

**19th INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY
SCIENTIFIC GEOCONFERENCE
S G E M 2 0 1 9**

**CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
VOLUME 19**



**ECOLOGY, ECONOMICS, EDUCATION AND LEGISLATION
ISSUE 5.4**

.....
EDUCATION AND ACCREDITATION IN GEOSCIENCES

**ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION, MULTILATERAL
RELATIONS AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**
.....

**30 June – 6 July, 2019
Albena, Bulgaria**

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Published by STEP92 Technology Ltd., 51 "Alexander Malinov" Blvd., 1712 Sofia, Bulgaria

Total print: 5000

ISBN 978-619-7408-87-4

ISSN 1314-2704

DOI: 10.5593/sgem2019/5.4

**INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENTIFIC GEOCONFERENCE SGEM
Secretariat Bureau**

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CONTROL OF MASTER'S PROGRAMS IN ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT: NATURE AND TRENDS IN RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the problems of managing master programs in the field of economics and management. The theoretical and empirical analysis made it possible to conclude that the existing masters programs in economics and management do not fully meet the modern requirements of the business environment, including geology, exploration and mining enterprises. The key factors that influence the gap between the competencies formed by graduates of programs and those demanded by the business environment are identified. One of the factors contributing to the current situation is the management system of master programs at Russian universities, which is not flexible enough and does not provide an operational-change in their content and methods of implementation.

The following research methods were used in the work: an empirical study of data from annual employer surveys to identify development priorities of organizations and actual skills of employees, systematic analysis of skills demanded by employers, analysis of factors affecting the current situation in the field of training masters in economics and management.

It is revealed that the elimination of the gap between the requirements of the business environment and the competencies formed by existing programs in the field of economics and management is possible by ensuring close ties with the real business, organizing project work, and using blended learning. The transformation of the management system of master's programs requires the involvement of employers in the academic council of the program and the creation of a structure that ensures the application of modern methods of project management.

Keywords: management system, master program, higher education, competencies, project management.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been many changes in higher education in Russia, due to the demands of the economy, the emergence of new digital educational technologies, and the transition to a two-tier system of training. The changes affected the structure and content of educational programs, teaching methods, approaches to the management of educational institutions and programs.

Experts identify a number of significant problems of the higher education system in the Russian Federation related to the weak real impact of a formally high level of education of the population on economic growth and its sustainability. According to the report of Global Human Capital 2017, published by the World Economic Forum in September 2017, Russia ranks very high in fourth place in the world in terms of human capital (measured mainly through indicators of population coverage with different levels of formal education), but only 42 place on the parameters of the real use of skills in work and involvement in continuing education [1].

Higher education, on the one hand, has become a mass (global trend) that most Russian universities are focused on, which is characteristic of the transition to a post-industrial, information society, and now to a knowledge society, when the differences between the creation and use of high technologies and directly scientific knowledge become implicit. On the other hand, the same trend is accompanied by functional unemployment. According to the report of the Higher School of Economics, on such an important for the growth of the economy indicator as "availability of qualified workers", Russia occupies the 89 place in the world [2].

Employers, students, educational institutions and the state have their specific interests and give their assessment of the quality of education.

From the position of the state, the quality of education should be sufficient for the implementation of the development strategy chosen by the society. Educational institutions in matters of assessing the quality of education support the point of view of the state and assess the quality of education as the degree of compliance of the content and level of training with the requirements formulated in the form of federal state educational standards.

A graduate considers education quality if it allows him to successfully compete in the labor market, get a job and successfully develop a career. When employing graduates to work, employers are primarily interested not in the compliance of their training with the requirements of the educational standard, but in their professional competence, ability to navigate the work environment, solve non-standard tasks, make independent decisions within their competence and be responsible for them, work in a team.

These problems are fully consistent with education in the field of economics and management, in which during the last decades large-scale transformational processes have been carried out, related both to the general changes of the national education system and due to the transition from command-administrative to market principles of economic regulation. However, these changes lag behind the needs of the market, which requires modification of basic principles and specific training practices. In our view, this is especially important at the level of the magistracy, as this training should provide enterprises with specialists and managers who are able to effectively respond to the challenges of a dynamic economy[4].

From our point of view, the main drawback of today's master's training-formed during the training of competence does not fully meet the needs of the labor market.

The problem of developing a master's program is manifested in inaccurate construction of the competence model of economist and manager of high qualification, graduated from magistracy, which requires such competences to advance the career ladder, as: cognitive (known); regulatory (planning of organization and control of manager's activity); communicative, personal, characterizing needs of the manager of the higher levels: self-

knowledge, self-actualization, self-updating, self-motivation and professional growth. These competencies allow to evaluate the success of their activity.

