

TUNING OF ACADEMIC AND BUSINESS SECTORS' POSITIONS FOR BETTER COMPETENCES OF GRADUATES

Jurgita Baryniene, Kestutis Krisciunas

Institute of Europe, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

e-mail: jurgita.baryniene@ktu.lt, kestutis.krisciunas@ktu.lt

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It is universally recognized that in order to cope with the raising challenges which emerges under the pressure of rapid global transformations and exponential changes in nowadays economy and society, enterprises concentrates on educated and highly skilled human resources, which are suited for the requirements of knowledge. The importance of skilled human resources is strongly emphasized in European initiatives and strategic documents such as “Europe 2020” and others. It is argued that qualitative requirements for human resources competences are shifting. The main factors which stimulate the changes in requirements for human resources competences are underlined and discussed in this research paper.

In this situation role of higher education institutions becomes undisputed and crucial. In European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning is laid down that “Since their foundation over 800 years ago, Europe's universities have championed research, fostered a civilized and tolerant society and prepared young people for their role in society and the economy”. These institutions continue their fundamental role in nowadays societies. Universities are required to educate highly skilled human resources who are able to respond the challenges of changing business environment and be highly adaptable. This research paper focuses exclusively on the graduates of universities who become crucial under the circumstances of knowledge based economy.

Notably, graduates competences are important for both sides – for universities and for business sector as well. This paper explores peculiarities of the position of academic and business sectors towards universities' graduates' competences. Unfortunately, authors reasonably demonstrate that there exist observable differences between positions of academic and business sectors towards the content of universities' graduates' competences. This fact plays negative role in the processes of economic development and society cohesion. Research paper discussed issues are related to the revelation why academic sector position to graduates competences differs from the business sector. This scientific and practical problem is analyzed in this article.

Obviously, the partnership between academic and business sectors is broadly recognized. However in the paper there is discussed the involvement of third actor – government – in order to strengthen the cooperation between business sector and universities. The involvement of government can do significant and positive impact trying to minimize gap between graduates competence and labour market requirements. This specific accent is made in the paper.

In developing these insights the main objective of this paper are following: to identify objective positions of academic and business sectors towards universities' graduates' competences. Authors of this article state that it is necessary precondition enhancing the relevance of universities' graduates to business sector's requirements.

This paper particularly focuses on the questions how to find managerial ways to match academic and business sectors' position towards graduates' competences reducing mismatch between universities, labour market and society at large. Solving main tasks of research authors are using analysis of scientific literature and documents. Main research findings allow to present the insights and recommendations to academic, business sectors as well as government for the closing partnership in the graduates preparation processes in order to respond to nowadays changes and raising challenges in business environment.

Keywords: *human resources, competence, graduates, higher education, university, labour market, academic sector, business sector.*

Introduction

Human resources are often regarded as the key element for successful activity in contemporary rapidly changing business environment. It is agreed that the success of the business enterprises in knowledge based economy and knowledge based society depends particularly on the highly skilled human resources (Malhorta Y., 2000; Laroche M., 1998; Mathis R., Jackson H., 2006; Daugėlienė R., Volodzkienė L., 2005 and others). Regarding to this, the quality of content of graduates' competence becomes strategic priority of universities, business enterprises and society at large.

The Eurobarometer Survey (2010) “*Employers' perception of graduate employability*” revealed that Lithuanian employers

are least satisfied with content of higher education graduates' competences in European Union. Employers usually stress the low graduates' readiness for work, low productivity of graduates, shortage of skills and abilities required for contemporary business, lack of experience and etc. There exists the evident discrepancy between academic and business sectors' positions towards the competence of graduates. This article is devoted to the analysis of this scientific problem which could be solved finding the managerial instruments for elastic and more efficient partnership between academic and business sectors in the process of graduates' education.

The discrepancy between business sector's needs and universities' graduates' competences is the object of scientific research in many countries (Cohen A.R., 2003; Doria J., Rozanski H., Cohen E., 2004; Evers F.T., Rush J.C., 1996; Badriotti A., Pappada G., 2012; Nicolescu L., Paun C., 2009; Schomburg H., 2000; Moscati R., Rostan M., 2000; Arnesen C., 2000; Kellerman P., Sagmeister G., 2000; Woodley A., Brennan J., 2000; Kivinen O., Nurmi, J., Salminitty, R., 2000). However these researches have focused largely on the situation of particular country and are strongly contextual. In Lithuania there exists the lack of articles in which are analyzed deep causes of miscommunication between universities and business sector in the process of graduates' education.

