment. The current leader in this chart is Spain, which case is going to be exposed in more detail in the following sections of this work. Germany, on the other hand, remains the country with the lowest rate, followed by the United Kingdom.



Source: Adrián Francisco Varela elaboration based on Eurostat data (2021).

When it comes to unemployment, it is important to understand that the matching between labour supply and demand takes place at sector, regional and company level. The latter is an accurate factor in determining the needs of each market segment, so it is vitally important to know which skills, attitudes and knowledge can be sought and valued on the supply side, and whether the education system can make education responsive. Moreover, in the face of changes in the economic structure caused by technological disruption, globalization, outsourcing of production activities or migration, companies

must perceive and define the new professional skills required to be able to progress and develop in industry.

In these periods of rapid change, it is essential to forecast the skills and knowledge required and developed in order to be able to take the necessary measures and thus secure the future of employment in the various European countries.

2.4.2. Spanish case

In this section, it will be delved into the special case of Spain and how globalization, the challenge of the crisis and the difficulties to get out of this economic stagnation left almost 60% of young people unemployed in 2013, as shown in Graph 4.

2.4.2.1. Youth employment

In the specific case of Spain, it is one of the countries with the highest current youth unemployment rate (around 43%) well above the EU average of 17,8% (see Graph 3). This leads to delicate economic consequences for the country, but also at the social level, such as mistrust, social exclusion and the brain drain, as well as to a burden on our country's medium- and long-term competitiveness.

Graph 4: Evolution of the youth unemployment rate (2002-2020)



Source: INE (2020), www.epdata.es

As Dolado et al. (2000) and Moreno Mínguez (2008) mentioned, the working conditions of young people in particular depend on the effectiveness of the education system. Given the large supply of jobs and the growing demand for training by companies, the ability of youth to find stable and adequately paid jobs depends, among other things, on the

quantity and quality of education they receive. However, the relationship between the education system and the labour market is bi-directional.

Therefore, the reasons for youth unemployment in Spain must be found in the absence of the education system and the labour market. Among the former are the scale of early school drop-out and the polarization of education, on which it will be focused below. These developments, together with the segmentation of the labour market, its rigidity and the inefficiency of active employment policies (Council of the European Union, 2010), have led to a deterioration in the participation of young people in the labour force, restricting employment growth due to their frustration.

As for the increase in training, it has always been biased towards university education, which has led to a mismatch between the supply and demand of employment divided by level of education, thus limiting the development of youth unemployment.

As a result, the education level of the Spanish population is polarized, generating a mismatch between the demand and supply of skilled jobs, and causing university graduates to experience a high rate of unemployment or underemployment compared to the European average due to the relative inability of the production system to absorb qualified young people (Martínez, 2013; Pérez and Hernández, 2013). In addition, all this is reflected in the overqualification of the young population and the emigration of the best educated to other European countries (Moreno Mínguez, 2013).

This over-supply of university graduates and the resulting over-education not only helps to explain the magnitude of the unemployment rate among university-educated Spanish youth, but also helps to explain the unemployment rate among less educated youth. First, as technological progress has increased the relative demand for skilled workers, it has reduced the demand for unskilled ones. Second, skilled workers tend to displace unskilled workers from occupations traditionally held by them, either because of an over-supply or because of higher recruitment standards in companies (García, 2011).

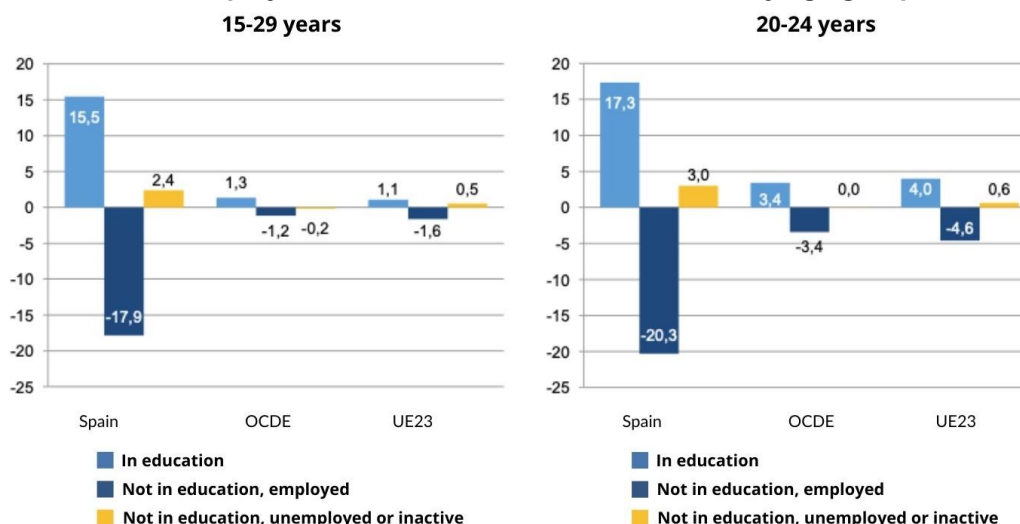
2.4.2.2. Concern of Spanish youth

Nowadays, young Spaniards are a clear reflection of the crisis that Spain has endured in recent years, triggering in these periods of constant concern about their future, their economic level or the exploration for a solution to their employment difficulties and anxieties.

Over the past 10 years, the difficulty of young people in Spain in gaining access to the labour market has led to an increase in their permanence in the education system. Approximately the number of young Spaniards aged 20 to 24 who are still in training has increased by 17.3%, while the average for the EU23 countries has only increased by 4% between 2008 and 2018 (see Graph 5).

At the same time, inversely, the group of young people who do not continue training but are employed has decreased, accounting for 20.3% less than in 2008 (González, A., 2019). This decreased percentage has been the main cause of the increase in young people who decide to enter or resume training in Spain in order to apply for jobs with better conditions or simply to be more likely to be employed by improving their knowledge, skills and abilities.

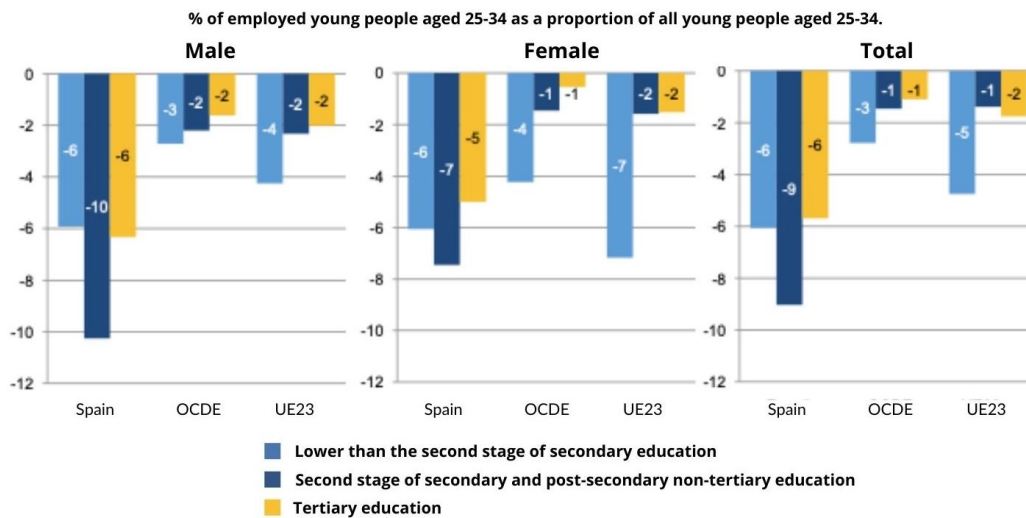
Graph 5: Change in % of young people in education and not in education according to their employment status between 2008 and 2018, by age group.



Source: OCDE (2019).

The time and quality of education that they receive have a major shock in their evolution from education to work, labour market conditions and the socio-economic context or cultural features of each country. Since the labour market is particularly difficult for young people during time of crisis, this transition has become one of the main concerns of Spanish society today. All this makes young people tend to stay longer in the education system to be more profitable and improve their skills, thus hoping for an improvement in their working conditions.

Graph 6: Evolution of the employment rate between 2008-2018, by level of education and gender.



Source: OCDE (2019).

The result of the economic recession in Spain does not have the same impact on the young population according to their level of education (see Graph 6). By reducing job opportunities, the market has become more demanding, generating greater value for those who are better prepared. This has attracted the attention of people in jobs that require some level of education, thus triggering the recruitment of youth with university or higher education, so although the employment rate in Spain has fallen by 6%, the impact of the crisis is not as obvious on this group as on young generations who have stagnated at a lower level of education.

Furthermore, there is also one of the main factors that hinder the transition between the education system and the labour market: the lack of work experience, one of the main concerns of young Spaniards.

This lack is one of the scourges more exposed by young Spaniards who want to start working. Most of the jobs on offer require a minimum level of experience, which many of them have not acquired because they have not even had the opportunity to do so. In addition, there are the current competencies or skills that companies require, most of them specific or technological, which are not provided in university degrees or formal training. This is where the greatest disparity between the education system and the lines of the company occurs, and where actions must be taken.

Simultaneously, the need to deal in a global environment has led to changes in competencies that need to be promoted in education, as the European Commission states in a communication to the European Parliament, the Council, The European

Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions in 2008. Some of them such as resilience, ability to adapt to changing backgrounds, ability to work in a multicultural and multidisciplinary context or high level of languages, are vitally important and, if they are not properly promoted, it will lead to a skill gap that will affect the employability of youth.

