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Expectations by Employers on Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes of Employees

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Abstract

Changes of the work conditions and technologies ask to change approach to the main principles of education system. The education system can't prepare employees for the whole working life. Relative role of different parts of the qualification are changing. Skills, practical experience, which were main object of investigation and assessment, becomes less valid for whole working life, significance of motivation, emotional intelligence and attitudes increase. Skills and knowledge must be periodically improved, but attitudes remain as more constant basis for the competences. Attitudes are significant part of employers needs for qualified employees, but their role should be investigated more carefully. Investigation demonstrates different assessment of attitudes by employers depending on strategic plans and short term needs. Increasing role of motivation supports the appropriate changes in education system. The relevant recommendations for the improvement of education system have been proposed. The purpose of the study is to investigate the expectations by employers on skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees. To achieve the purpose the following tasks were set: to summarize and analyse the results of the research published in scientific literature; to study the opinions of the employers. Research methods used: scientific literature studies, survey of employers of the Kurzeme region, Jelgava city, Jelgava district, Ozolnieku district, Dobeles district (survey was conducted in June 2013 – October 2013). For employers selection company register LURSOFT was used and every tenth company was approached, response rate 21%. In survey for most of questions evaluation scale 1 – 10 is applied where 1 – not significant, 10 – very significant. For data processing used methods: descriptive statistics – indicators of central tendency or location and indicators of variability; multivariate statistical analysis – factor analysis; non-parametric statistical methods – Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Kruskal-Wallis test. The empirical research showed that professional skills, knowledge, caring for the agenda and organization of work, purposefulness, cooperation, ability to plan and control, honesty are significant part of employers needs for qualified employees. The cooperation between education institutions and companies is necessary for the development of the study programs and practical skills in real production environment. The results of recent requirements by employers have been compared with survey results last decade. The important role of motivation of employees has been observed. The discussions about the employers

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needs could be divided in two main parts – social and specific skills. Transferable skills and attitudes become more significant owing to fast changes of knowledge and skills necessary for the quickly changing technologies. The ways of continuing improvement of qualifications of employees during their career are discussed. Special attention is paid to different possibilities to involve employers and local municipalities in the creation of the conditions favourable for the life-long learning of employees.

KEYWORDS: attitude, competence, education, employers; employees; employer's motivation, experience, employees; knowledge; skills.

Changes of the work conditions and technologies ask to change approach to the main principles of education system with special attention to professional education. The education system can't prepare employees for the whole working life. Relative role of different parts of the qualification are changing. Skills, practical experience, which were main object of investigation and assessment, becomes less valid for whole working life, at the same time increases significance of motivation, emotional intelligence and attitudes. Skills and knowledge must be periodically improved, but attitudes remain as more constant basis for the competences. The issues how to provide employers with necessary specialists are particularly topical.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the expectations by employers on skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees. To achieve the purpose the following tasks were set: to summarize and analyse the results of the research published in scientific literature; to study the opinions of the employers. Research methods used: scientific literature studies, survey of employers. For data processing used methods: descriptive statistics – indicators of central tendency or location and indicators of variability; multivariate statistical analysis – factor analysis; non-parametric statistical methods: *Kolmogorov-Smirnov test*, *Kruskal-Wallis test*.

The empirical research showed that professional skills, knowledge, caring for the agenda and organization of work, purposefulness, cooperation, ability to plan and control, honesty are significant part of employers needs for qualified employees. The discussions about the employers needs could be divided in two main parts – social and specific skills. To Transferable skills and attitudes become more significant owing to fast changes of knowledge and skills necessary for the quickly changing technologies.

The expectations of business and the capabilities offered by employees are on research agenda worldwide touching different branches, specifics in different countries, different age groups, and many other aspects.

Attitude and motivation of employees are important aspects stressed in scientific publications of many authors as well as confirmed by many cases in empirical research. On motivation of employees extensive research is performed by scientists from Scotland Pouliakas & Thoedossiou (2012) where has been stressed that one of the primary determinant of employee's effort is job discretion through monetary rewards.