Arguably the strong partnership between business and academic sectors should become urgent priority in order to develop the necessary skills of graduates which are able to meet the demand of contemporary employers. In the process of skills obtaining and development are important both sectors – academic as well as business sectors (Keršytė J., Kriščiūnas K., 2007). Partnership between these two sectors could serve as efficient instrument and could give positive impact solving the problem of youth unemployment which recently has become the one of the most important issue in European Union.

In developing these insights the **research purpose** is to identify objective positions of academic and business sectors towards universities' graduates' competences in Lithuania and to find the main managerial ways fostering the tune of the academic and business sectors' positions towards the content of graduates' competence.

The tasks of the research were set as follows:

- to identify the raising challenges for business enterprises in knowledge based economy;
- to highlight the role of universities in contemporary economy and society;
- to reveal the academic and business sectors' position towards the competences of graduates;
- to determine the ways for strengthening academic and business partnership in graduates education.

Research methods: the analysis is made upon the scientific literature and research in this field.

Scientific originality and practical significance of the article: the authors of this article are solving scientific and practical problem – how to foster the tune of the academic and business sectors' positions towards the content of graduates' competence in Lithuania using different instruments and forms. There are provided insights and recommendations for the interested parties reducing mismatch between universities, labour market and society at large in the article.

The article consists of four parts. First part reveals the main factors which stimulate the changes in business environment and influence the changing requirements for human resources' competence. The second part is devoted to the emphasis of importance of universities in knowledge based economy. In the third part there are analysed differences between business and academic sectors' positions towards graduate's competence and emphasized the inevitability of partnership between these two sectors. The last part is dedicated to the searching of ways how to tune academic and business sectors' position towards graduates' competences. In the end of paper there are provided insights and recommendations for universities, business sector and government for the closer partnership in the graduates' preparation processes in order

to match academic and business sectors' position towards graduates' competences.

A Synopsis of Main Factors Stimulating Changes in Requirements for Human Resources Competences

In rapidly changing world, analysis of transformations becomes important context in order to understand the roots of many contemporary problems. The conceptualization of the circumstances which have influenced the changes of human resources competence becomes important prerequisite for the further analysis of required human resources competences.

In the scientific literature it is agreed that many social, economic transformations are influenced by two main factors:

- *global transformations* (Melnikas B., 2011; Castells, 2005; Kriščiūnas K., Daugėlienė R., 2003; Ravenhil J., 2008; Kefela G., 2010; Stoškus S., Beržinskienė D., 2005);
- *technological changes*, especially fast development of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Grosjean G., 2003; McLeish A., 2002; Kriščiūnas K., Daugėlienė R., 2003, Longworth N., 2007; Pons J.P., 2010; Castells, 2005).

Global transformations and fast technological changes have influenced and accelerated the erection of knowledge based economy (Kefela G., 2010; Houghton J., Sheehan P., 2000), emphasizing competence of human resources.

In this changing context, the business enterprises appear in challenging environment as well. Under the influence of mentioned transformations, there could be noticed other significant transformations which are identified by different scientists and listed below:

- *changes in customers basis* (McLeish A., 2002, Goffin K., Mitchell R., 2005; Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2004) – it is emphasized that contemporary customers are more informed, more active, more interested in products and services;
- *changes in business management paradigm* (Savanevičienė A., Stukaitė D., Šilingienė V., 2008) – in the changing environment the business enterprises should react and rethink the main principles of business management in order to act successfully.
- *changes of the work character* (Sakalas A., 2012, Van der Velden R.K., Wolbers M.H., 2008) – the importance of knowledge based work is raising in nowadays economy;
- *human resources changes* (Savanevičienė A., Stukaitė D., Šilingienė V., 2008; Sakalas, 2012). It is agreed that nowadays employees are more informed, active, know their values.

It could be emphasized that in the context of these changes there erect several significant aspects:

- *importance of learning*, particularly lifelong learning, which becomes the crucial in knowledge based society. Universities are responsible for education of graduates with the skills needed for lifelong learning;
- *importance of innovations and entrepreneurship* – these factors become significant seeking the competitive advantages. Skills for entrepreneurial activity become essential in the portfolio of graduates competence;
- *importance of research based work* – raising significance of research based work requires new skills in the content of graduates competence as well.