2.5. Higher education students' competence profile

A flexible and high-quality education system is needed that can respond to the changing needs of the world of work and society itself. The expansion rate of the professional skills required far exceeds the rate of adaptation to the education system, which has led to a clear mismatch in the skills required for the jobs offered (Blázquez et al., 2019).

According to the OECD data, these mismatches affect more than 33% of workers in Spain. Future employment requires an understanding of the knowledge and abilities that companies will need in a few years. In short, these are the skills that generate employment opportunities and play a major role in defining the vocational skills that need to be developed to ensure the employability of young people in the future.

Everything mentioned above in this section will focus more on the profile of requirements created by companies and the competence profile of university students, a target audience that is of age to enter into the labour market, are interviewed for the first time and apply for their first professional jobs.

2.5.1. Definition of competence profile

Although it also has applications in business environments, the competence profile is a widely used tool in the learning process, and it allows us to understand a set of standards that are associated with specific competencies in different profiles. This is achieved by assigning specific objective criteria for the competencies to be analysed, which will make it possible to obtain more quantitative, efficient and concrete information on the competencies of students or workers.

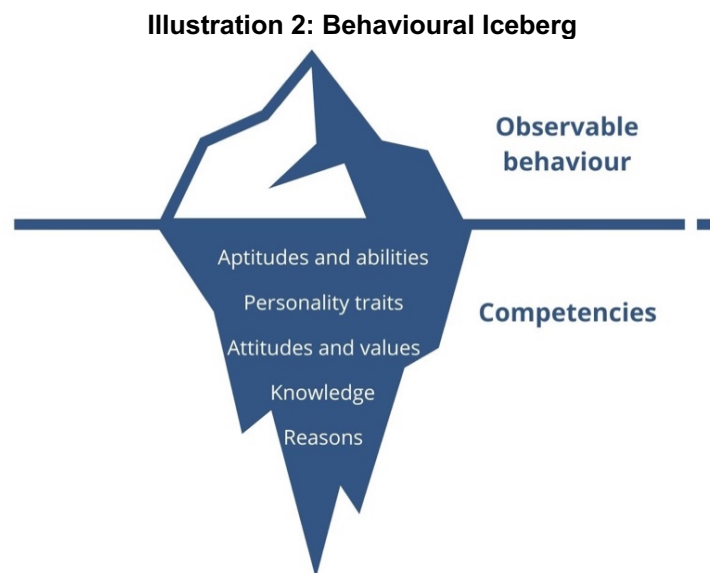
At the company level, this tool makes it achievable to isolate the overall profile of job applicants and thus to focus more on individual skills maximise employees' potential. This also helps to create a requirements profile within the jobs offered by companies,

hence defining the characteristics and competencies that should be met by the people who occupy those jobs and enable them to carry out their duties efficiently and effectively (Marín, Berrocal and Quero, 2002).

The evaluation of the person will reveal their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the requirements profile, checking which of the behaviours included in it they perform and which they do not. This will also help the company to define a qualitative workforce with a vision of long-term success.

2.5.2. Importance and background of the competence profile

The concept of competence cited by some leading authors such as Boyatzis (1982) and Spencer and Spencer (1993), emphasises that competencies are underlying particularities of individuals that are causally related to good or excellent job performance. This can be represented graphically with the concept of “behavioural iceberg” (Pereda and Berrocal, 1999), which displays how the competencies shown in observable behaviour are affected by a series of psychological variables, as shown in the following figure (Illustration 2):



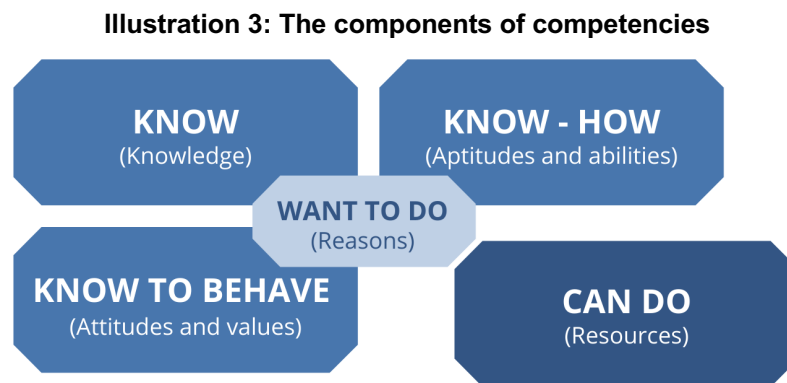
Source: Own elaboration.

Starting from the “behavioural iceberg”, it can be seen how the following variables directly affect competencies:

- Aptitudes and abilities: refer to a person’s ability to perform a given job.

- Personality traits: the tendency to act in a stable and consistent way in a given situation.
- Attitudes and values: set of thoughts and emotions that determine the direction in which someone does something or is interested in doing it.
- Knowledge: a set of technical or human knowledge owned by an individual.
- Motives: the need that drives or guides an individual's behaviour.

Along the same content, Pereda and Berrocal (1999, p.78-80) point out that competencies consist on five components that must be present in order to perform the actions included in the competencies that constitute the profile of requirements of a particular position. For competencies to be deepened and demonstrated, it is necessary (Illustration 3):



Source: Own elaboration.

- Knowledge. Set of knowledge that a person needs to behave in a certain way.
- Know-how: those aptitudes and abilities that allow a person to apply what he or she has learned or the knowledge he or she has on work.
- Knowing how to behave: understood as the set of attitudes and interests that allows us to act according to the values, norms and working rules of a specific group or organization in general.
- Being able to do (can do): means and resources available to people, usually produced by the organization to enable them to carry out their work effectively.
- Want to do: if people are not motivated to apply their skills to the work environment, the above components will be useless. Therefore, motivation becomes a variable that selects behaviour and leads it towards certain goals and moves it away from others.

This evidence supports the importance of motivation in the declaration of competencies, since if employees do not feel that their particular work or organisation meets their own needs, it will be difficult for them to develop and use their competencies effectively. And for this reason, motivation is appreciated by Alles (2000) as the basis on which competency management is born.

All this background and concepts that encompass their functions and competencies themselves, protect the basis by which the competence profile and requirements profile of individuals are managed and, therefore, make it easier to compare them because they are interrelated and have a common origin (Pereda et al., 2011).

To this fact must be added the importance of the different actors in acquiring and identifying the competencies needed to create such profiles. The first one is the education system's contribution, not only at university stages, but also throughout compulsory processes and/or supplementary education. Secondly, to be considered are the employing companies, which have people in charge of managing and analysing the acquisition and identification of the competencies and skills of their employees or job candidates in the company. And finally, higher education students' perspective is considered, thus relating the importance that the student, subjectively, believes the university has given to each of the competencies and to the professional competence profile acquired during their educational phase, allowing to measure the adjustment degree between perceived profile and that demanded by the market (Martínez and Peralta, 2012). The contributions and perspectives of each agent will be noted in the following sections, taking into account both the competence profile and the profile of requirements of the individuals concerned.

2.5.2.1. Educational system's contribution

The education system is one of the most important agents in the process, since the continuity and quality of the learning and knowledge they offer is essential for the acquisition and development of competencies.

Focusing on universities, which are our main field of study in this work, they can be defined as "companies" with an intensive use of their human resources. The quality of their teaching, research and contribution to society depends to a large extent on the quality of their staff and the students they attract. In addition, a substantial part of its budget goes to staff, hence staff autonomy has been a key aspect of the latest reforms,

followed by competition between universities for better and more prestigious higher education (Kruger, Parellada and Surssock, 2019).

In the 1970s, the enrolment of students at university levels increased substantially, and from the hitherto targeted only the elite, it became more widespread and eventually promoted universal access to it (Trow, 2000). As discussed in previous sections, this led to a greater increase in the problem of overeducation in Spain than in European countries (Barone and Ortiz, 2011). The problem was exacerbated by the combination of higher education growth, followed by the inability of the labour market to absorb such a large number of skilled people. This contributed to the high rate of unemployment in Spain and, therefore, to youth unemployment, with the latter group being the most highly skilled people on the labour market who have the least experience and who find it more difficult to find a job where all their skills could be well-used. However, the overeducation spread has led to the devaluation of educational qualifications as a key to the occupational and social achievement of population, maintaining the value of qualifications as a positional asset (Rahona, 2008).

With the recent creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), there has been more pressure and demand from different sectors such as governments and employers, so that universities become the driving force for economic development, by upgrading practical training and improving employability among university students. Some studies carried out so far confirm that there are satisfactory and hopeful results (Nelcy et al., 2012; Taylor and Hooley, 2014), but many others insist on the need to continue strengthening the relationship between university and the world of work, which they still consider to be deficient (Rutt et al., 2013; Torres-Coronas and Vidal-Blasco, 2015).

The link between the labour market and tertiary education needs to be improved in terms of content and application in order to increase productivity and reduce job insecurity, by harnessing human capital in an increasingly well-educated society (Camarena and Velarde, 2009). In this connection, competencies are the main link between both agents, which you acquire during your university phase (to a large extent) and which, later, will be valued by companies in order to be able to perform a job or adding value to your professional and/or personal profile. These are the ones that the person has in their competence profile, and that later on, will be key to match with the profile of requirements of many jobs. The problem lies in incorporating the competences approach into higher education, since as Jenkins (2000) acknowledges, it is a long and difficult path, and in the specific case of Spain, a non-passed subject (García-San Pedro and Gairín, 2011).

