

## Prospective Hospitality Managers Competence as Integral Part of Competitiveness

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**Abstract:** The factor of the success of the performance of hospitality companies is the competitive, professional staff, which can ensure successful communication with customers and provide qualitative services. One of the most important indicators of a specialist's competitiveness is his or her competency. The aim of the article is to publicize the results of the conducted theoretical research in the field of Ecology of Education and Concurrentology. The methods of research: theoretical research – study, analysis and evaluation of scientific literature and the corresponding documents; reflection of authors' personal experience. The main conclusion - the structure of the competitiveness of the prospective manager of Hospitality Company consists of three components: personality and professional progress, self-management and the competence component of the environment of professional activities.

**Keywords:** competitiveness, competence, environment of professional activity, higher education.

### Introduction

Nowadays it is possible to observe the increase of the role of education, especially – the role of higher education, for the facilitation of the competitiveness of population and national economy of Latvia within the context of globalization and integration processes. The facilitation of the professional development of prospective specialists, including hospitality managers, within the study process at a higher education institution becomes topical, in order the new specialists would be able to integrate into the labour market successfully and prove their competitiveness in the environment of professional activities. One of the most important indicators of a specialist's competitiveness is his or her competency. We could paraphrase the well-known expression as follows: *tell me about your competency, and I'll tell about your competitiveness!*

The industry of hotels, restaurants and public catering is one of the most rapidly developing in Europe. It is an important source of work places in the sphere of services. In 2013 there were 10 million people employed in the hospitality industry, in Latvia – 46,000 people or 5% out of all employed (The Hospitality Sector..., 2013). The factor of the success of the performance of hospitality companies is the competitive, professional staff, which can ensure successful communication with customers and provide qualitative services. The surveys of industry experts show that the companies lack 40-50% of line employees, but upper management - 80-90%. Only 12-15% graduates of higher education institution continue to work in the industry, besides – the average period of employment in the industry is 1-1.5 years (Наумова, 2012). One of the reasons of such statistics is the preparation of specialists who have not sufficiently developed professional competencies, especially emphasized is the communication with customers and the behaviour in the environment of professional activities in different situations. Thus there is an objective necessity to change thinking, as well as to change the education of prospective hospitality industry specialists by grounding the studies at the higher education institution on *ecological approach*, which opens up a wide perspective for the development of prospective specialists' competitiveness, including the competency of the environment of professional activities.

The aim of the article is to publicize the results of the conducted theoretical research in the field of *Ecology of Education* and *Concurrentology*. The methods of research: theoretical research – study, analysis and evaluation of scientific literature and the corresponding documents; reflection of authors' personal experience.

### Methodology

**Ecological paradigm** in education actualizes the significance of students as the prospective specialists' interaction with environment – the educational environment and the environment of professional

activities – for the development of their competitiveness. Therefore one of the conceptual approaches within our research is *the ecological approach* in the study process, including the organization of professional training, facilitating the competitiveness of prospective managers of hospitality companies as the specialists, including their readiness for professional activities in the changing environment of hospitality industry. The important educational task, according to the aspect of ecological approach, is to create balance between the sustainability and constantly increasing contradictory and competitive differences, information flows, which often create disbalance, conflicts and stress. (Katane, 2007; Katane, Kalniņa, 2010; Katane, Baltusite, 2007; Briede, Pēks, 2011).

*The environment* of competitive education ensures the development of a competitive specialist's *competency*. The hospitality is a very specific sphere, where there are two types of products created simultaneously – a material product – food, beverages, a room in a hotel – and an intangible product – service, which makes *the environment* of the activities of hospitality companies unique and original, therefore it is necessary to substantiate the concept *the competence of the environment of professional activities* within our future research, because competency develops by cognizing the environment of professional activities, performing varied activities in this multidimensional environment of professional activities, as well as by developing environment-friendly thinking, proving environment-friendly and responsible actions through own professional activities.

But *the structural approach* enables us, when substantiating the concept of competitiveness, to identify *several components* both in the structure of *competitiveness* (Floren, 1998; Katane, 2010; Katane, 2011; Katane, Kalniņa, 2010; Андреев, 2006; Митина, 2003) and *competence* as the structure of the component of competitiveness (Kadishi, 2001; Keen, 1991; Raven, 1984; Зеер, 2005).