Economic crisis has confirmed that in general there are not important changes in expectations of employers and also employees towards job satisfaction, commitment and self-regulation (Markovits, *et al.*, 2014).

Modelling employees behaviour on workforce dynamics (Saravakos & Sirakoulis, 2014) has indicated relevant aspects of employee expectations and different possible realisation scenarios.

Attitude to job and employee discrete emotions are also important aspect valuable for successful business and satisfaction judgements (Sherf & Venkataramani, 2015).

Different employers expectations towards employees depend in small extent from the business branch (Dhar, 2015; Lee, 2014; Muir, *et al.*, 2013; Karatepe, 2013; Cowart & Brady, 2014; Antošova,

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Theoretical Background

et al., 2014; Sharpley & Forster, 2003), as well as business ownership forms (Sieger, *et al.*, 2011; Choudhury & Mcintosh, 2013), in some countries also traditional national specifics influence employers expectations towards employees (Chung, *et al.*, 2014; Chiu, 2003; Kalkavan & Katrinli, 2014; El-Zeiny, 2012), as well as other personal aspects (Law, *et al.*, 2011; Clark, *et al.*, 2014).

The expectations of business and the capabilities offered by information and communication technologies makes it necessary to change teaching practices, particularly in higher education (Warin, *et al.*, 2011). The need for developing a converging set of key competences, knowledge and skills that reflect the requirements of employers and they staff and can be guidance for the design of courses are grown (Quendler, *et al.*, 2013).

Turek & Perek-Bialas (2013) have proved that when explaining productivity ratings in the case of older workers, soft skills (e.g. social skills, management skills, reliability and loyalty) were the most influential factor, hard skills (e.g. creativity, physical health, new technology skills, willingness to learn and flexibility) played a smaller role, in the case of younger workers, the relationship was reversed. Turek and Perek-Bialas have pointed out that lifelong learning is necessary for hard skills development, it allows updating and improving of new technology skills, and maintains ability to learn. An increase in training investments is significantly linked to an increase in revenue per employee; marginal returns to training are increasing firm size. Large firms benefit more from training (Mehra, *et al.*, 2014).

Work-place learning takes place in many settings and in different ways, resulting in knowledge and skills of different kinds and having different approaches in different countries and parts of world.

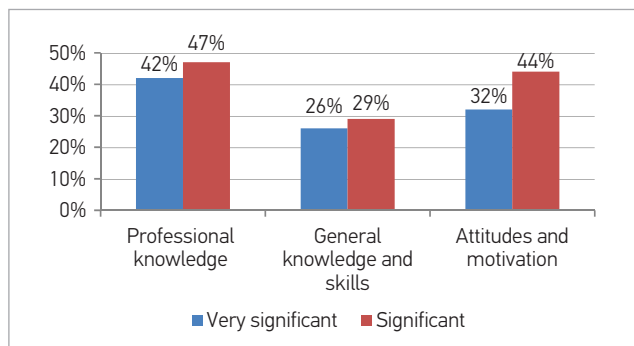
Research results and discussion

The survey of employers of the Kurzeme region, Jelgava city, Jelgava district, Ozolnieki district and Dobele district was conducted from June to October 2013. The company register LURSOFT was used for selection of employers, all large and medium companies and every tenth company was approached. The web survey, phone survey and written survey were used. The response rate was 21%. In survey for most of questions evaluation scale 1 – 10 was applied where 1 – not significant, 10 – very significant. For data processing used methods: descriptive statistics – indicators of central tendency or location and indicators of variability; multivariate statistical analysis – factor analysis; non-parametric statistical methods: *Kolmogorov-Smirnov* test, *Kruskal-Wallis* test.

The survey results show that employers high evaluated not only the professional knowledge and skills of employees, but also their general knowledge and skills, attitudes and motivation. Approximately 42% of employers assessed professional knowledge of employees as very significant factor, 47% – as significant. The general knowledge and skills (languages, computer, driving

skills, co-operation ability, ability to plan, control, lead a team) as very significant assessed approximately 26% of employers, as significant – 29%. The attitudes and motivation of employees (initiative, purposefulness, caring for the agenda and organization of work, progress towards development) as very significant assessed approximately 32% of employers, as significant – 44% (see figure 1).