Finally, it should be noted that under no circumstances the university should cover the full level of competence of graduates. As several studies point out, competencies are not acquired only through educational institutions (although these have a relevant role in the process), are not developed exclusively through a formal learning process, and do not end this learning when the individual enters the labour market (Michavila et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the higher the contribution of the university, the higher the level of the graduate and the easier will be forming them to reach the level required for the labour market, thus finding employment commensurate with their knowledge, abilities and skills.

2.5.2.2. Employers' perspective

From companies' perspective, the research will focus on the profile of demands, their relationships with the competence profile of individuals, and their performance in the different phases or processes where competencies play an important role.

In the first instance, the competence profile of candidates and employees themselves is very relevant in order to be able to carry out the work itself with all demands or needs that the company requires. These needs are collected in the requirements profiles, considered as the starting point for the multiple activities and phases within a company's human resources management (Pereda et al., 2011):

- Recruitment. Depending on individuals' competencies, it is possible to decide whether internal or external recruitment is more appropriate; and, in the latter case, what are the most suitable ways to find suitable candidates for the positions.
- Selection. Knowing the competencies required for the job, it is possible to determine the most capable procedures, techniques, contents and methods for each situation.
- Training. By understanding the content and demands of the positions, it is possible to define training needs and objectives, and to design and implement more efficient and cost-effective training actions.
- Organizational career plans. The content and demands of the positions will make it possible to define the career path that a person is likely to follow within the company, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each employee when they want to change positions, for promotion or other reasons.

The second pillar of human resources management is people who make up the organization. In order to get to know the individuals, it will be necessary to carry out evaluations of them, which will make it possible to determine their competence profile and then to assess the level of compatibility or approximation with the requirements profile of the position offered. This assessment can be made at different stages of the process:

- During the selection process, when the person joins the company, their skills profile will be assessed against the job requirements.
- Once employees have participated in the training provided by the company and in the evaluating process of their effectiveness, the competencies they have acquired and/or developed will be studied.
- During performance evaluation period performed in the company, the competencies of each employee are assessed with respect to the profile of requirements of their position, and the extent to which they have achieved the stated objectives will be verified.
- In evaluations of potential, the most fitting skills assessment techniques are applied to understand the strengths and weaknesses of employees, with a view to expecting them to be competent form more or less positions in a near future.

At the end of the day, professional and personal success is not just about one's aptitudes or academic career, but also about the competencies one possesses. This allows people to focus their goals not only on what others usually do or have experience in, but on what they would be able to do if the opportunity is given. This statement is particularly taken into account in order to know whether people who do not have experience in performing specific tasks would be able to do them (most of them young people who have just entered the labour market).

Normally, employing firms tend to attach great importance to the practical dimension of competence (i.e., "know-how") and tend to focus more on the theoretical or conceptual part, since they assume that a young university graduate with a specific degree or qualification should know about certain subjects related to this field. Situations like this led to some experts like Jackson (2012) or Alonso et al. (2009) to demand a better match between university education and labour market in order to really reach consensus and understand what is the role of each actor in the preparation of young university students in this case.

This section will be expanded by the case study proposed in the following sections of the paper.

2.5.2.3. Higher education students' perspective

Higher education graduates or those who are still studying at university, regardless of age, gender or specialisation, have an overall view of the possible problems or concerns that young university students now face when entering the labour market, as discussed above.

Focusing on the competence development of university students, authors such as Jackson (2012) acknowledge, after several studies, that students' perception of their competence development is far above the recognition given by employers. Given the existence of this gap between supply and demand, as Velde (2009) rightly believes, the level of expectations that employers have about the skills of students tends to be low (a fact that will be analysed in the case study). This leads to a lack of security, often triggering frustration, detachment from the labour market and even a talent drains to other countries (Ortega, 2013). In addition, students also need to improve in order to be able to work, making them seek to develop these deficiencies through more training (carrying out a specialization, another career, specialist courses, postgraduate courses, etc...). All this leads to a return to the concept of over-education as a starting point, where over-qualified youth underuse the competencies they possess in their respective jobs (McGuinness et al., 2017).

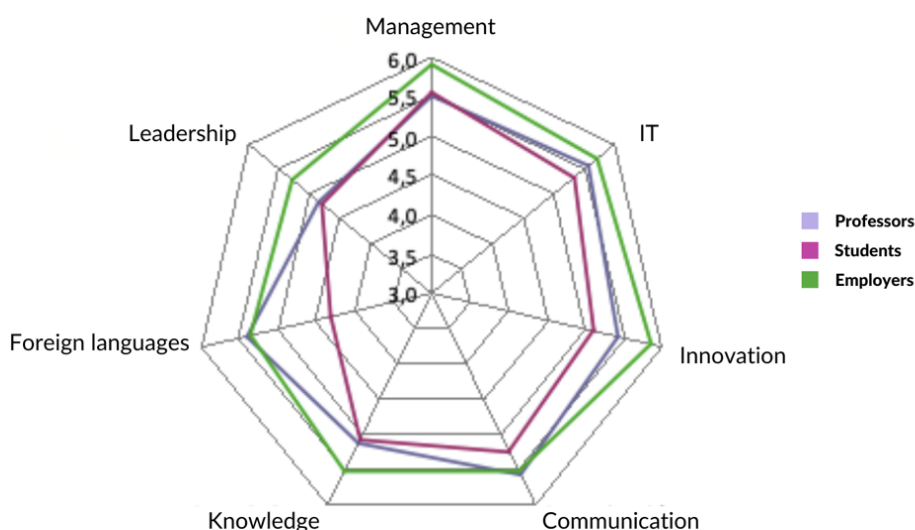
2.5.2.4. Compilation of perspectives of all parties involved

Once the perspective and contribution of the three agents involved in the acquisition and development of competencies of young university students has been collected, the relationship between them and the comparison of different perspectives will be discussed. For this argument, we count on the survey carried out by the *Generalitat Valenciana* in the *Green Paper on the Employability of Valencian Community graduates* in 2013. This paper exposes the importance of education for employment and draws the attention of today's population to the need to cooperatively establish the knowledge, competencies and skills requirements required of university graduates to successfully enter and retain employment.

This paper highlights the opinions of three agents (employers, professors and students) regarding the competencies required from the perspective of each of them, in order to be able to compare them with those owned in a generic way by university students according to the people surveyed in this study.

Following the choice of the different competence dimensions, the *Generalitat Valenciana* conducted a series of surveys of professors, employers and graduates of the Valencian Community, leaving the results in the following graph (see Graph 7), where it can be found the average values of each competence dimension for the competencies required according to the different agents.

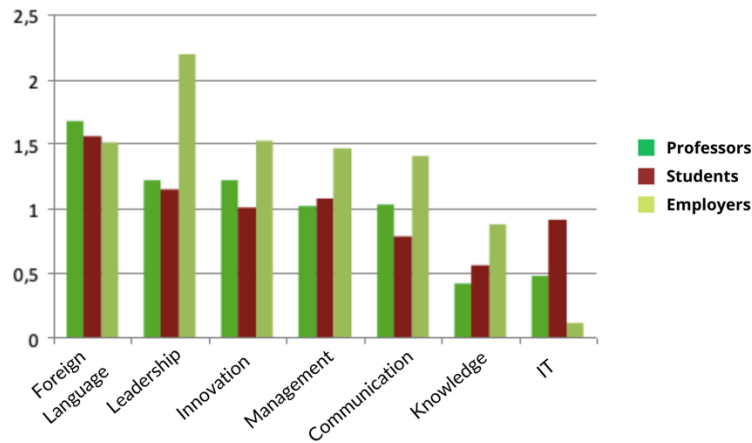
Graph 7: Average values for each competence dimension for required competencies. Scale of 1 to 7.



Source: *Green Paper on the Employability of Valencian Community graduates.*

It can also be seen that employers and professors are more demanding in terms of the level of competence they believe the jobs require. Graduates, on the other hand, give lower assessments of what their current jobs are demanding from them in all areas of competence. This could be due to the overestimation of employers and professors about jobs complexity and/or to an overestimation of university students themselves, who believe to be better qualified than the jobs they perform (both theories can coexist at the same time).

Graph 8: Difference between competencies required and owned according to the three groups surveyed.



Source: *Green Paper on the Employability of Valencian Community graduates.*

Finally, after all this data, they close by referring to the calculation made differentiating the competencies demanded by the labour market and those possessed by university students, both with the contribution of the university (in the case of university students and professors) and that performed in the company (in the case of employers). In Graph 8, it can be observed the results, thus identifying some approximate ideas about possible training deficits of university students from different perspectives.

It is noticeable that there is an absolute difference in valuation (employers tend to demand more), but the order of dimensions with the lowest valuation is actually the same. So, the Valencian graduates seem to have outstanding training deficiencies in Foreign Languages, Leadership, Innovation, Management and Communication, following that order. While the deficiencies in Knowledge and IT are proportionally smaller.

This study has been developed taking into account university graduates as the focus of the work, without affecting their degree, study field, gender or age, so the resulting data is fairly generalized. As a result of this paper carried out by the Generalitat Valenciana, it has been proposed to elaborate a case study to delve more deeply into the university profile of young people who are or have completed a Business Administration degree. The aim is to link this area with the skills required on the labour market and the skills they own, with particular emphasis on the perspective of some employing companies in the province of Castellón.

3. CASE STUDY

This study was triggered by the study of the Generalitat Valenciana in the *Green Paper on the Employability of Graduates in the Valencian Community*, which reflects on the importance of education for employment. The aim is to make society aware of the need to establish shared requirements between the education system and the labour market in order to successfully retain employment, especially among recent graduates. Given the theoretical and practical relevance of this topic, it was considered that it deserves a more specific analysis changing the heart of the study focusing only on the business perspective without taking into account other agents mentioned previously in the work.

