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SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES NEEDED IN THE WORKPLACE: A EUROPEAN SURVEY OF SPORT EMPLOYERS' AND SPORT GRADUATES' PERCEPTIONS*

M. Goudas¹, P. Tsimeas¹, E. Tsitskari², C. Baker³, E. Loughgreen³, D. Crone³

¹University of Thessaly, School of Physical Education & Sport Science, D.P.E.S.S., 42100 Trikala

²Democritus University of Thrace, School of Physical Education and Sport Science, 69100 Komotini

³School of Sport and Exercise, University of Gloucestershire, UK

Abstract

This study presents data from the Erasmus Life Long Learning Program “Employability of Graduates of Sport” (EGS). EGS aims at establishing a Europe wide Employers/Sport related Higher Education Institutions network, to promote good practice in employability programs. As part of the Needs Analysis action of the project, a survey of employers and sport graduates was performed. Employers (n = 347) and Sport Graduates (n = 2047) from 6 countries (UK, France, Germany, Greece, Spain and Czech Republic) rated: a. the importance and b. the perceived possession of 20 specific attributes and skills related to employability. This study presents data from the Greek sub-samples as well as a comparison between the results from Greece and those from all countries. Regarding Greece, there were large differences between Graduates and Employers perception of the possession of skills and attributes, with Employers denoting that Graduates possess the skills to a much lower extent that the Graduates perceived. Also, Greek Employers perceived that Graduates possessed the skills and characteristics to a lower extent than Employers from the other countries.

Keywords: *Attributes, Greek Employers, Greek Graduates, Skills*

Διεύθυνση αλληλογραφίας

Marios Goudas

Address: Thessaly University, School of Physical Education and Sport Science, GR-42100 Trikala, Greece

Tel.: +302431047045

E-mail: mgoudas@pe.uth.gr

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Introduction

There are currently growing concerns regarding youth unemployment in the EU. Some countries, for example Spain and Greece are experiencing over 40% unemployment of young people under the age of 25. Furthermore, the number of unemployed youths across the EU27 is more than double (22.7%) that of all age unemployment (10.5%) (Eurostat, 2014). These unemployment figures are despite the steady increase of young people attending universities in the last decade (Eurostat, 2014).

The Employability of Graduates of Sport (EGS), is a consortium of eight partners from six countries (University of Gloucestershire, Strasbourg University, University of Göttingen, Murcia University, University of Thessaly, Palacky University, El Poso Sports Club, and Cheltenham Borough Council) funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus Life Long Learning Program, to address issues of employability of sport graduates of Higher Education Institutions. The aims of the related project are: a. to develop resources to assist employers of sport graduates and HEI's in developing evidence – based employability programmes and b. to establish a Europe wide Employers/Higher Education Institutions related to sport network, to promote good practice in employability programs.

This study presents results from the Needs Analysis action of the project, which was implemented by a Europe- wide survey of employers and sport graduates.

Methods

Two multi-section surveys were developed: one for Employers and one for Sport Graduates. The surveys were translated to the 6 languages of the partner countries and were administered electronically.

Participants

Graduates and Employers were invited to complete the survey by several means including university databases, professional networks, alumni associations, social media etc. Three hundred and forty seven employers (347) and two thousand and forty-seven (2047) sport graduates completed the surveys.

Procedure

This study presents results regarding the section “Skills and Attributes” which was identical in the two surveys and in particular data regarding Greece and data contrasting Greece with the other countries. For the section “Skills and Attributes” of the surveys, twenty (20) specific work – related skills and attributes were elicited. These were drawn by several sources (e.g. Hodges, & Burchell, 2003; Jackson, 2009). These skills and attributes were: Ability and willingness to learn, Computer skills, Energy and passion, Teamwork and cooperation, subject knowledge, Self-confidence, Flexibility. Analytical & conceptual thinking, Communication, Work experience, Problem solving, Ability to apply knowledge, Building relationships, Up- to- date knowledge, Initiative, Planning, Impact and Influence on others, Organizational awareness, Leadership, and Supporting others. For this section, two identical scales were used in the graduate and employer surveys. In completing the “Perceived Importance” scale, Employers and Graduates rated the 20 skills and attributes on a 5 – point scale ranging from “Critical” to “Unimportant”.

Statistical analysis

Results related to this scale are presented in the form of percentages (%) of employers and graduates attributing ‘high importance’ (combining Critical and Very Important responses) to each statement. In completing the “Perceived Possession” scale Graduates and Employers stated whether sport graduates possess each the twenty skills and attributes on a scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. Results related to this scale are presented in the form of percentages (%) of employers and graduates attributing ‘high possession’ (combining Strongly agree and Agree responses) to each statement.

Results

Results from Greek data

Regarding Greece, there were large differences between Graduates and Employers on the perceived possession of graduates’ skills and attributes: % of Graduates who rated “high possession” ranged from 84,3 to 98,5 for the 20 skills and attributes, while % of Employers who rated “high possession” ranged from 31,5 to 52.

Regarding Greece, there were also differences between Graduates and Employers on the perceived importance of skills and characteristics. Employers assigned more importance to all twenty skills and attributes that Graduates did (% of Employers who assigned high importance ranged from 61.9 to 98.4 while % of Graduates who assigned high importance ranged from 22.4 to 88.8

Comparison of Greek results with European results

Regarding perceived possession, European Employers perceived sport graduates to possess skills and attributes to a higher extent than Greek employers did. Perceived high possession % ranged from 38.6 to 63.8 for European employers while % for Greek Employers ranged from 31.5 to 52.

Regarding perceived importance there were not notable differences between European Employers and Greek employers (% high importance ranging from 58.3 to 96.6 and from 61.9 to 98.4 respectively).

Discussion - Conclusion

These results denote that employers perceive several skills and especially soft skills as equally important to subject knowledge. These skills need to be embedded in the HEI's curricula. Further, differences between employers and graduates regarding possession of skills denote that graduates should be assisted in developing self-awareness regarding the skills they poses in relations to those demanded by employers.

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