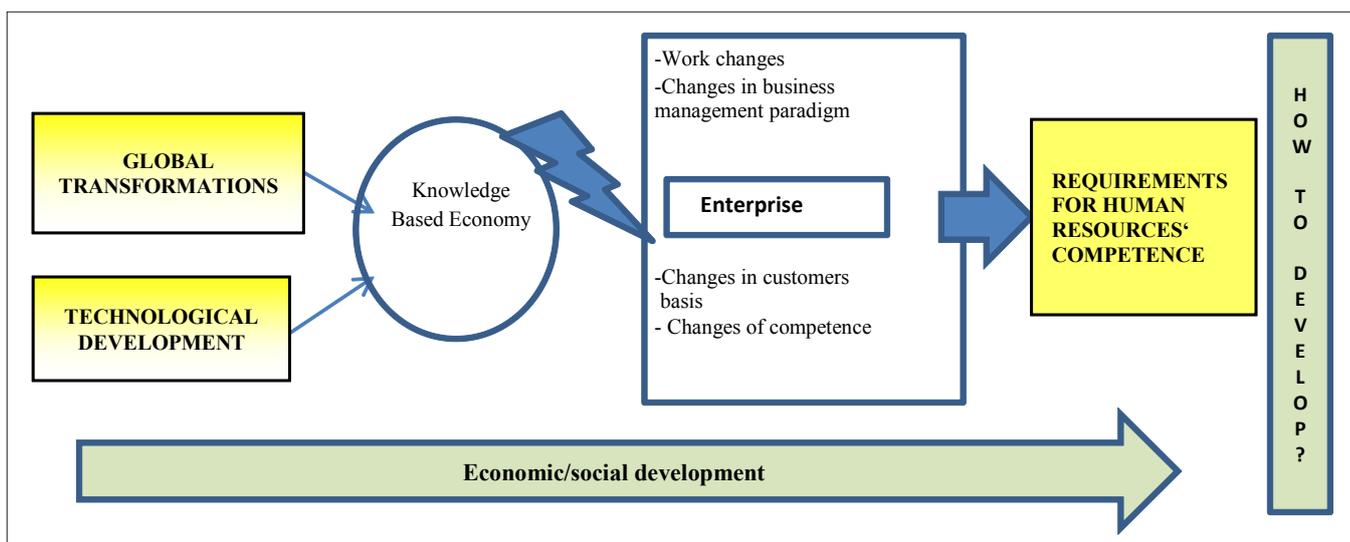


Figure 1. The chain of main transformations (made by authors)

Figure 1 illustrates the chain of main transformations which have the significant impact on the changing requirements for human resources competence. In fact, due to dynamism of labour market, the portfolio of graduates' competence is shifting all the time as well.

In concluding it should be mentioned that in knowledge based economy and knowledge based society the discussion about the content of human resources competence takes the new implications. Obviously, business environment which is friendly to knowledge requires the new package of knowledge, abilities, skills, individual attributes. In the context of environmental and organizational changes, the employers require graduates with competences, which could allow them to react and respond to raising challenges.

For this reason the universities, as the crucial institutions shaping the content of graduates' competence, face new challenges as well. Universities should become flexible, shape the studies programmes in order to respond raising challenges.

The Importance of Universities Role in Knowledge based Economy

It is agreed that the relationship between universities and economic growth is obvious and unquestioned (Declaration of the 2013 Global Universities Summit to the G8, 2013; Deiacio E., Hughes A., McKelvey M., 2012). Further universities contribute to the economic development as educators of graduates with wide portfolio of knowledge, transferable skills, and abilities which are necessary for contemporary labour market. These graduates ensure the labour productivity and are driving force for economic growth. In the mentioned declaration universities are seen as the "key part of the engine room of long – term, sustainable economic growth and prosperity". It is agreed that success of Europe of knowledge depends on universities which are strong, autonomous and provide the research based studies. As highlights Keršytė J., Kriščiūnas K. (2008), universities are ahead responding the challenges and aftermaths in labour markets which are induced by global economic recession.