Employing companies are one of the most important agents, since they are responsible for giving the opportunity to demonstrate and put knowledge and skills into practice. Because of this, they are considered as a very suitable field for an in-depth analysis. More specifically, the study will focus on the vision that employers and/or managers of the company have of university students who have recently entered the world of work, focusing only in those between the ages of 18 and 30, and who are studying or have completed the Business Administration degree.

This will help to contrast and compare the reality that resides in the companies of the area, and if it approaches what is reported in the theoretical framework. For this, several companies from Castellón have contributed in this work with their vision and experience on the key competencies in the profiles proposed. The aim will be to deepen the perspective that employers have of recent graduates in their respective companies, linking it with their overall competence profile and comparing it with the profile of requirements demanded by the company itself at the time they were recruited. In addition, information will also be provided on the position they hold in the company in terms of qualifications, and whether those profiles are actually in qualified positions or in positions where their skills are underused.

3.1. Methodology

The main purpose of the research is the empirical verification of the process of evolution of the competencies within the business framework taking into account the company's requirements and the contribution of the profiles for which they have been asked. This will help to understand the characteristics, motivations and causative factors of

behaviour both on the part of the company and on the part of the workers who match with the requirements of the sample.

The case study methodology can be used to describe this phenomenon in real organisations and to explore situations where there is no clearly defined theoretical framework (Larrinaga, 2017), thus helping to conduct more precise research to explain why the phenomenon occurs, creating new theories to illustrate good performance practices (Bonache, 1999) or to verify theoretical explanations (Yin, 1989).

In view of the methodological design that it will be used in this case study, it will be recognised as a qualitative and quantitative data study (Larrinaga and Rodriguez, 2010), since the case study will be based on two key points in order to better understand the concept of competencies and their use in companies by the profiles by which companies will be consulted.

Finally, it should be emphasized that this case study is mainly composed of primary information provided by the companies through the interviews and questionnaires made. An external search has only been conducted for the selection of competencies to be addressed in the questionnaire and for the preparation of the interview guide considering information from other studies and other authors (Blázquez et al., 2019; Mateo and Albert, 2010).

3.1.1. Quantitative data study

First, it will be taken into consideration the quantitative part of the study, where it is proposed to collect data from several companies in the province of Castellón that have young adult workers aged between 18 and 30 who are studying or have studied Business Administration. Experiences of entrepreneurs and/or heads of departments will be analysed using Google Forms (available in Annex 1) as a data collection tool.

As for the sample collection process, it should be made clear that the companies involved were selected primarily because the aim was to have a population of companies from various sectors. Based on this, the sampling was statistically non-probabilistic, more specifically a convenience sampling, since they were asked to participate through contacts in the same companies.

The aim of this questionnaire is to approximate the competencies of the above-mentioned profiles without considering the sector or the position in which they are located, thus attempting to establish a generic competence profile to try to identify the training or skills gaps faced by companies when recruiting these profiles.

After all, 18 companies replied to the questionnaire. The sectors in which it was possible to collect information were mainly the industrial sector (8 responses), more specifically ceramics (6 of them). At the same time, we have the services sector with 7 responses (tourism, audit, insurance, sales, finance...), followed by another 3 responses corresponding to the public sector (public administration). In most cases, the individuals who have completed the questionnaires hold relevant positions within the company such as HR managers, heads of specific departments, project leaders, or directors of companies or branches.

As for the content of the questionnaire, an introductory text was included explaining to participants that the data collected would be treated confidentially for academic purposes only. Firstly, questions related to basic company data are included (company size, approximate percentage of staff with a Business Administration degree, percentage of young people aged 18-30 with this degree and the approximate level of qualification in the position held by the latter within the company).

Secondly, two questions have been asked on the performance of this group within the company, both when entering the company and its development so far using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 in each of the questions. This is intended to establish a generic score of the opinion of companies on the overall performance of having a young person with certain training.

Thirdly, the questionnaire enters into the matter of competencies, where 20 key competencies have been selected for analysis by companies at different stages of the natural employment process. The stages involved are: the level of each of the competencies required by the company, the level of the young people who match with the survey profile when they enter the company and, lastly, the level they currently own in the company. The selection of the competencies included in the questionnaire was carried out methodically taking into account the most valued according to some experts, such as Rábago (2010), for proper professional development, as well as the selection of the Likert scale 1-7 used (scale used by similar studies such as the one carried out by the *Generalitat Valenciana*).

The analytical process of the data collected includes the following elements. Different graphs and tables will be drawn up with the basic data of the companies surveyed and some of the questions asked to them (performance, job qualification, personnel, competencies, etc.). About the competence data, it will be transferred to an Excel file where descriptive analyses will be processed and executed by creating a radial graph. This graph will contain all the information on the total averages for each of the competencies and stages on the same graph. This will help to compare several quantitative variables, visualize which variables have similar values, or if there are atypical values between variables. On the other hand, it will be analysed which of the 20 competencies are most demanded by companies through descriptive analyses (average, as before) to try to analyse whether the scores of these correspond to the performance that companies expected from the profiles for which the questionnaire asks.

3.1.2. Qualitative data study

Secondly, the study will be complemented by the qualitative part, where we will have the opportunity to talk more openly with some of the companies collaborating in the study, conducting brief interviews with the directors or HR managers of these companies trying to delve more deeply into the relationship between the educational system and the labour market.

In the selection of the companies interviewed, we have tried to guarantee a certain diversity of sectors, especially focusing on those that are the leaders in Castellón, such as ceramics and finance (*Cámara de Comercio Valencia*, Valencia Chamber of Commerce, 2011). Within these two sectors, two companies were selected for an interview from among the 18 companies that responded to the online questionnaire.

Interviews have varied according to the availability and predisposition of the interviewees contemplating the current health crisis situation. The interviews were face-to-face with a duration of approximately 30-40 minutes each. As for the people interviewed, in the ceramics industries, the conversations were conducted with the person in charge of human resources within the entity. In the case of the company in the financial sector, the interview was with the director of the branch, as there is no human resources department as such. Due to the centralization of human resources management in this company, it is believed that the branch manager is the best person to answer the questions proposed.

The guide to be followed when conducting the interviews includes a set of relevant topics within the objectives of the research carried out previously in the theoretical part (Mateo and Albert, 2010). In addition, they will not be closed-ended questions, but will be conducted with complete flexibility, allowing both the interviewer and the interviewee to have a fluent conversation as the interview progresses, and also helping to expand information on certain aspects that companies have considered important and that may not have been thoroughly researched in this work.

A technical sheet of the questions drawn up and carried out during the interviews can be found in Annex 2, which contains four blocks of questions according to different themes: introductory questions, recruitment, competencies and skills, and other general aspects. Participating companies will be interviewed without revealing their identity, since they have chosen to remain anonymous. In order to differentiate them, the sector to which they belong will simply be mentioned.

3.2. Competence profile analysis of the participating companies

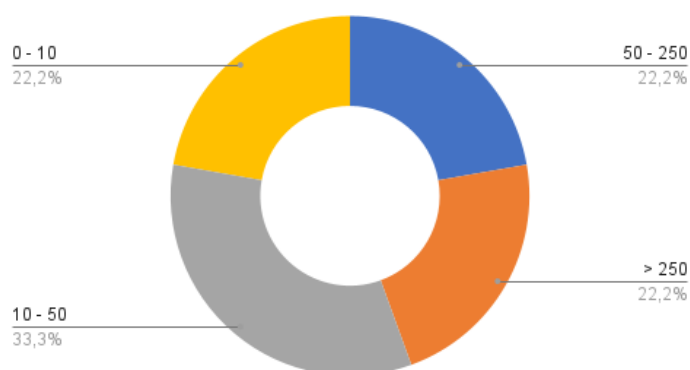
As discussed in the previous sections, both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) data have been analysed. For the analysis of the data collected, the information from both parts of the case study will be combined in an attempt to complement them. Quantitative data will be analysed, reinforced and corroborated by the information gathered in the interviews, in order to have a global and unified view of the situation.

Where companies are referred to in general terms, this generalisation should be understood as the companies which have participated in the case study. The information given will be fully provided by companies.

3.2.1. Basic information of the participating companies

The companies participating in this case study answered some basic questions about the company they mentioned in the questionnaire. Firstly, the size of the company was asked. It can be seen that the distribution of participating firms is fairly even, with a fairly equal representation of different sizes according to the number of employees (Graph 9).

Graph 9: Size of the company per number of workers.

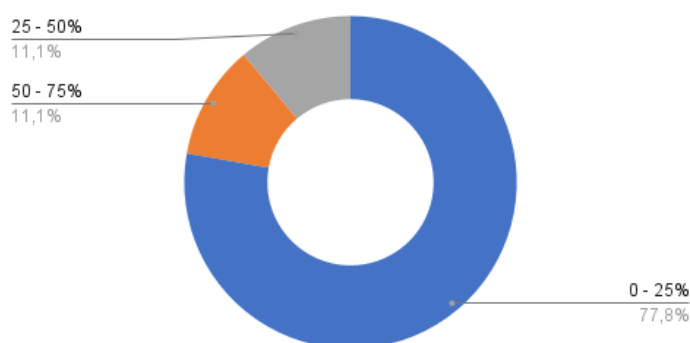


Source: Own elaboration.

Within the workforce of the company, it was asked about the approximate percentage of employees who have studied a degree in Business Administration regardless of their position in the company or any other variable. In general, the surveyed companies tend to have a low percentage of such profiles, more specifically, almost 80% have less than 25% of employees with this profile (Graph 10).

