



The impact of learning outcomes in business education: Assessing *value*, *relevance* and *graduate ability* in a multi-country study of employers and business graduates

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Presentation Overview

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Presentation Objectives

- o **Report critical findings from two-year, EU-funded research project entitled ,MISLEM'**
- o **Introduce two theoretical models:**
 - 1) **Employers:** business graduates' *abilities* in business knowledge and key business competencies predict their satisfaction with graduates' work performance
 - 2) **Graduates:** *value* of business knowledge and business competencies for the workplace predict their satisfaction with business education



MISLEM: Project Goals

- **To advance a model or step-by-step procedure** for assessing the match between skills and competencies developed by educational institutions and those required by labour market
- * **Six steps:** 1) Define learning outcomes for specific study programs, 2) Design questionnaire, 3) Administer questionnaire to recent graduates and direct supervisors, 4) Analyse and interpret results, 5) Aggregate data to create meta-level indicators, 6) Create feedback system for curriculum improvement
- **To refine and test meta-level indicators (focused on the labour market linkage)** for assessing quality in universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational training institutions (VETs)
- * **Aggregate data** to find out percentage of employers and graduates who believe that learning outcomes are: a) *valued* in workplace, b) *relevant* for future career and that c) graduates are *capable* or *able* in these learning outcomes.



Project Partners

- **9 partners in 4 countries (Austria, UK, Slovenia, Romania):**
- FH Joanneum (AT)
- Aston Business School (UK)
- University of Primorska (SI)
- University of Craiova (RO)
- Bfi (VET) (AT)
- Matthew Boulton College (VET) (UK)
- Bit management (Consulting and Training) (AT)
- PPS (HR Consulting) (UK)
- AQA (Quality Assurance Agency) (AT)



MISLEM: Rationale and Target groups

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Rationale○ <i>Growing acceptance and use of output-oriented criteria (e.g., learning outcomes, quality indicators) as key quality assessment components</i>○ <i>Noticeable lack of assessment tools to incorporate input from employers regarding how well educational institutions are responding to labor market needs (<i>labour market linkage</i>)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Target Groups○ Policy-makers in education:<ul style="list-style-type: none">* <i>need more specific information to direct their policies to needs of specific fields of study</i>(e.g., business, engineering)○ Administrative heads and personnel at QA agencies:<ul style="list-style-type: none">* <i>need more specific information to inform/give advice on curriculum development</i> |
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MISLEM: Project's Methodology

- Project was designed to include **two phases**:
- **Exploratory phase** involving *comprehensive literature reviews* in the four countries and *qualitative interviews* with employers and recent business graduates from the partner institutions
- **Descriptive phase** involving *questionnaire design and administration* with a sample of employers and recent business graduates from higher education and VET institutions in the four countries



MISLEM: Summary phase 1

- *Literature reviews* demonstrated **great diversity** in educational systems, quality management practices and control mechanisms typically used in the four countries
- *Detailed review* of the concept of '**competency**' indicated many different components (e.g., knowledge, skills, abilities, motives, beliefs, values) and no definitions for specific types of competencies (e.g., leadership or ability to see bigger picture)
- **Key conclusions from phase 1**: business knowledge and competencies can be viewed together as *key learning outcomes* for business study programs; some competencies were considered more important than others, so partners proposed a *cluster of eight key business competencies* to be used in final questionnaire



MISLEM: Summary of phase 2

- **Two nearly identical questionnaires were developed (one for employers and one for recent business graduates)**:
- **Business knowledge questions** addressed 5 main functional areas and also some business-related disciplines
- **Business competency questions** addressed 8 key competencies: Influencing and Persuading, Teamwork and Relationship Building, Critical/Analytical, Self and Time Management, Leadership, Ability to see bigger picture, Presentation and Communication
- **Critical survey questions** were created to provide answers to the meta-level indicators – e.g., Do you agree that the following business knowledge areas (competencies) are *useful* for the performance of our current job activities?