Universities become crucial institutions in the process of highly skilled graduates' education for contemporary labour market (Harvey, L.; Knight, P. T., 1996; Pukelis K.,

Pileičikienė N., Allan A., Dailidienė E., 2007; Martinkus B., Neverauskas B., Sakalas A., 2002, Singh M., Little B., 2011;

Sursock A., Smidt H., 2010; Kriščiūnas K., 2010). As it is stated in Charter of Lifelong Learning (EUA, 2008) „Since universities foundation over 800 years ago, Europe's universities have championed research, fostered a civilised and tolerant society and **prepared young people for their role in society and the economy**. They have also shown themselves to be remarkably resilient and adaptable institutions, continually developing their roles society evolves.“

Universities, their role in the knowledge based society are on the top of European level agendas as well. Below there are listed several important documents in which the importance of universities and their role in nowadays societies and economies are stressed:

- European Commission "The role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge" (2003);
- European Commission "Mobilizing the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy" (2005);
- European Commission "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation" (2006);
- EUA Charter of Lifelong Learning (2008);
- European Commission "A New Partnership for the Modernisation of Universities: the EU Forum for University Business Dialogue" (2009);
- Europe 2020 "A strategy for smart, sustainable, inclusive growth".

The importance of universities could be revealed analyzing the trends of future jobs. According to CEDEFOP prognosis to 2020 in European Union the demand of highly skilled human resources will grow, and the demand of low qualification human resources will drop significantly.

Requirements for content of competence is changing and should be revising constantly. Furthermore transferable skills become more and more important in nowadays business. For this reason universities should educate graduates with broad portfolio of transferable skills. Students' skills should be highly adoptive. Keršytė J., Kriščiūnas K. (2007) highlight that personal effectiveness, critical thinking, communication skills, networking and team working, lifelong learning become very important for highly skilled human resources in knowledge based economy. The studies should become orientated to students (Barynienė J., Kriščiūnas K., 2009).

Undoubtedly, universities should collaborate with business sector in the process of graduates' education, because it's strongly correlates with their historical fundamental mission – to prepare highly skilled graduates. Sustained partnership between universities and business sector stimulate positive results in the education of graduates with the business sector relevant competencies.

Differences between Academic and Business Sectors' Positions towards Graduates Competence and Inevitability for Partnership

The gap between the labour market requirements for skills and the competences portfolio which have the university's graduate has recently started to become a significant problem. It plays negative role in the processes of economic development and in the context of society cohesion. This problem is discussed in academic and especially not academic environment.

Martin A., Milne-Home J., Barrett J., Spalding E., Jones G. (2000) highlight main reasons why universities face to difficulties educating students for contemporary business:

- university's learning could be characterized as individualistic;
- university ensures broad learning however the tasks in jobs are more specific;
- university's knowledge is decontextualized while employers require more contextual knowledge;
- university focuses on individual competition while employers need more team and group workers.

It should be emphasized that competences mismatch is more than the discrepancy between labour market needs and graduates competence. It could be named as the discrepancy of positions between academic and business sectors.

Universities position towards competence of graduates is rising from their fundamental missions and is orientated to long term. Main direction of the mission of the universities is to educate creators, generalists.

Meanwhile the business sector's position towards competence of graduates is pragmatic and mainly orientated to short term. According to the nature of business, this sector is primarily interested in benefit. Furthermore, looking at Lithuanian context, the discrepancy between academic and business sectors' positions towards graduates' competence is determined by specificity of Lithuanian business. Nowadays business enterprises, especially in knowledge intensive sectors, could not act effectively without the universities graduates. In Lithuania industry's sectors which are orientated towards technologies, innovations and could be identified as knowledge intensive sectors are quite weak yet. Regarding to

this, business sector usually needs specialists. For this reason the discrepancy between these two sectors appears.

The tune between academic and business sectors' positions towards the competence of graduates is not only desirable but also essential condition for successful economic growth. The collaboration between universities and business sectors becomes crucial in order to prepare graduates which could match the requirements of nowadays labour market. Unfortunately, the contemporary situation shows that collaboration between universities and business sector *in the process of graduates' education is not satisfactory yet.* Seeking to change situation to the better it is necessary to find managerial ways how to reduce mismatch between labour market requirements and graduates competence.

The partnership between universities and business sector becomes urgent priority and strategic approach for the government policies. The involvement of policy makers is important for the strengthening of partnership between academic and business sectors preparing graduates. This collaboration could give the positive benefit fostering the skills which fit the requirements of business sector and needs of state and society at large.