“In our case, as we are a relatively small company and not divided into specific departments, we do not consider a priority to have a person with a Business Administration degree in the Administration department or a similar one. As we operate in the company, we do not look for individuals with a closed profile of university studies or degree, we try to be quite flexible about that.” (Ceramic sector enterprise).

Graph 10: Percentage of employees with a Business Administration degree.



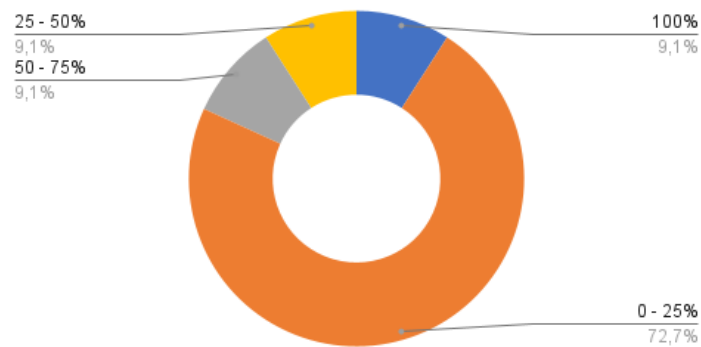
Source: Own elaboration.

From Graph 11, it can be seen that within the low percentage of employees with a Business Administration degree, more than 70% of companies claim that they do not have many people with this profile between the average age of 18 and 30. At present,

the emphasis is still on the incorporation of young people into the workforce, but in the vast majority of companies, the older people with more experience continue to predominate.

“The reality is that in the financial sector the age of people employed tends to be very high, because we consider the development within the company of employees to be very important. In other words, a young person who joined the company with an internship a few years ago will probably continue to stay in the company nowadays, if the company wants to. This also reduces training times, by having a person with a lot period trajectory in the company and not having to spend time training new employees every now and then.” (Financial sector enterprise).

Graph 11: Percentage of employees with a Business Administration degree aged 18-30.



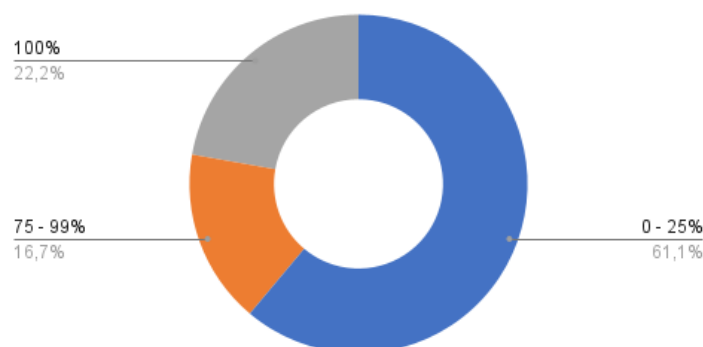
Source: Own elaboration.

Young people are generally taking part in low-qualified jobs (Graph 12), where they do not develop or enhance the skills or competencies they have acquired during their education. In fact, only 20% of the companies in this study have in qualified positions all young employees who match the profile for which they were requested.

“Most of young employees in the company are on internships, although they are learning to develop as workers, at the time they are in low-qualified jobs. They learn from different work areas, with different work groups and they gather information about everything that the company offers them.” (Ceramic sector enterprise).

“The few young workers we have, the vast majority, are trainees only during the summer months to cover employees’ vacations and earn extra money. Very few find themselves as workers on fixed contracts, and those few who did get it, are the oldest between the 18-30 age range.” (Financial sector enterprise).

Graph 12: Percentage of employees with a Business Administration degree aged 18-30 in qualified positions.



Source: Own elaboration.

Once the business context is known, it can be seen a clear imbalance in terms of young workers and their place within the company. The majority of firms prescribe or do not have a large number of young workers, and the few that do exist find traineeship contracts or internships with fairly short duration (3-6-12 months) and with fairly low numbers of employees because they are training contracts (even unpaid in the case of most university curricular internships).

3.2.2. Recruitment and Selection

In the case of companies interviewed, the procedures of recruitment and selection vary depending on the needs of the company and the positions to be offered in some cases. They are increasingly using the internet and social networks such as LinkedIn, Infojobs, or even using the company's own website. In other cases, there is also a great deal of recourse to recruitment consultants (the head-hunter route), especially if they are more specialized or higher-ranking positions.

"In our company, as we work on a national level, personnel selection is not arranged from the same branches. There is a regional Human Resources director for areas. In the case of Castellón, the person in charge would be responsible for managing the province of Castellón and the northern part of the province of Valencia. This individual is only responsible for administration and management, not for recruitment or staff selection, as these functions are completely outsourced and are achieved through temporary employment agencies with those the bank has an agreement." (Financial sector enterprise).

Another of the most used ways for recruiting are the references given by the employees about other people.

“At the end, the employees know how the company works, what is required in terms of time, skills, competencies, specific needs, pace of work... Who better than our staff to give us references from close people? Being a small company, we have already hired some people with this method and the experience is very suitable.” (Ceramic sector enterprise).

Depending on the sector, the use of tools for staff selection has varied, but in all cases the same tool has been used as the main recruitment point and is considered the most effective one: internships programmes or contracts for traineeships. This is currently one of the main recruitment routes in most sectors, even through university-specific practices, provided by the company itself or professional training education.

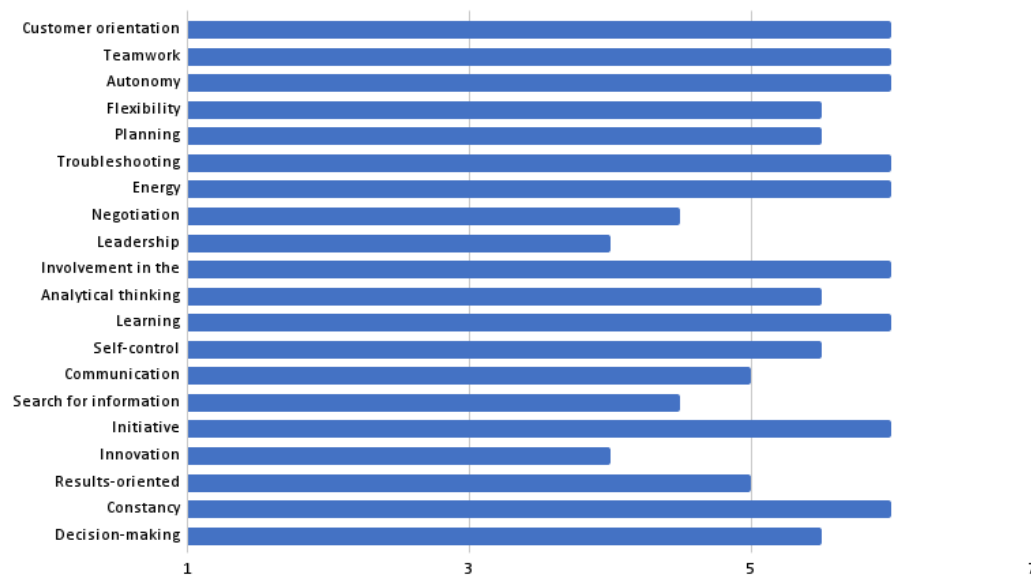
“Company internships are a great opportunity not only to learn or develop as a professional, but also to make contacts or even to establish yourself as a future employee in the company itself. In our case, all young employees, or the vast majority, have undergone an internship before being hired. Many of them are now part of the permanent staff.” (Ceramic sector enterprise).

“In the financial sector, at least in our company, internships are not directly focused on the subsequent hiring of these people. Obviously, if there were any vacancies in the branch or in a nearby branch, these profiles would be the ones that would have preference when it came to filling the vacancy.” (Financial sector enterprise).

In many companies, these internships are seen as an opportunity to train a future employee in line with the company's culture and way of working, offering them an indefinite contract once the internship period is over. All this always depends on the resources that the company owns.

Once the method of recruitment has been established, the company proceeds to draw up a profile of requirements, that the employee to be recruited, is expected to have in a rough way. The questionnaire shows the level that companies require of their employees in the different competencies.

Graph 13: Level of competencies required by the companies. Likert scale 1-7.



Source: Own elaboration.

The general level required by the company tends to be high in many of the competencies (Graph 13). Some of the best ranked are “Constancy”, “Teamwork”, “Energy”, “Learning” and “Involvement in the company”. Companies are not only looking for a person who can do the job assigned, but also some dedication and compromise with the company as can be seen from the data on the chart. On the contrary, the required level of “Leadership” and “Innovation” are the lowest ones. This is due to the current supply of youth employment, which for the most part does not offer specialist positions with some responsibility to develop such competencies.