Figure 1
Employer's evaluations on professional knowledge, general knowledge and skills, attitudes and motivation of employees as significant or very significant factors



Source: Author's calculations based on employers survey conducted in June – October, 2013 (n=340), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant.

Skills, knowledge and attitudes	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Professional knowledge	8.9	9	10	1.18
Latvian language skills	8.8	10	10	2.01
Purposefulness	8.7	9	10	1.24
Caring for the agenda and organization of work	8.7	9	10	1.56
Co-operation ability	8.6	9	10	1.61
Ability to plan and control (tasks and their execution)	8.6	9	10	1.77
Initiative in addition to the actions to be taken	8.4	9	10	1.54
Initiative in additional duties taking	8	8	8	1.9
Progress towards development, the ability to plan further education	8	8	8	1.89
Computer skills	7.2	8	10	2.62
Ability to lead a team	7	8	10	2.82
Driving skills	6.8	8	8	2.32
Russian language skills	6.4	7	8	2.83
English language skills	5.8	6	6	2.71
Other languages skills	4.6	5	1	2.83

Source: Author's calculations based on employers survey conducted in June – October, 2013 (n=340), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant.

The employers were asked to evaluate the significance on skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees. Very high employers evaluated professional knowledge of employees, Latvian language skills, purposefulness, caring for the agenda and organization of work, co-operation ability, ability to plan and control, initiative in addition to the actions to be taken, initiative in additional duties taking, progress towards development, the ability to plan further education of employees (characterised by arithmetic mean, median, mode). The evaluations of above mentioned skills, knowledge and attitudes were quite homogenous (characterised by standard deviation), except evaluations of Latvian language skills. Main statistical indicators of employer's evaluation on skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees are reflected in table 1.

The opinions of employers about the significance on skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees differed in the cross-section of industries. The differences of employer's evaluation were statistically relevant with high probability (98.2%) proved by the result of *Kruskal-Wallis* test ($p < 0,018$). In the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry employers highly evaluated professional knowledge, co-operation ability (arithmetic mean 9, median 10). In the construction industry – professional knowledge, initiative, ability to plan and control, ability to lead a team, co-operation ability, purposefulness, caring for the agenda and organization of work, progress towards development, the ability to plan further education, Latvian language skills and knowledge (arithmetic mean 10, median 10). In the transport and storage industry employers highly evaluated the initiative, Latvian language skills and knowledge, purposefulness, caring for the agenda and organization of work, progress towards development, the ability to plan further education (arithmetic mean 10, median 10); in the manufacturing industry – professional knowledge, Latvian language skills and knowledge, computer skills). In the wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles industry – the Latvian language skills and knowledge, purposefulness, caring for the agenda and organization of work (arithmetic mean 10, median 10), professional knowledge, co-operation ability, the ability to plan and control (arithmetic mean 9, median 10).

Table 1

Statistical indicators of employer's evaluation on skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees

Factor analysis was performed to identify complex factors – skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees which employers evaluated as significant. As a result of the factor analysis the initial fifteen factors, through nine iterations (by using the *Varimax* rotation with *Kaiser Normalisation*) are grouped in four complex factors (see table 2).

The interpretation of the identified complex factors with regard to the indicators with which the initial indicators have relatively high burdens:

1 Complex factor F1: ability to plan, control, organise, co-operation ability, purposefulness, progress towards development. The factor has relatively high burdens on the following indicators: ability to plan and control, caring for the agenda and organization of work, co-operation ability, purposefulness, and ability to lead a team, progress towards development, the ability to plan further education, Latvian language skills and knowledge.

2 Complex factor F2: general knowledge and skills. The factor has relatively high burdens on the following indicators: English language skills and knowledge, other languages (excluding English and Russian) skills and knowledge, computer skills, Russian language skills and knowledge.

3 Complex factor F3: professional knowledge and initiative – in additional duties taking and in addition to the actions to be taken. The factor has relatively high burdens on the following indicators: initiative – in additional duties taking, professional knowledge, and initiative - in addition to the actions to be taken in addition to an effort that required under the formal job responsibilities.