In figure 2 there is shown the possible benefit from partnership. Universities and business sectors join their human resources, financial, informational, physical and other resources in the studies environment. On the basis of such interactions could appear the synergy effect based on partnership and efficient activity.

The input of business sector into the process of graduates' education is important. The platforms and initiated other activities could bring the universities and business enterprises for better dialogue shaping universities' graduates' competence. Universities and business collaboration becomes significant in order to map the content of universities' graduates' competence which is adequate to the requirements of business sector.

The close cooperation between academic and business sectors in the process of universities graduates preparation creates favorable conditions for the preparation and realization of high quality studies programmes, during which students are granted the competences fitting the requirements of business sector. J. Keršytė, K. Kriščiūnas (2006) emphasize that study programmes should be flexibly regulated in order to facilitate and promote interdisciplinary studies.

As it has been stated previously, business sector plays important role in developing and training the required competences. Seeking to change situation it is necessary to find managerial ways how to reduce mismatch between labour market requirements and graduates competences and foster the cooperation between academic and business sectors. Furthermore, business should actively participate in the processes of human resources competence improving.

The sustained partnership between universities, business sector and government in the education of graduates is indispensable matching the supply and demand of competences and enhancing the employability of universities graduates in labour market. Further collaboration between these three actors could help to obtain comprehensive benefit and ensure education of graduates with such content of competence which will empower the successful integration of universities graduates into contemporary labour market.

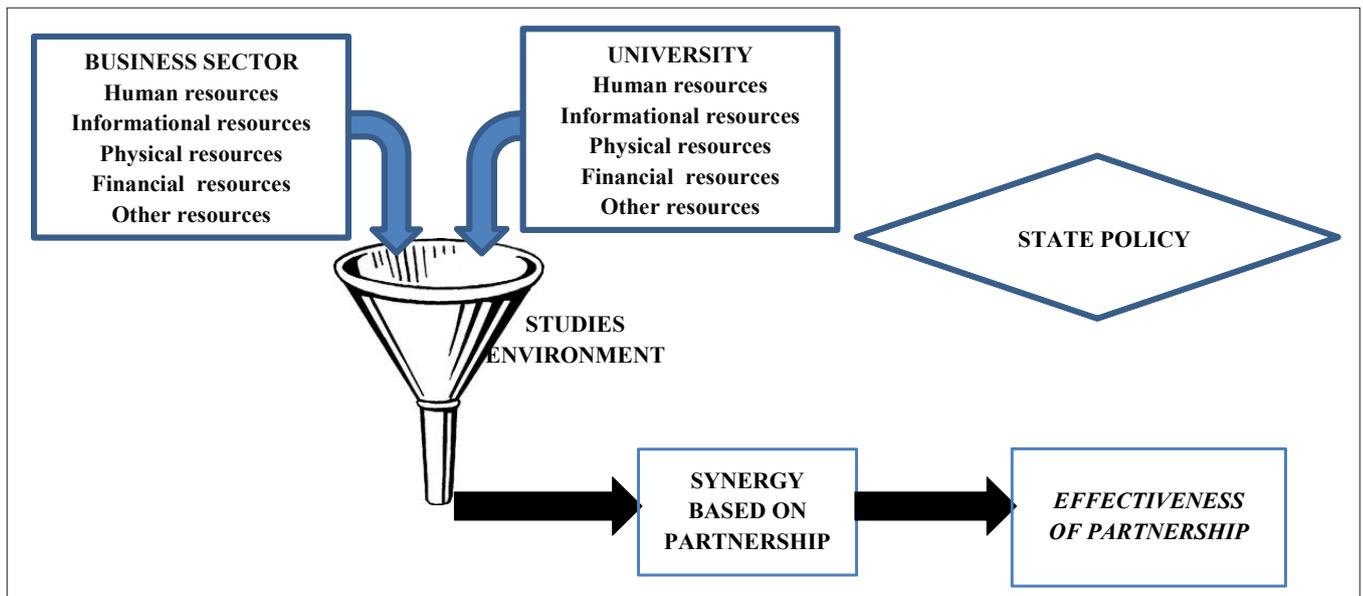


Figure 2. Scheme of partnership (modified by authors according Lasker R.D., Weiss E.S., Miller R. (2001))

How to Tune Academic and Business sectors' Position towards Graduates' Competences?