3.2.3. Competencies and skills

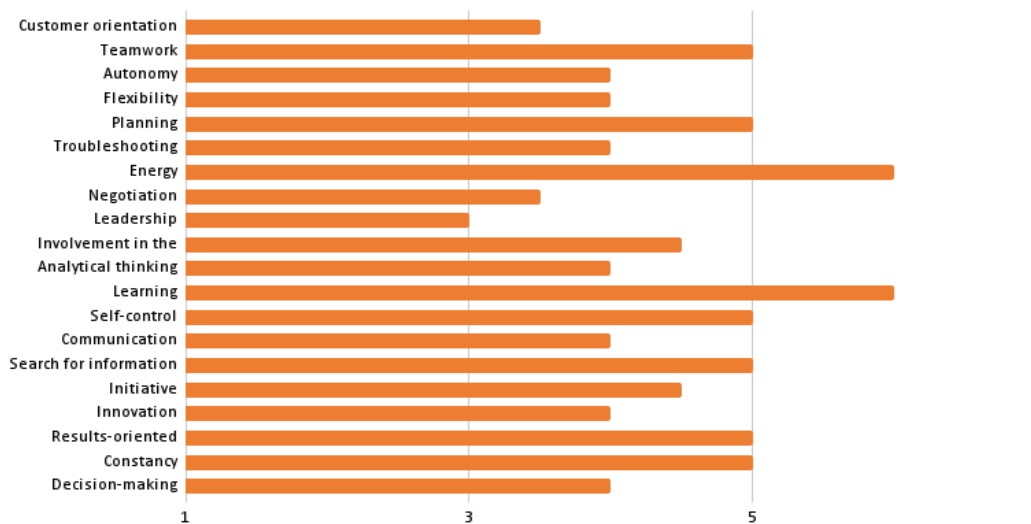
Competencies are considered a great showcase of the individuals’ knowledge, skills and abilities, thus helping to improve the personal and professional presence in different fields of action. Firms are looking for a person with a certain competence profile, trying to establish a relationship of the profile they are looking for with the interests and/or culture of the company.

“We usually need generic profiles, which are quite flexible and adaptable to different tasks or situations. That helps us to centralize the processes and thus have the same person or work group in charge of the entire project or action. This solves the problem

of the task chain, where you do not really learn and, at the end, the work becomes routine and more automatic.” (Ceramic sector enterprise).

As for the competencies that young people own once they enter the firm, they tend to be quite dissimilar depending on the type (Graph 14). The best scores are “Energy” and “Learning”, meeting the level of competence required by the companies in both cases. Then, there are some competencies also related to motivation and predisposition such as “Constancy”, “Search for information” or “Results-oriented”. The least rated are “Leadership”, “Customer orientation and “Negotiation.”

Graph 14: Level of competencies upon entering. Likert scale 1-7.



Source: Own elaboration.

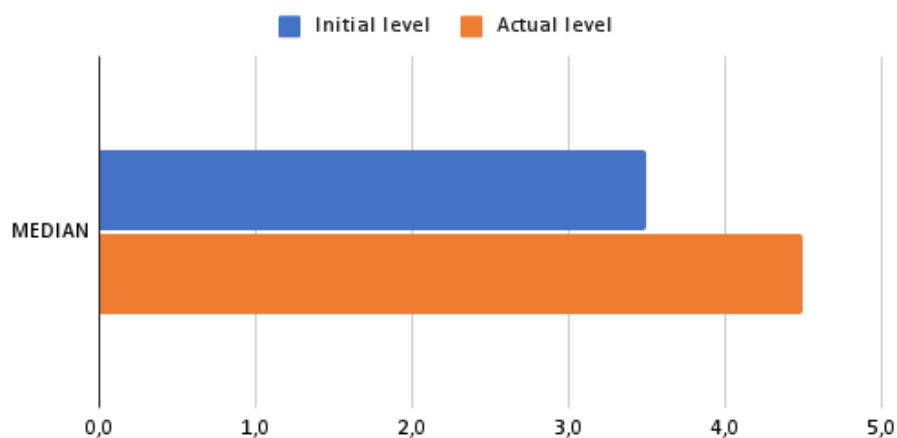
In these results, the generic competence level of young people with Business Administration degree is clearly visible. Competencies related to self-attitude tend to be rated higher, considering them as the greatest strength of youth in the companies surveyed. On the other hand, those skills that are less marked, such as “Negotiation”, “Customer orientation” or “Leadership”, are usually the least strengthened by the education system, as they are more technical and/or specific competencies, required only in certain positions.

“In general, we do not usually ask for specific requirements or profiles for young individuals entering the company for first time. All they need is motivation, desire to learn and initiative, the company is in charge of covering the rest by providing training and guiding them through the process. The only thing that is currently necessary to work in

the bank is: being studying or to have attended a university degree.” (Financial sector enterprise).

On the other hand, the firms that were consulted on the job performance¹ of these profiles, where most of them agreed that the performance was higher the more time they spent in the company (Graph 15), thus confirming a positive development of these employees from the perspective of the company.

Graph 15: Evolution of job performance. Likert scale 1-5.

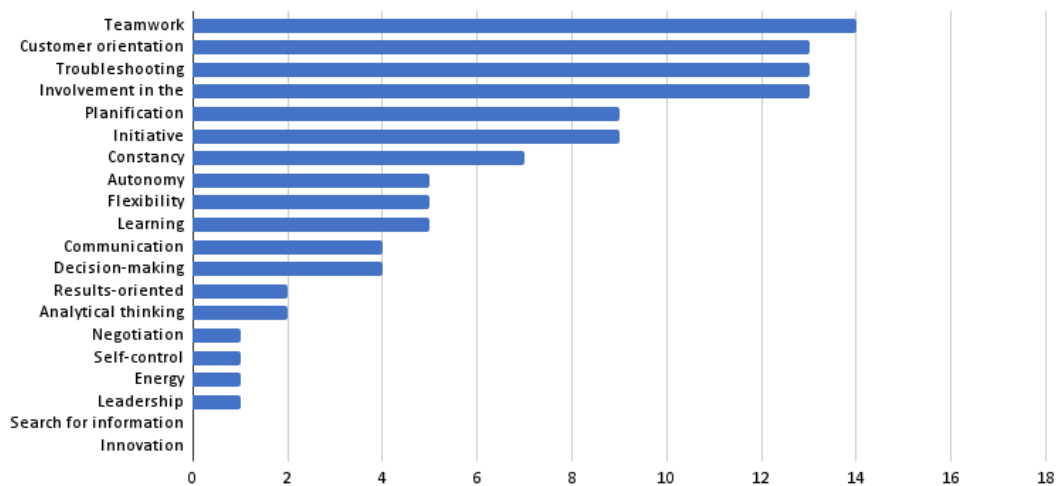


Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, companies were consulted about the 6 competencies they considered most important for them. The results are quite impressive and, as can be seen from Graph 16, they have been fairly consensual among companies from different sectors with different priorities.

¹ A series of correlation analyses were also carried out, but results did not show any significant correlation between job performance and competencies of the study. This could be due to the sample collected, which could not be sufficient to establish meaningful results.

Graph 16: Competencies more in demand by companies.



Source: Own elaboration.

Those most in demand have been “Teamwork”, “Customer orientation”, “Troubleshooting” and “Involvement in the company”, followed by “Planification” and “Initiative”. These six competencies together encompass a large part of the processes that a company faces when creating a project or action, trying to improve the quality and effectiveness.

3.2.4. Continuing training in the company

All companies consider their employees training very important, but the approach to training will depend on the sector or the specific tasks of each company. However, there are fields or skills to be developed that are common to all companies, as well as some of the competencies used in the case study.

Continuing training helps to improve and consolidate knowledge by enhancing the skills or competencies of the different teams, or even the leadership of the managers. Some companies support the development of training plans, especially the larger ones, while many others consider that an individual’s training also takes place when the individual is working.

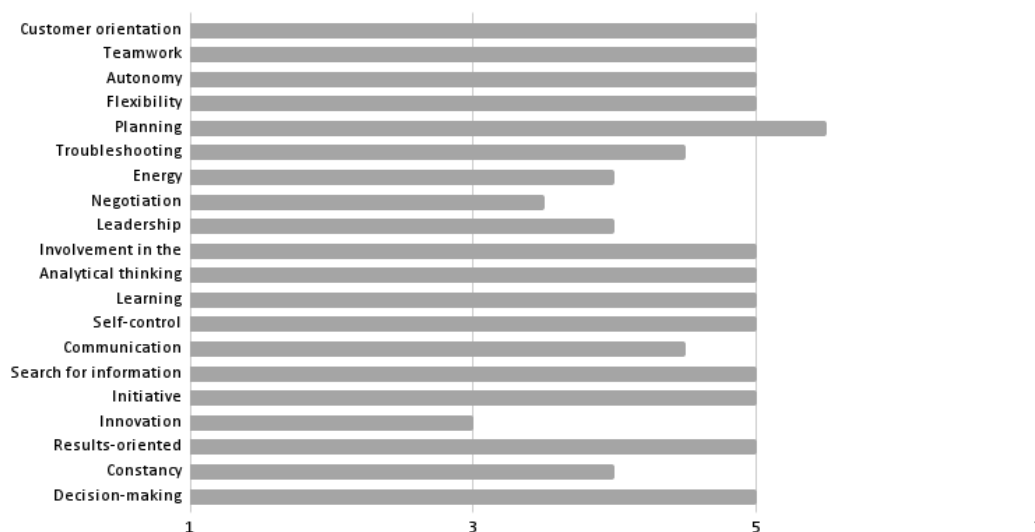
“The implementation of continuous training plans is not something we usually organise. The company believes that while you work, you are already acquiring knowledge and, at the same time, putting it into practice. They do not think continuous training is necessary unless certain aspects or functions within the company change, such as new database

programs, structural changes, etc. In addition, this represents an extra expense that many companies do not want to invest in.” (Ceramic sector enterprise).

“Our tasks, in most cases, are quite routine, and once you learn how to do them, they are always done the same way. Once you enter the company, they teach you how to perform these tasks, so they do not spend extra time or money on continuing training. Specific trainings are only carried out if changes are made in the way we operate or in the protocols of action that we currently develop.” (Financial sector enterprise).