Of particular importance are the problems of realization of Master's programs in the directions "economy" and "management", arising directly in the university, identified by the authors in the process of analysis of program implementation:

- the predominant role of specialization in training, achieved by teaching various specialized disciplines to the detriment of solving integrated complex tasks of practical management carried out by the team;
- the imbalance in master's training, manifested, on the one hand, in the prevalence of training in strategic analysis, on the other-in insufficient attention to the teaching of skills in project management, the search for managerial innovations, the development of methods, models and control algorithms for specific objects;
- separation of teaching methods and management tools from the real conditions in which enterprises operate.

These problems can be solved by increasing the requirements to the quality of the educational process, attracting experienced, highly qualified lecturers, including from abroad, by improving the methodical provision of training process, increasing the share of active and interactive methods of education, project training, integration of educational and scientific process in the preparation of Master's theses.

The basis for the empirical study were the data of annual surveys of heads of business structures studying the program of management training for the organizations of the national economy of the Russian Federation (presidential program), held since 2007 at the Siberian Federal University. In general, the presidential program at the Siberian Federal University is the center of approbation of new educational approaches and disciplines[5]. It is within the framework of this program that new disciplines of managerial orientation are created. The sample volume amounted to 1700 respondents from the Krasnoyarsk region and the Republic of Khakasia. The purpose of the poll was to identify relevant competencies for business executives, and as a consequence, necessary for the formation of undergraduates in the fields of economics and management. Results of the survey for 2007 shown in Figure 1.

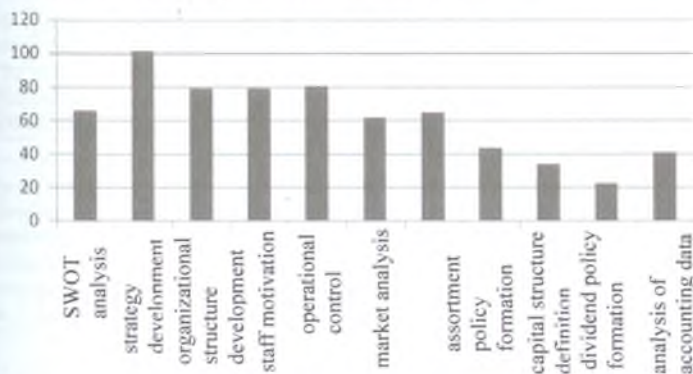


Figure 1- Assessment of the demand for competencies according to the results of the survey in 2007.

The priority competencies of the manager for the specified period were - creation of strategy, organizational structure, organization of operative control and system of motivation. This is due to the need of many companies that appeared in the late 90s, the necessity to debug the basic processes of regular management. This survey is conducted annually and analysis of the dynamics of demand for individual professional competencies allows to identify the following trends:

1. Since 2014, there is a growing demand for competencies related to analytical functions and rationale for decision-making, including the ownership of methods of strategic, market and financial and economic analysis, diagnostics of business processes and internal potential of the company
2. Over the last decade, organizations of different sizes and industries have received a demand for a project approach, which leads to increased demand for skills related to the development and implementation of projects, including risk management and project team management.
3. Competencies related to personnel management remain valid, but in this block there are changes in the direction of involvement and retention of talented employees and increase of personnel involvement.
4. Recently, the wide development of digital technologies causes actualization of skills of use of digital content and IT-tools in decision of managerial tasks.

In addition to professional competencies, respondents note the importance of soft-skills for company specialists and managers, which corresponds to the list of competencies identified by the experts of the 2018 Davos Forum. They include: solving complex problems, critical thinking, creativity, managing people, coordinated actions with other people, emotional intelligence, expert assessment and decision-making, orientation towards the provision of services, negotiation, flexibility of thinking [3].

However, universities rarely attract employers and practitioners to develop and update training courses, because they believe that the level of competence and qualifications of the faculty of the departments guarantees the high quality of training courses and educational programs in general.

Thus, it can be concluded that the variability of the labor market demand is quite high from the point of view of the demand for professional and personal competencies of graduates of master's programs, which requires a regular transformation of master's programs from an educational institution. At the same time, the modernization and development of new master's programs is hampered by a group of factors determined by the administrative procedures of educational institutions.

Firstly, at present, the content and educational results of master's degree programs are regulated by the Federal State Educational Standards, which are developed by the Federal educational and methodical associations and approved by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. Educational standards define a set of activities that a graduate will be able to perform and a detailed list of related competencies. At the same time, the current needs of employers are contained in professional standards developed by the business community.

Comparison of the content of educational and professional standards in the field of economics and management shows that educational standards do not fully reflect the requirements of professional standards.

The second significant factor is the conservatism and the extremely high level of regulation of the coordination and decision-making processes in the area of updating the master's degree programs.

The analysis of the approval process of the new educational program at a federal university revealed several stages of coordination and takes from six months to a year. At the same time, a large number of documents are coordinated, such as a description of educational programs, curricula, calendar training schedules, a competency formation scheme, work programs of disciplines (modules), practice programs, assessment tools, an extract from the decision of the academic council of the institute, annotations of discipline programs, etc.