In this report we offer our views on the basis of conclusions drawn by several authors (Ivanenko, Khairova, Fajzrakhmanova, Khalilova, Kharisova, Lisitzina, Shaimukhametova, 2015; Katane, Kalniņa, 2010; Zhuina, 2014; Деркач, 2004; Митина, 2003; Хазова, 2011), where the competence is substantiated as a structural component of competitiveness.

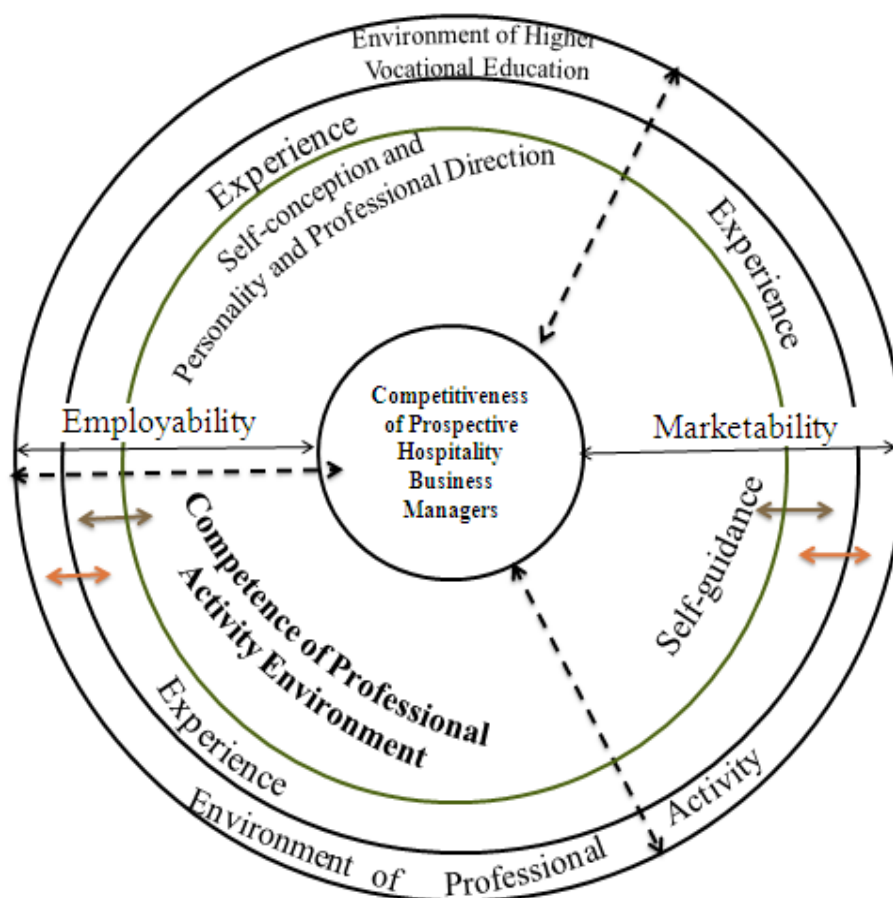


Figure 1. The model of the competitiveness of the prospective managers of hospitality companies.

There are 3 structural components identified in the model of the competitiveness of the prospective managers of hospitality companies (Figure 1): the component of personality and professional progress, the self-management component and the component of the competency of the environment of professional activities, which is one of the most important elements of competitiveness and enables a specialist to develop his or her career and fulfil his or her professional functions under the continuously changing conditions of professional environment and labour market. The basis for the competitiveness is experience, which had been obtained in the environment of higher education and professional activities. The important indicators of a specialist's competitiveness are his or her *employment* (an indicator of competitiveness determined by environment) and *employability* (an indicator of competitiveness resulting from and depending on the specialist), as well as *marketability* in the labour market.