By whatever method, employees have developed their competencies as they spend more time and acquire experience in the company. Today, as can be seen from Graph 17, the level of competence obtained from young people with a Business Administration degree, has risen considerably compared to when they first joined the company.

Graph 17: Competencies currently obtained. Likert scale 1-7.



Source: Own elaboration.

The data is much more consistent than in the previous graphs, with quite positive results in most of the competence dimensions. The competition that stands out most is “Planification”, while the two least developed are “Innovation” and “Negotiation”, followed by “Energy”, “Leadership” and “Constancy”.

3.2.5. Situation of the current labour market

The situation of the last few years in Spain has triggered the reality in which we live today (commented on the previous sections). The 2008 crisis has already brought about major changes in society, but two key developments have recently been added to this: the current health crisis and future job insecurity due to the automation of work and the development of new technologies. These events have caused the economy to slow down, many companies to be on the verge of closing down, and the labour supply to be reduced even to the point of having to do without staff in the companies.

“What is happening in the financial sector is a huge problem, since staff numbers are being reduced and many branches have been closed. This means that, except on specific occasions, we have not been renewing staff for 15 or 20 years, so young and new people are not entering the company. And unfortunately, it will probably remain that way for a while.” (Financial sector enterprise).

“In the ceramics sector more than in others, large companies with the highest sales volume, are absorbing the smaller ones, remaining only a few compared to the period of the ceramic boom in Castellón. This means that a large proportion of the staff of the small companies being taken over, do not continue to work in the company, therefore, unemployment within the sector increases.” (Ceramic sector enterprise).

In all cases, young people are the most affected group and are most likely to lose their jobs due to their limited work experience and short time in the company. This fact is further explained in the theoretical framework.

4. RESULTS

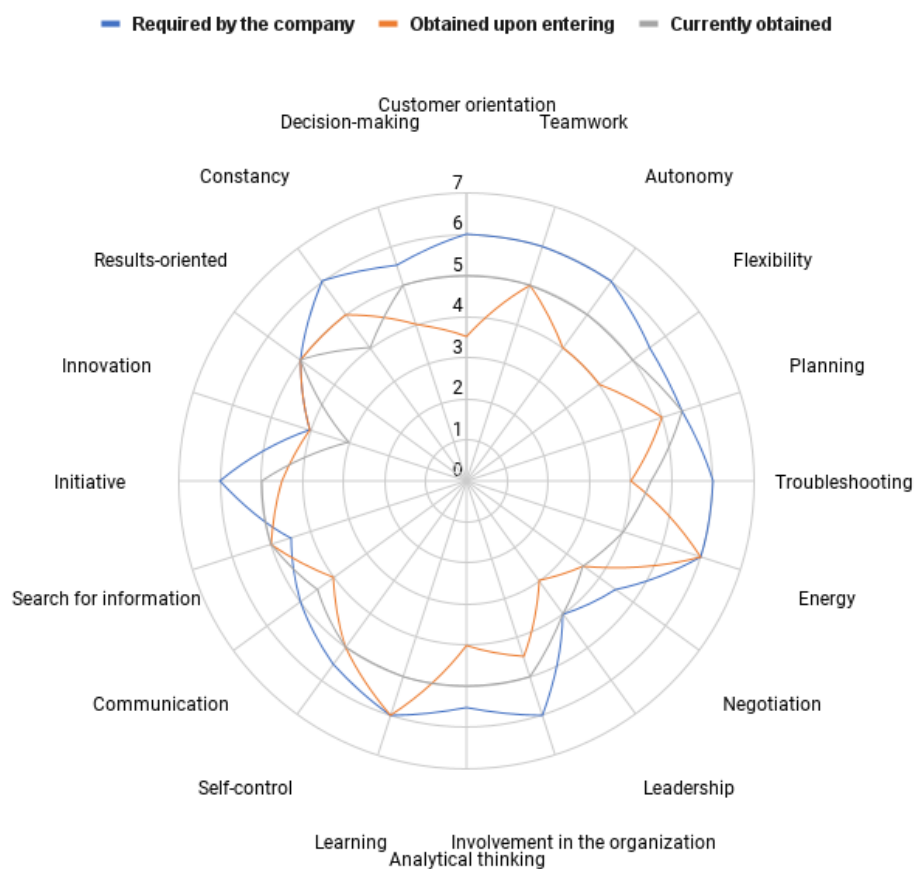
On the basis of the data collected in the previous section, the results obtained will be analysed and examined. First, the low rate of participation in companies by Business Administration profiles will be discussed. This could be because of the high specialization of positions in many of the companies that are focused on another study field, or to the number of employees in non-management and/or similar positions. Within these profiles, we also find that very few people belong to the 18-30 age group, and that very few manage to hold qualified positions within the company. This aspect was not investigated further, but it is considered, according to what the companies interviewed confirmed, that

it is due to the fact that most of the young people who are in the company perform an internship, and only a few are in jobs with a higher level of responsibility.

Secondly, the competence level of young people in Business Administration degrees was treated from three different stages of competence assessment, which appear unified in Graph 18. In general terms, the competence level of youth has evolved in a positive way, comparing the initial with the current level, but never reaching the level required by companies.

Some aspects to highlight are the evolution of competence dimensions such as “Energy”, “Constancy” or “Learning”. These competencies are directly related to attitude and job performance, and from what it can be seen on the chart, when entering the company, the expectations of the company are fulfilled, but as time has gone by, motivation and productivity has been decreasing. This occurs in situations where employees are not satisfied with the company, feel stagnant, or do not believe that they are being given the job opportunities they were initially looking for, or expected to find (Prokopenko, 1989).

Graph 18: Average values of level of competencies. Likert scale 1-7.



Source: Own elaboration.

On the other hand, there are competencies such as “Customer Orientation”, “Decision-making”, “Analytical Thinking”, “Autonomy” and “Flexibility” among others, which have evolved over time, but have not managed to reach the level initially required by firms. This could be due to several factors, but it is mainly focused on how long these youth have stayed in the company. In most cases, young people have not been in the company for a long time, so the evolution does not produce the results that the company expect, but it is assumed that it is perfectly possible to perform, as long as the employee remains motivated and the company offers the means to do so.

Moreover, only 7 of the 20 competence dimensions have at any point been adjusted to the level required by firms. “Planning”, “Search for Information” and “Leadership” are the only dimensions that have developed positively to match the requirements, while the other three have developed negatively as mentioned above.

In the case of “Results-oriented”, it has kept completely linear data with no changes overtime, due to the perspective that young people currently have very focused on short-termism, which they emphasise more on the results of the tasks they are doing at the moment, than on having a long-term vision in the company. All this is also because of the current need to exceed certain standards of excellence to stand out and differentiate yourself from the rest, a fact that is very internalized in the young population.

The competencies with the greatest deficits are those related to the ability to innovate (“Innovation”) and to the ability to manage time and relationships (“Negotiation” and “Communication”). And finally, “Negotiation”, “Self-control” and “Teamwork” are competencies that have not evolved during the working period and have remained with the same score. In all cases, this is because tasks have not been performed or have not had the opportunity to develop these competencies further in the jobs where young people work, or because they have not been empowered within the education systems (especially in those with the greatest deficits).

After this, a search was made for those competencies most demanded by companies, leaving “Teamwork”, “Customer orientation”, “Troubleshooting”, “Involvement in the company”, “Planification” and “Initiative” as the most ranked by firms (Graph 16). Those profiles, who develop this competence level, will be able to adapt to any of the stages of planning, action, observation or reflection. In addition, this type of profiles usually

develops a great capacity to take on changes without altering their main objectives, linking it also to the ability to adapt themselves to the changing need of the environment.

Finally, it can be concluded that the employing companies are demanding in terms of level of competence they expect from Business Administration young profiles. The same companies are the ones that subsequently evaluate the competence performance of these young people and in most cases do not meet their needs. This could be because of an overestimation by employers of the complexity of jobs, the lack of competence training of young people leaving university, or probably due to a balance between them.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study has been able to observe the importance of aligning the competencies promoted at university and those required by companies, thus helping to improve job performance and the integration of youth into the labour market. The reality of the situation has been demonstrated, providing that most of the difficulties that exist today are due to the crises and structural changes that our society is experiencing, triggering indefinite unemployment, economic difficulties, closures of companies, changes in new technologies, among others, such as Blázquez et al. (2019) and other experts stated in their works. Young people, and not so young, see that more and more individuals are unemployed or in jobs where they underuse their competencies. This problem has led to an almost massive tendency to improve our own employability by remaining in the educational system to continue training and expand our skills, thus triggering a general increase in the qualified population (OECD, 2013).

Therefore, qualified individuals try to look for jobs commensurate with their broad education, but due to the current context, the labour market does not have the capacity to absorb all these profiles, triggering a high youth unemployment or underemployment rate. According to authors like Martínez (2013) or Perez and Hernández (2013), this has led to the overeducation and polarization of the population. Adding the companies' reply to these causes, it is the same ones that promote this educational mismatch by increasing the requirements of candidates who want to work in the company to have more qualified staff in all fields (García, 2011). This blurred the line between what is actually required to perform a task or job and what is required simply to have better-qualified workers in jobs where their knowledge, skills and abilities are underused. The frustration and loss of motivation of employees also have a negative impact on the

company (Martínez, 2013), so if there is no stability or cooperation between all the parties involved, it will always return to the starting point of the problem without reaching any solution.