4 Complex factor F4: driving skills. The factor has relatively high burdens on the indicator driving skills, the initiative - in addition to the actions to be taken in addition to an effort that required under the formal job responsibilities.

Table 2

Complex factors on employer's evaluation on skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees

Initial factors	Complex Factors			
	F1	F2	F3	F4
The ability to plan and control (tasks and their execution)	0.921	0.116	0.051	0.150
Caring for the agenda and organization of work	0.874	0.080	0.020	0.134
Co-operation ability	0.835	0.106	0.287	-0.145
Purposefulness	0.662	0.122	0.470	-0.406
Ability to lead a team	0.575	0.468	0.221	0.347
Progress towards development, the ability to plan further education	0.530	0.451	0.409	0.117
Latvian language skills and knowledge	0.456	0.438	0.288	-0.110
English language skills and knowledge	0.049	0.882	0.123	-0.153
Other languages (excluding English and Russian) skills and knowledge	0.212	0.778	-0.030	0.122
Computer skills	0.046	0.769	0.041	0.180
Russian language skills and knowledge	0.168	0.745	0.365	-0.078
The initiative - in additional duties taking	0.122	0.224	0.809	-0.038
Professional knowledge	0.186	-0.018	0.663	0.369
The initiative - in addition to the actions to be taken in addition to an effort that required under the formal job responsibilities	0.397	0.287	0.465	0.424
Driving skills	0.119	0.137	0.140	0.771

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
 a. Rotation converged in 9 iterations

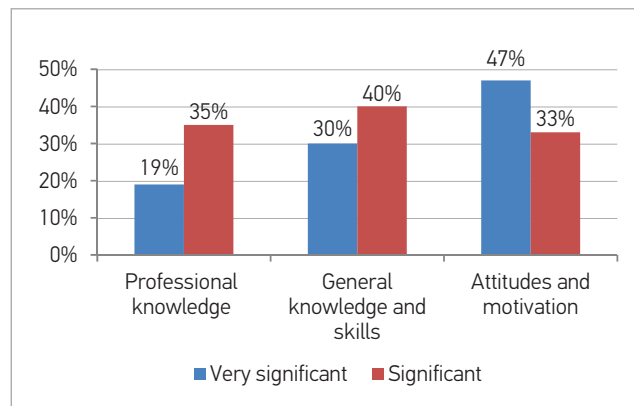
Source: Author's calculations based on employers survey conducted in June – October, 2013 (n=340), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant.

The employers were asked to evaluate the significance on skills, knowledge and attitudes when recruiting new employees. The survey results show that employers high evaluated professional knowledge and skills, general knowledge and skills, attitudes and motivation to work in the company of new employees. Approximately 19% of employers evaluated professional knowledge (appropriate education and qualification, appropriate work experience) of new employees as very significant factor, 35% – as significant. The general knowledge and skills (developed intellect, reasoning and analysis and synthesis capabilities, expression skill, communication and acumen) as very significant evaluated approximately 30% of employers, as significant – 40%. The attitudes and motivation of new employees (sense of responsibility, honesty, desire to work in good faith, motivation to work in the company, appearance and social behaviour) as very significant evaluated approximately 47% of employers, as significant – 33% (see figure 2).

Very high employers on employer's evaluation on skills, knowledge and attitudes when recruiting new employees evaluated honesty, desire to work in good faith and sense of responsibility (characterised by mean, median, mode), the evaluations were homogenous (characterised by standard deviation). High employers evaluated developed intellect, reasoning and analysis and synthesis capabilities, communication and acumen, motivation to work in the company and a vacant post, the evaluations were quite homogenous. A bit lower employers evaluated appropriate education, qualification and appropriate work experience on employer's evaluation on skills, knowledge and attitudes when recruiting new employees. The main statistical indicators of employer's evaluations on required skills and knowledge and attitudes when hiring new employees are reflected in table 3.