**Functional and evolutionary approach** enable to study the competitiveness not only as a result, but also as a phenomenon, which continuously develops within the developmental process (evolutionism) of education, personality and professionalism and manifests through activities (functionality) (Hansen, 2008; Peters, Waterman, 2004; Гарафутдинова, 1998; Лаврентьев, Лаврентьева, Неудахина, 2002; Потемкина, 2004). Thus this conclusion shall be related also to the competence as an integral part of competitiveness.

## Results and discussion

### *Concept of competence and its structure within the context of competitiveness*

The concept *competence* is not unambiguous; sometimes it is called *a fuzzy concept*, because it is specified and improved on an ongoing basis (Boon, van der Klink, 2002). There is a vast diversity of the substantiations, interpretations and definitions of the concept of competence.

Competence-based education developed in 1970ies. Its development was facilitated by several factors – both at the European level and globally: firstly, the rapid development of innovations of products, processes and technologies brought about the necessity to adjust the studies to the labour market, which is a precondition for the second factor, namely, education oriented towards the result becomes important or the traditional, supply-driven model of educational system is replaced by demand-driven model. The third factor is related to the lifelong learning policy. In some European countries, in France (*“Bilan de Compétence”* – system for the accreditation of professional training), Ireland and Great Britain (*the “Accreditation of Prior Learning” system*), Germany (*the “Criteria Reference Testing” system*) there are skills identified and certified, which have been acquired in the non-formal and informal education (Bjørnåvold, 1997). The emphasis of this policy is related to the fourth factor – to broaden the learning opportunities, including an opportunity to obtain competencies, by offering “stairs” to those who have had no formal education and practical training opportunities but have practical experience. The fifth factor is also related to the European lifelong learning policy – the traditional education, professional training and development of experience shall be integrated into the competency-based approach. The sixth factor could be seen in the European Employment Strategy, where there is an emphasis on the necessity to improve the skills and qualifications of an employed person, and to facilitate his or her mobility, thus developing the professional competency (Delamare Le Deist, Winterton, 2005).

American psychologist D. McClelland (McClelland, 1973) in the article "Testing for competence rather than for intelligence", published in the journal "American Psychologist", points out that the results of academic tests, the existence of diplomas do not ensure the person's ability to perform his or her work well. D. McClelland substitutes the narrower concept *skill* by *competency*, including into it behavioural aspects and technical abilities. He emphasizes that it is the competency distinguishes an excellent employee from an average one. While continuing the work of D. McClelland, in 1984 in London the British scientist J. Raven in the work „Competence in Modern Society. Its Identification, Development and Release” (Raven, 1984) writes that the competence is in a human being as the biological inheritance, abilities, dispositions and other individual qualities. It has subjective nature; however, the competence forms and develops depending on the objective conditions. Each sphere of activities requires a different totality of competences, which form the specialist's proficiency.

Professor of Latvia University of Agriculture B. Briede (Briede, 2004) has suggested a definition of competence: it is a totality of knowledge, skills and abilities to reflect, which could be tested in a documentary manner and through the activities in which an individual agrees to participate actively and with responsibility. The scientist emphasizes the important personality's *ability* – to adapt to the changing *environmental* conditions. Scientist D. Clark (Clark, 2010) connects competence with *abilities*; however, the concept ability usually means either the ability to do something or a special talent, but the competences are closely related to knowledge and experience, to the quality of performance. An individual obtains competence by acquiring knowledge, practicing, obtaining experience.

M. Eraut (Eraut, 2003) has defined competence as *an ability* to fulfil assignments and roles provided by the expected standards. This definition views competence as the acquisition of standards determined by the society. J. Stabiņš (Stabiņš, 2001) views competence as *an ability* obtained within the educational process and based on knowledge, experience and attitude. Such ability manifests as a skill – readiness for activities.

Latvian scientist T. Koķe (Koķe, 2003) defines competence as a result of studies. If an individual is able to focus and apply his or her knowledge, experience and skills quickly in a particular professional situation, this characterizes him or her as a professionally successful personality and a competitive specialist.

Some scientists (Duffy, Petrovic, Crespo, 2010) relate the concept of competence to the sphere of professional activities. In this case the competence is viewed as the manifestation of *abilities* through professional activities.