In contemporary economy business enterprises should very actively participate in the process of graduates' education. There are no conditions for situation, when firstly employers seek and then train and prepare employees for the concrete work place. Employers should be interested in "oven-ready" graduates (Boden R., Nedeva M., 2010). For this reason business enterprises become active partners of universities in the process of graduates' preparation and education. Analyzing business sector and universities cooperation in the process of graduates' education becomes meaningful such dimensions as:

- variety of forms of business and universities cooperation in the process of graduates' education;
- frequency of cooperation's actions between business and universities in the process of graduates' education;
- quality of cooperation between business and universities in the process of graduates' education;

Below there are given and analyzed some *traditional forms* of universities and business cooperation.

Learning in workplaces, practices

Undoubtedly students cannot develop some abilities, skills, interpersonal attributes without specific context. For this reason efficient form for competence development in cooperation with business is *learning in workplace* (Eraut, Hirsh, 2007; and others). Work based learning is recognized as one of most effective and valuable form for the graduates education. In work place students can apply knowledge and transform abilities to skills. This form of learning is based on experience (Jarvis, Holford, Griffin, 2004). The internships, which are realized in business enterprises, become important factor and possibility for university to strengthen the cooperation with business sector.

In Lithuanian context there could be mentioned other important problem – the practices of students are usually *inefficient* and do not give desirable benefit. It is agreed that sometimes practices are fictitious, just „on papers“ (Židonis

Ž., Strazdas R., Vijeikis D., 2011). Practices are effective way to educate the employee which fits the requirements of employer. The rate of effective practice could be measured by the number of graduates which are accepted to permanent work after the practices. Business enterprises take the responsibility for the effective practice, ensure the implementation of practice's aims and tasks. In this context the students' internal and external motivation becomes one of the very important factors for successful practice.

The involvement of representatives from business sector in the university's governing bodies, groups of studies programmes' preparation

It is recognized that involvement of the business sector's representatives into the government processes of university is significant prerequisite for the successful cooperation between business sector and university. Business enterprises become active partners in preparation of studies programmes, advice for university identifying the strategic objectives, consult on strategic issues related with graduates education. Such involvement of business sector into university's life gives positive effect in the process of graduates education for nowadays labour market. In some Lithuanian universities the Business Councils, as an advisory body to the rector, are already established (for example, Kaunas University of Technology, ISM). Business representatives are expected in the preparation of studies programmes. For example they could advise the list of important learning outcomes.

The involvement of representatives from business sector in studies process

Business sector should be interested in the participation in the universities studies process. It could be emphasized several forms:

- lectures of business representatives in universities including simulations, case studies, etc.;
- participation of business representatives in the scientific, practical conferences, seminars, debates;
- involvement of business representatives in the process of students final thesis preparation and assessment;