Within this problem, this study has been able to find several pieces of evidence where it can be concluded that the relationship between businesses and education system lacks consistency, and does not allow an ideal transition from education to the labour market. Firstly, the training received must seek to ensure that people have the competencies needed on the labour market, but today the development of competencies is changing so rapidly that the education system is not adapting at the same pace (Blázquez et al., 2019), and this mismatch of competencies required and acquired may be largely because of this phenomenon. Secondly, there is a lack of profiles focused on the competencies most in demand by companies, which, as the case study shows, young profiles do not meet these needs in most cases. In addition, it must be highlighted the need for companies to find young profiles with some flexibility and adaptability to withstand any type of change in the environment without deviating from the main objective.

On the other hand, the role of traineeship contracts in youth employment has been further investigated, both with the contribution of the case study and the theoretical framework, and this is clearly a double-edged sword. Companies attach great importance to the practical side rather than to the theoretical ones, but not all of them help to turn this “Know” into “Know-How” (Pereda et al., 2011). Many of them, as this study has shown, end up using traineeship contracts to have young workers with low wages, in exchange for training that they already have. All this is due to the inefficiency of current policies, which are not sufficiently flexible, as is the case with unwanted part-time contracts (Council of the European Union, 2010).

Finally, this paper has shown the association between all the actors directly or indirectly involved in the training and employment process. All the contributions of education system, companies, students and institutions affect the final outcome, so there must be coordination between them, always leaving aside self-interest and trying to focus actions on the prosperity of youth employability.

6. FUTURE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding future research and acknowledging the limitations of the present study, this work could be continued and supplemented in several ways, since competencies and youth are two topics that can cover many paths of research. Firstly, this study could be followed up by involving universities and students, thus providing a 360° view of the current situation of young Business Administration university students. Secondly, a more detailed investigation of specific competencies development could be carried out by trying to identify possible training gaps in more technical aspects, as only more strategic and generic competencies have been investigated here. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate how motivation and personality influence job performance in order to match it with the different competencies. And finally, all the above information may be complemented with an analysis of current initiatives or proposals of governments and their legislation, trying to examine those deficits or strengths that exist to balance the participation of all actors involved in youth education.

In addition, it has been considered to make a number of recommendations, which are given by the information collected in the theoretical framework and by the companies participating in the case study. The recommendations are:

- Reducing youth overqualification through more flexible training programmes. The number of students enrolled in higher education has increased, but has not been matched by a similar increase in qualified jobs. As a result, many young people are taking up jobs where their skills are undervalued simply because they want to gain experience.
- Promote education policies to improve the quality of youth employment. The situation of youth is currently quite precarious, due to endless traineeship contracts, part-time contracts... all this performed with wages well below the minimum interprofessional wage, which means that young people have to look for other unskilled jobs at the same time in order to be able to sustain themselves economically.
- University education should strengthen the acquisition and development of competencies to improve young university students' employability. This could be done by shifting university education towards a more participatory and collaborative approach that promotes implication, communication and application

of acquired knowledge in a more practical way, thus helping to reinforce learning and the management of competencies rather than knowledge.

- Promote a closer relationship between university and labour market by ensuring that students benefit most. The creation of more internship agreements, extension of the duration, help of experts in the development of the curricula of the university degrees, direct contact of students with business activities, realization of more internships during the degree... are some of the ideas that have emerged as the work progressed.
- The digital revolution, internationalization and work automation have brought about a change in competencies required by companies. This will lead to the disappearance of some jobs and at the same time there will be new opportunities to be exploited, but specific training will be needed to implement these occupations. It will take a great deal of coordination and temporality between those competencies that companies will require and the training that will be provided by the education system to develop them. Knowledge will change at ever greater rates and the ability of students to learn or adapt to these constant changes will be key to improve their employability.
- Guidance for young people at an early stage of education so that they become familiar with the reality of business before entering a university degree. This will help to motivate students to undertake courses that really interest them, and not to enter studies without a clear motivation, since in the future this may create discontent or loss of productivity, as we have seen from the results of the case study. There is a need for guidance on the different career paths that can be followed from an early age, not just focusing on the need for a university degree to be more likely to be employed in a better job.
- Active participation of governments, both central and autonomous, to promote cooperation between businesses and educational institutions, and to secure employment in a near future.

Since this research has been performed, we hope that the situation will improve and that, to this end, the participation and cooperation of all the actors directly or indirectly involved in youth's training, will be progressively increased.

“Every mistake builds up until you finally find yourself in a dead end, where you can only go back to the beginning to change direction, leaving behind all the steps taken.”

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8. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: Online form questions

The aim of this survey is to make an approximation of the educational deficit of the young adult population, taking into account the views of companies from different sectors within the province of Castellón, in order to establish a possible connection between the labour market and the university education system. The information collected will be treated confidentially for academic purposes only.

This form can be filled in by anyone who, by their position in the company, knows its workforce in order to give an overview as close to reality as possible. Preferably employees of the Human Resources department or recruiting officers who know about the generic competencies their employees possess both when they enter the company and at present. We ask for your estimate/perception (questions can be answered quickly by choosing values on a scale).

Specifically, we ask for information about employees of the company with a specific profile: people between 18 and 30 years old who are studying or have studied the Business Administration degree.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Name (optional):	Position in the company*:
Company (optional):	Sector*:

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPANY
Approximate number of employees in the company
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0 – 10 workers• 10 – 50 workers• 50 – 250 workers• + 250 workers
What is the approximate percentage of employees holding the Business Administration degree?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0 - 25%• 25% - 50%• 50 - 75%• > 75%

Within the above percentage, what is the approximate percentage of employees between the ages of 18 and 30?

- 0 - 25%
- 25% - 50%
- 50 - 75%
- 75 - 99%
- 100%

Within the above percentage, what is the approximate percentage of employees between the ages of 18 and 30 in jobs that are qualified for their level of education?

- 0 - 25%
- 25% - 50%
- 50 - 75%
- 75 - 99%
- 100%

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

What do you think is the overall performance level of people who meet the survey profile in your company? (Consider the **CURRENT** level.) *Rate each of the questions from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (very satisfactory).*

1	2	3	4	5
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What do you think is the overall performance level of people who meet the survey profile in your company? (Consider the **INITIAL** level, i.e., the time you entered the company.) *Rate each of the questions from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (very satisfactory).*

1	2	3	4	5
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GENERIC COMPETENCIES

What is the **COMPETENTIAL LEVEL REQUIRED IN THE COMPANY** for the positions that Business Administration graduates usually occupy in each company? *Rate each of the questions from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 7 (very satisfactory).*

	Customer orientation		Teamwork		Autonomy
	Flexibility		Planning		Trouble shooting
	Searching for information		Negotiation		Leadership
	Involvement in the company		Analytical thinking		Learning
	Self-monitoring		Communication		Energy
	Initiative		Innovation		Results-oriented
	Constancy		Decision-making		

What is the **MEDIUM LEVEL** of Business Administration graduates in each of these competencies right upon **ENTERING THE COMPANY**? *Rate each of the questions from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 7 (very satisfactory).*

	Customer orientation		Teamwork		Autonomy
	Flexibility		Planning		Trouble shooting
	Searching for information		Negotiation		Leadership
	Involvement in the company		Analytical thinking		Learning
	Self-monitoring		Communication		Energy
	Initiative		Innovation		Results-oriented
	Constancy		Decision-making		

What is the **MEDIUM LEVEL** of Business Administration graduates in each of these competencies **CURRENTLY**? *Rate each of the questions from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 7 (very satisfactory).*

	Customer orientation		Teamwork		Autonomy
	Flexibility		Planning		Trouble shooting
	Searching for information		Negotiation		Leadership
	Involvement in the company		Analytical thinking		Learning
	Self-monitoring		Communication		Energy
	Initiative		Innovation		Results-oriented
	Constancy		Decision-making		

Select the 6 that you consider essential for your company.

	Customer orientation		Teamwork		Autonomy
	Flexibility		Planning		Trouble shooting
	Searching for information		Negotiation		Leadership
	Involvement in the company		Analytical thinking		Learning
	Self-monitoring		Communication		Energy
	Initiative		Innovation		Results-oriented
	Constancy		Decision-making		

*** The online format of the questionnaire filled by the participants can be found in this link (Spanish version): <https://cutt.ly/1bzdCBY> .

ANNEX 2: Interview guide

1. Introductory questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- N° of employees- Geographical scope of activity- Sector of the company.
2. Recruitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- In the last 5 years, has your company hired Business Administration graduates?- What channels are used in your company for the recruitment of these graduates? (ETT, job exchange, social networks, personal relationships...)- How do you join the company? (trial contracts, internships, indefinite...)- In the last 5 years, have you hosted internships? Appraisal? Improvements?- Have you ever hired a student at the end of the internship?- Do you make plans for the reception of the people you hire? (initial training, mentors, instructors...)
3. Competences and Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- In your opinion, how do you think graduates are prepared to enter the labour market? Are there training gaps? Point out positive and negative points.- Do you find a relationship between theory (what is taught at university) and practice in the labour market? If they find discrepancies, how would you improve the connection?- To what extent is the CV valued to have a post-graduate training when hiring? (master, specialist, stays abroad, volunteering...)- In line with the important generic competencies, do you think that the university should provide additional training in these personal aspects?- How do you generally assess the attitude and motivation of university graduates in relation to work?

4. Other aspects

- To what extent do you think the university should adapt to the demands of the labour market?
- How do you assess the current situation on the labour market? Do you believe that having a university degree guarantees quality employment today?
- Do they promote any kind of continuous training for employees?
- Do you carry out evaluations of employees in terms of performance, potential or competencies?
- What are your views on the competency approach to human resources management? Are they taken into account in any of the management phases in your company? (recruitment, selection, training, career plans...)