T. Friedman (Friedman, 2013), the well-known journalist of the newspaper „New York Times”, states that the world only cares and would pay for your *ability* to achieve something by applying your knowledge... We are advancing towards the competency-based world, where people do not care, how you acquire the competency – in the e-environment, by studying at a higher education institution for 4 years or by attending the courses organized at the company – but there is a significant demand for the evidence that you have acquired the particular competency.

Irrespective of the fact that there are many and different definition of competencies, B. Mansfield (Mansfield, 2004) has aggregated, evaluated and supplemented the most common ones, emphasizing three approaches to the defining of a competence: 1) the competence could be observed through an activity – it describes the present process; 2) the competence is a result of an activity or a professional standards, which describes what an individual shall do in order to hold a particular office; 3) the competence is the person's most characteristic qualities, which describe the person.

Scientist B. Briede has added the fourth approach, namely, the competences are define using several approaches (Hoffmann, 1999, 276; cited by Briede, 2009).

Literature analysis on competence shows that this concept is viewed in a holistic way, as a structure, consisting of different components.

At the beginning of 1980ies, German sociologist and philosopher J. Habermas (Habermas, 1981; 1984) defined the competence as an individual's *ability* to use the acquired in practice, “to handle” knowledge, skills, attitudes, to apply them creatively in a corresponding situation and improving; however, it is not knowledge, skills and attitudes in a particular sphere of activities, which could be actualized.

Scientist B. Kadishi (Kadishi, 2001) points out that the competence is an individual combination of a personality's knowledge, *abilities* and attitudes for the achievement of a particular goal. They could be taught, developed and actualized on the basis of external impulse and internal energy. Researcher emphasizes that competence is always connected with an action, its expression depends on a particular situation and individual potential, namely, it manifests within a particular context and is oriented towards an aim. Similar conclusions could be found also in Le Boterf's (Le Boterf, 1998) publication.

K. Keen (cited by Marshall, Kinuthia, 2009), by means of a metaphor, has described the competence as a hand with fingers: skills, knowledge, experience, contacts, values, which is coordinated by palm and controlled by nervous system that manages an arm on the whole.

Scientist J. Raven (Raven, 1984) points out that the competence has many components, which enable the personality to achieve goals important for the particular personality. The scientist divides these components into 3 groups: cognitive, affective and volitional components. The components of competence are relatively independent; they possess cumulation and substitution abilities. British psychologist believes – the older a person becomes, the more important for the development of competences is the personality's values system instead of personality's abilities.

Researcher R. Boyatzis (Boyatzis, 2008) emphasizes that the competences are necessary for the efficient fulfilment of work; however, they are not decisive, if competences do not correspond to the functional requirements of work and organizational culture. This statement explains the fact, why, when a person changes his or her job, and together with the job – also the environment, efficiently working employees cannot achieve good results. As well as the fact, why, when a person is promoted, the executor of the work cannot achieve good results by performing the analogous work. As well as the fact, why the executors with excellent professional achievements often do not achieve the same results in other spheres. When explaining competences, the scientist emphasizes the essential role of a motive, namely, the motives of any activity are hidden in the subconsciousness, but knowledge and skills are the result of a personality's conscious behaviour, thus the manifestation of one and the same competence level may differ.

Scientist E. Zeer (Zeep, 2005) views competence as an integration of knowledge, skills and experience in the social-professional situation. It is *an individual's ability to implement the totality of his or her competences through practical activities*. According to the scientist's point of view, the competence has procedural nature.