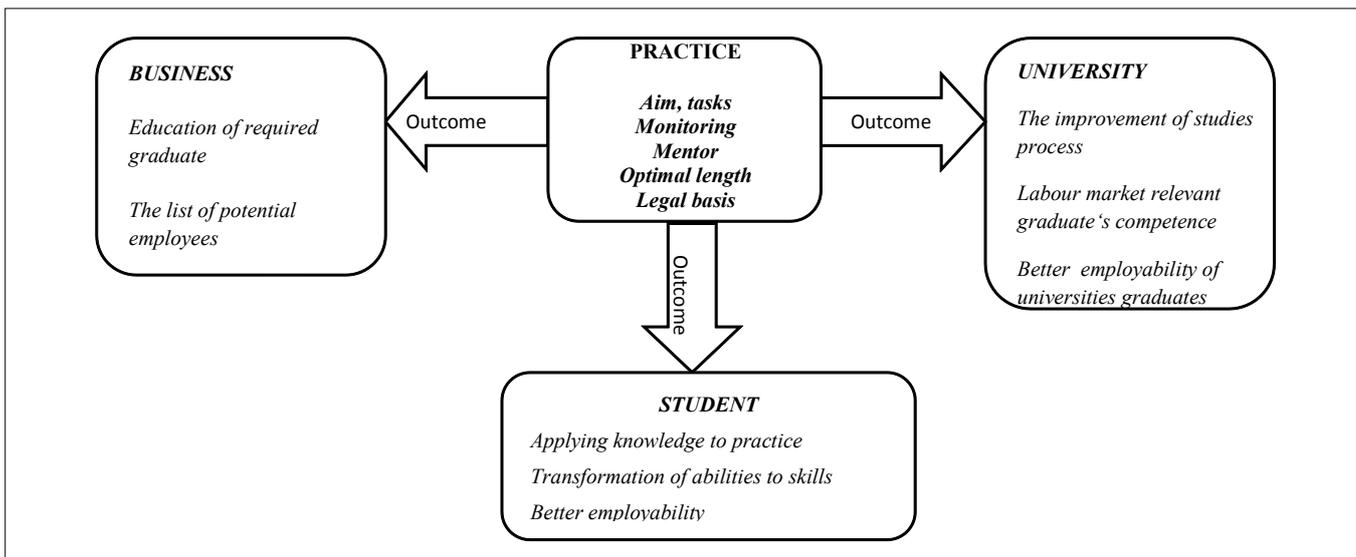


Figure 3. Benefits from practices – win- win – win situation (made by authors)

- excursions for students in business enterprises during which are possibilities to introduce the enterprise, to know the peculiarities of enterprise, discuss the practical problems.

The business sector could be involved in the universities life through usage of financial instrument such as grants of Maecenas, support for research, studies equipment, materials and etc.

The involvement of representatives from universities (lecturers, professors) in business

The university's lecturers and professors could be involved in the business through:

- trainings for employees during which they develop competence;
- participation in seminars organized by business enterprises.

Cooperation's forms listed and analysed above are known and used in practice in different level. However *why these cooperation forms do not work fruitfully and, in some case are not attractive for business sector?* In this context the starting point could be the involvement of government in enabling and stimulation (regulation) processes. Government using the legal measures could make some of analyzed forms more attractive and acceptable for example endowing different exemptions for business activity and others.

Final Insights and Recommendations

Under the influence of technological development and global transformations, business enterprises meet significant changes and challenges in their environment. In such context and situation acting enterprises require new portfolio of graduates' competence.

As it was elucidated in article, universities, as the crucial institutions in knowledge based economy, should ensure the broad education for graduates with adaptation in business sector. Graduates should have the work relevant skills, especially transferable, and be adaptable and ready to meet the labour market needs.

The partnership between universities and business sector should be reinforced and become the priority for business, as well as for universities. Such partnership becomes the crucial prerequisite which empower universities respond better to the raising requirements for human resources in the contemporary labour market.

Business sector strongly contribute to the universities in the process of graduates' education, cooperate with universities multichannelly, especially in management processes of universities. In article mentioned traditional forms, such as *learning in workplaces, practices, involvement of representatives from business sector in the university's governing bodies, groups of studies programmes' preparation, involvement of representatives from business sector in studies process, involvement of representatives from universities (lecturers, professors) in business*, particularly further the cooperation between academic and business sectors and could ensure sufficient graduates integration in labour market. Business sector involvement in academic processes could do positively impact trying to minimize gap and level of discrepancy between graduates competence and labour market requirements.

In this context the government, representing the interests of community, also plays significant role. Regarding to this, universities, business enterprises and government become the main actors in order to tune the academic and business sectors positions towards the competence of graduates. Each party has its obligations which are shortly laid down below.

- **Universities** are responsible for ensuring the graduates competences which are relevant to business sector's requirements. Universities considering the requirements of business for graduates' competence should keep the balance between their fundamental, long run mission and business sector's requirements. Academic freedom ensured by state could stimulate the flexibility of studies programmes.
- **Business sector's** interest in graduates' competence and their education process is extremely significant. Regarding to this elastic cooperation (with the help

of government) and active participation preparing graduates for nowadays business become the priority of intellectual organizations. Organizational culture which is favorable for cooperation with universities becomes important prerequisite for successfully partnership. Business actively takes part by suggesting learning outcomes, ensuring high quality of practices and etc.

- As it was mentioned above, **government** takes part in enabling the processes of cooperation and tackling analyzed problem. Using legal measures some forms of cooperation between business and academic sectors in the graduates preparation processes could become more acceptable and more usable. Furthermore government has the power to stimulate the changes in business environment by encouraging knowledge intensive sector development in which universities graduates could achieve better self- realization.

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