The opinions of employers about the significance on skills, knowledge and attitudes when recruiting new employees differed in the cross-section of industries. The differences of employer's evaluation were statistically relevant with high probability (99.9%) proved by the result of *Kruskal-Wallis* test ($p < 0,001$). In the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry employers highly evaluated sense of responsibility, honesty, to desire to work in good faith (arithmetic mean 9, median 10). In the transport and storage industry – appropriate work experience, sense of responsibility, developed intellect, reasoning and analysis and synthesis capabilities, honesty, motivation to work in the company and a vacant post, communication and acumen, desire to work in good faith (arithmetic mean 10, median 10). In the wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles industry – sense of responsibility, developed intellect, reasoning and analysis and synthesis capabilities, honesty, to desire to work in good faith (arithmetic mean 9, median 10). In accommodation and food service employers highly evaluated employees honesty (arithmetic mean 9, median 10).

For identifying the key factors – skills, knowledge and attitudes which are significant when recruiting new employees and determining the mutual statistical relations of the factors, factor analysis has used. As a result of the factor analysis the initial twelve factors on employer's evaluation on skills, knowledge and attitudes when recruiting new employees through four iterations (by using the *Vari-max* rotation with *Kaiser Normalisation*) are grouped in three complex factors reflected in table 4.



Source: Author's calculations based on employers survey conducted in June – October, 2013 (n=340), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant.

Figure 2

Employer's evaluations on professional knowledge, general knowledge and skills, attitudes and motivation when recruiting new employees as significant or very significant factors

Table 3

Statistical indicators of employer's evaluation on skills, knowledge and attitudes when recruiting new employees

Skills, knowledge and attitudes	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Honesty	9.5	10	10	1.14
Desire to work in good faith	9.3	10	10	1.02
Sense of responsibility	9.3	10	10	1.15
Developed intellect, reasoning and analysis and synthesis capabilities	8.5	9	10	1.65
Communication and acumen	8.5	9	9; 10	1.55
Motivation to work in the company and a vacant post	8.4	9	10	1.48
Good reviews from people who trust	8.1	8	8	1.91
The overall impression of the overall adequacy of the post	7.7	8	8	1.98
Expression skill	7.4	8	8	2.15
Appropriate education and qualification	7.4	8	8; 9	2.15
Appropriate work experience	7.3	8	8	2.15
Appearance and social behaviour	6.6	7	8	2.23

Source: Author's calculations based on employers survey conducted in June – October, 2013 (n=340), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant.

Table 4

Complex factors on employer's evaluation on skills, knowledge and attitudes when recruiting new employees

Initial factors	Complex Factors		
	F1	F2	F3
Sense of responsibility	0.914	0.026	0.011
Desire to work in good faith	0.908	0.062	0.035
Honesty	0.891	0.148	0.007
Motivation to work in the company and a vacant post	0.752	0.201	0.155
Developed intellect, reasoning and analysis and synthesis capabilities	0.652	0.324	0.254
Expression skill	0.116	0.813	0.318
Appearance and social behaviour	0.033	0.793	0.121
Good reviews from people who trust	0.410	0.589	-0.118
Communication and acumen	0.472	0.503	0.484
Appropriate education and qualification	0.041	-0.047	0.852
Appropriate work experience	-0.003	0.158	0.714
The overall impression of the overall adequacy of the post	0.202	0.407	0.631

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

Source: Author's calculations based on employers survey conducted in June – October, 2013 (n=340), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant.

The interpretation of the identified complex factors with regard to the indicators with which the initial indicators have relatively high burdens:

1 Complex factor F1: attitudes, motivation, intellect. The factor has relatively high burdens on the following indicators: sense of responsibility, desire to work in good faith, honesty, motivation to work in the company and a vacant post, developed intellect, reasoning and analysis and synthesis capabilities.

2 Complex factor F2: general skills, appearance and social behaviour. The factor has relatively high burdens on the following indicators: expression skill, appearance and social behaviour, communication and acumen, good reviews from people.

3 Complex factor F3: professional knowledge and skills. The factor has relatively high burdens on the following indicators: appropriate education and qualification, appropriate work experience, the overall impression of the overall adequacy of the post.