In the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning document (Eiropas kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūra .., 2009) the concept "*competence*" means "the proven *ability* to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development". The competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. In the descriptions of knowledge, skills and competence, provided in the document, the emphasis is placed on results, their display, namely, "knowledge" means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual. But *skills* mean the personality's qualities, thanks to which an individual is able to apply knowledge in practice, completing practical tasks and solving theoretical problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

The authors of the report find that competence, being a component of competitiveness, is a totality of the qualities of a student as a prospective specialist, the result of studies, and an ongoing developmental process. Thus we can state that competence is not static, it is in the ongoing process of development, renewal and improvement. This enables to substantiate the development of a competitive person's competencies as *a process*. The personality continuously develops and changes on the whole during the educational process and the process of professional activities. This means that its different qualities or their integral totalities also develop and change. Therefore the competency develops alongside with the development of a student's personality and the professional development of a prospective specialist. At the same time the competence is also *a result*, which is established, fixed and evaluated at a particular moment of a study process. The result should meet the aims of a particular study course at a particular stage of studies, and it could be assessed and evaluated according to the clearly defined evaluation criteria. After the evaluation of each competence, the next developmental stage of a competence begins within the study process, and it has cyclic nature: the aim in connection with the forecasted result of studies, the development of competence during the study process, the evaluation of the competence as a result of studies at the end of a particular stage of

studies (cycle). Each new developmental stage of competence during the study process starts with the acquisition of new knowledge, its application in practice, developing new skills or improving the existing ones, as well as with the development of new abilities for performing independent and responsible activities or the improvement of existing abilities for a new level of quality (Figure 2).

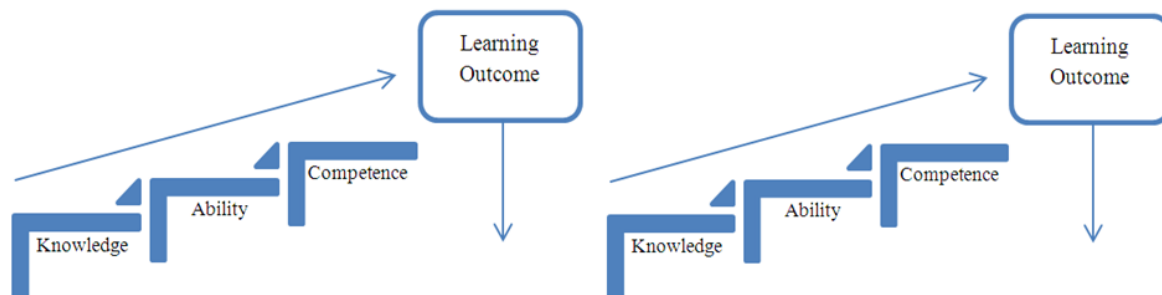


Figure 2. Competence as Learning Process and Outcome at the University.

Since the development of competence is closely related to the specialist's professional development, this process might last all life in the educational environment and also in the environment of professional activities within the context of career development.

Irrespective of the fact that there are many and different explanations of the concept *competence*, the interpretations of the components of competence structure, each of them have a practical value for the cognizing of this phenomenon. Within the framework of all studies, it has been, to certain extent, related to the quality of a personality's professional performance abilities, environment, where such activities take place, and to the quality of performance. The authors of the report find that ***competence is an integral totality of specialist's several abilities, which manifests through different independent activities according to the situation and set goals, including the ability to integrate into the environment of professional activities and to act with responsibility in a particular situation and period of time, where the responsible action is the expression and implementation of values-based attitudes through the professional performance.***

### Conclusions

- The structure of the competitiveness of the prospective manager of hospitality company consists of three components: personality and professional progress, self-management and the competency component of the environment of professional activities. Thus, the competency of the environment of professional activities is an integral part of the structure of competitiveness. Therefore the competency develops alongside with the competitiveness and vice versa.
- There is a vast diversity concerning the theoretical substantiation of the concept *competence*. On the basis of the results of theoretical research, the authors of the report have suggested the following definition of competence: *competence is an integral totality of a specialist's several abilities, which manifests through different independent activities according to the situation and set aims, including the ability to integrate into the environment of professional activities and to act with responsibility under certain circumstances and in a particular period of time, where the responsible action is the expression of values based attitude and its implementation in the individual's professional activities.* Besides, the competence is: 1) an integral totality of the qualities – abilities – of a student as a personality, 2) the result of study process, 3) an ongoing process, which is related to the development and career growth of the prospective specialist.
- The results of theoretical research show a new perspective, namely, on the basis of ecological approach in research, to actualize and theoretically substantiate *the competence of the environment of professional activities* as a component of a prospective specialist's competitiveness.

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