MISLEM: Survey sample

- **Sample Description:**
- The **final sample** was composed of 596 business graduates and 304 employers from the four countries (see table 1)
- **Business graduate sample** was young (66% of respondents between 21 and 30 years of age) and relatively balanced with respect to gender (approx.57% of females)
- **Employer sample** was notably older (approx. 55% of respondents between 36 and 50 years of age), but also ‚gender-balanced‘ (58% of males)
- **Business graduates and employers** were working in a variety of different industries (e.g., manufacturing, business-related activities, wholesale and retail trade, public administration and defense)



MISLEM: Key findings (I)

- *Graduates and employers* seemed, in general, **satisfied with business education** (73% of graduates, 87.6% of employers were either *very satisfied, satisfied or somewhat satisfied*)
- *Graduates and employers* also positively assessed graduates' **level of acquired knowledge during business education** (77.5% of graduates, 78% of employers were either *very satisfied, satisfied or somewhat satisfied*)
- However, **both groups gave less positive evaluations of graduates' ability in business knowledge and especially in business competencies (details in a minute!)**



MISLEM: Key findings (II)

- **Key comparisons – business graduates versus employers:**
 - * Regarding critical questions addressing business knowledge and business competencies, employers were *less positive* (e.g., capability questions) and *more discriminating* (across disciplines and competencies) in their responses
- **Key comparisons – country differences:**
 - * Regarding critical questions addressing business knowledge and competencies, many significant country differences were found, but they were considered *too small*; furthermore, *no consistent pattern* was found in responses across countries



MISLEM: Key findings (III)

- **Meta-level indicators** were derived from the *aggregation* of the answers for each business knowledge area and for each competency area (see table 2) - % of respondents who either *agree* or *strongly agree*:
- Concerning **indicators #1 and #2**, findings are similar for graduates and employers, with one exception: employers rate business competencies as clearly *more valuable*, compared to business graduates
- Regarding **indicator #3**, *fewer* employers either *agree* or *strongly agree* that their employees are *capable* in business knowledge and in business competencies



Beyond MISLEM: Employer and Graduate PLS models

- **Employers models** for each country were developed in order to identify the most important factors explaining and predicting employers' satisfaction with business graduates' work performance:
 - * The **two factors** are *graduates' abilities* in business knowledge and in business competencies; but there are country differences (see table 3 and figure 1)
- **Graduates models** for each country were developed in order to identify the most important factors explaining and predicting graduates' satisfaction with business education:
 - * The **two factors** are graduates' *value* ratings of business knowledge and of business competencies; here no country differences were found (see table 4 and figure 2)



Final Discussion

- Results confirm the **importance of developing business competencies**, together with business knowledge, within study programs (competencies are rated even higher than BK1!)
- *All BK and competencies* were perceived as **valuable and relevant** by respondents (even though some are judged as more important than others); **country differences** (regarding what is valuable, relevant and graduates' capability) are really *small!!!*
- **PLS models revealed:**
 - 1) the **real impact** of business education in the workplace - graduates' **abilities** in key learning outcomes help explain successful work performance!
 - 2) the **perceived quality** of study programs is related to the **instrumental value** of business education (i.e.: how *valuable* or *useful* the key learning outcomes are perceived to be for the workplace)



Recommendations (I)

- **To Personnel at Educational institutions, Quality assurance agencies:**
- * **Strengthen the study program's overall emphasis on critical learning outcomes, by:**
 - *Promoting different teaching and learning strategies (e.g., classroom activities that enhance the development of competencies);*
 - *Articulating an integrated, comprehensive path within the curriculum towards the development of key knowledge and key competencies;*
 - *Employing different types of assessment tools (e.g., final comprehensive examinations in key knowledge areas, consistent use of assessment tools which support individual competency development)*
- * **Demand ongoing quality assessment of the labour market linkage for each study program (how good is the response to changing labour market requirements?) – could use MISLEM step-by-step procedure!**



Recommendations (II)

- **To Policy-Makers in Education:**
- * **At National level:** Encourage greater involvement of employers in the quality assurance process of Higher Education and Vocational Training institutions
- * **At European level:** Use Business Knowledge + Business competencies model as a way to *harmonize* curricula across countries



Thank you very much for your attention!