The employers were asked to evaluate the measures referred to the importance of the professional skills development. Cooperation between education institutions and companies for the development of the studies programs and practical skills was highest evaluated measure (arithmetic mean 8, median 8, mode 10). The respondents high evaluated also measure „Professional qualification development organization in the workplace” (arithmetic mean 8, median 8, mode 8). Slightly lower respondents evaluated the measures „Possibility to EU projects and other foreign financial assistance co-financed projects in employees preparation for professional work” (arithmetic mean 7, median 8, mode 8), „Practice for students and/or management of apprentices in the workplace” (arithmetic mean 7, median 8, mode 8), „Regular information on continuing education/qualification development courses/seminars” (arithmetic mean 6.5, median 8, mode 8), „Training opportunities for employees development abroad” (arithmetic mean 6, median 6, mode 8), „Internet use in improvement of professional qualifications” (arithmetic mean 6, median 6, mode 8).

The current research indicates that professional knowledge and skills, general knowledge and skills and also attitudes and motivation of employees are high evaluated and requested by the employers.

The research results are similar to study of labour market in 2007 in Latvia – „Compliance of Professional and Higher Education Programmes with the Requirements of Labour Market”. This study indicates that work experience of employees is very important for about 92% of employers, general skills of employees is very important for about 76% of employers, higher or professional education appropriate for profession is very important or important for about 67% of employers.

— In the framework of the present investigation the opinion of employers concerning the knowledge, skills and attitudes of actual and potential employees were analysed. The answers were significantly different when the employers were asked to evaluate the significance of skills, knowledge and attitudes of employees and when the employers were asked to evaluate the significance of skills, knowledge and attitudes when recruiting new employees. The reason is high level of changes of knowledge and skills during the work. Attitudes are changing slower, therefore honesty and other attitudes employers want to see immediately when recruiting new employees. Knowledge and skills could be acquired after recruiting, during the work. According to the results shown in the tables 1 and 3, during the short initial period of work the professional knowledge should become the most valuable indicator of employees. Employers should care about the conditions for the learning of employees. When recruiting new employees, employers highest evaluate attitudes of new employees and motivation to work in the company and a vacant post. The significance of motivation, emotional intelligence and attitudes of employees has increased.

— The regulations for the professional education are under the discussions now. Changes of the professional standards and qualifications are proposed and elements of work based learning are introduced. Instead of different independent qualifications will be groups of qualifications with one professional standard and several specializations. Structure of such groups of qualifications and specializations will be discussed by *Branch Expert Councils* where all

Conclusions

main stakeholders will participate. Approximately twelve *Branch Expert Councils* will cover all main branches of industry. This new part of the system of education is very useful tool for the development of the cooperation between employers, trade unions and education. *Branch Expert Councils* could be used for secondary and tertiary level and could serve as a link between these levels.

- The system of the professional standards must support the appropriate study process. The existing system is too complicated and oriented to the receiving of equal professional knowledge and skills during initial studies in all educational establishments. Professional standards are confirmed by government and contain national level requirements for professional knowledge, skills and competences for each qualification. According to the results of the present investigation more appropriate could be a system of general professional standards for the main groups of qualifications. The professional standards should define the general structure of learning outcomes with main emphasizes on attitudes and transferable skills. The specific learning outcomes of the individual education programme should be decided by each educational establishment together with the representatives of employers, professional organizations and trade unions. Participation of the local communities is very desirable. Instead of the present national level decision about the content of the detailed professional standard for each qualification should stand few general standards for the wide groups of qualifications and additional requirements for the learning outcomes created by all stakeholders of the specific education establishment. The local needs should be reflected in the course of negotiations between all local stakeholders. Direct negotiations between the stakeholders create higher motivation for all stakeholders to participate in the education and employees skills development process. During such negotiations one more problem could be solved – organization of the life-long learning.
- According to the results of the present investigation the significance of the regular improvement of the professional knowledge and skills of employees increases. Organization of practical placement, work based learning, distance education and other forms of further education of employees should be linked with initial education and learning outcomes for each education programme. The cooperation between education institutions and companies are necessary for the development of the studies programs and practical skills.

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