As a third factor, we highlight the existing master's program management system, which is not flexible enough and does not provide an operational link to the dynamically changing educational needs of the business environment and the educational results of the master's programs. In fact, the existing control system provides mechanical reproduction of the previously developed master program. All management functions are concentrated at the program manager, final changes are approved by the director of the institute.

In our opinion, the elimination of the gap between the requirements of the business environment and the competencies formed by existing programs is possible by ensuring close ties with the real business, organizing project work, and using blended learning.

The proposed structure is shown in Figure 2.

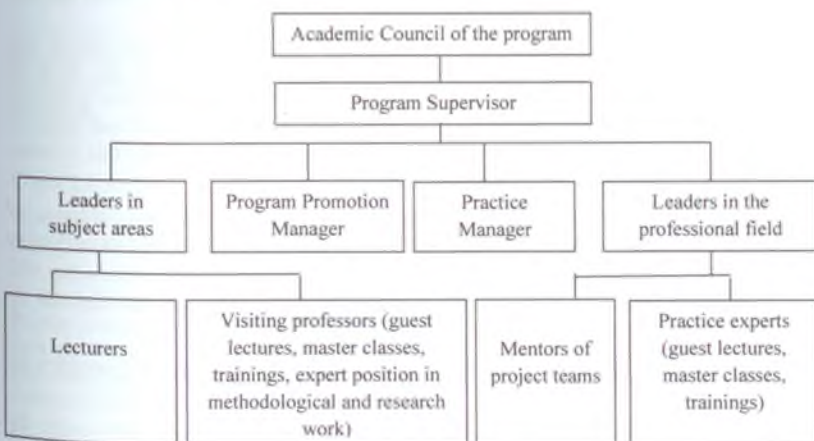


Figure 2 - Proposed Master Program Management Structure

The key point in the proposed training model is the formation of teams of students who are attached to a particular enterprise and under the joint guidance of a company representative and a university lecturer solve analytical problems, develop recommendations for solving problems of this organization and its development projects. The command form of the organization of the educational process will ensure the development of relevant soft-skills. For partner organizations, this will allow the development and implementation of interdisciplinary research and projects, including marketing research and analytics, financial analysis, product / service innovations, business planning, organization management, and much more. For students, this provides a wealth of practical experience, helping them learn the realities of the business world. The teamwork of lecturers with practitioners will ensure the actualization of theoretical knowledge, the use of a case study will help bring to the educational process the modern experience of project management in companies. In addition, the proposed model will allow for a flexible and rapid response to changing the set of competencies required by organizations.

At present, the practice of employers participation in educational activities of universities and evaluation of the quality of education is rapidly expanding in Russia, as employers need guarantees that in the labour market they will be able to find qualified professionals who are able to start working immediately.

However, a very small number of employers interact with universities on a regular basis, they are involved in the improvement of learning processes and the formation of the necessary competencies.

Many universities have difficulties in organizing the practice of students at enterprises. Practices of students at the enterprise are professional and practical training of students in the context of real professional activity. The practice of students at the enterprise ensures that students acquire professional experience and effectively form a high level of professional competence of future specialists.

Accordingly, practice programs at the enterprise should integrate theoretical and professional-practical, educational and research activities. However, the level of organization of practices in the enterprise today is insufficient for students to acquire real work experience and productively master them with professional and practical skills, production skills and advanced methods of work. The reason for this is weak, formal ties between universities and employers.

Among the important tasks facing universities and employers in the formation of professional competencies demanded by the labor market in terms of the practices of an enterprise include:

- coordination of the list of professional competencies that will be acquired or developed by students in the process of practice;
- receiving feedback from employers in order to adjust the educational program by universities;
- search for new forms of practices in the enterprise, providing students with the acquisition of meaningful practical experience and contributing to their guaranteed employment.

Successful development of relations will allow universities and employers to:

- take into account the needs of enterprises and organizations when introducing new specializations and opening new educational programs;
- regularly involve employers and practitioners in:
 - = development of new educational programs;
 - = development and discussion of the expected results of training;
 - = evaluation of actual results of students' and graduates' training;
 - = revision and actualization of the contents of the programs of practices of students at the enterprise;
 - = lecturing and holding seminars,
 - = formation of Master theses;
- more effective use of innovative educational technologies in the educational process,
- conduct joint research and technological development;
- involve employers-partners in the renewal and development of educational resources;
- hold joint scientific and practical conferences;
- create joint innovation centers and "corporate" departments;
- carry out retraining and target training of experts for enterprises and organizations of employers-partners;
- include employers-partners in the supervisory and coordinating councils of universities;
- involve representatives of international companies to lecture, hold seminars and develop training courses.

Consequently, universities, developing and implementing educational programs, should focus on the needs of employers and students and establish mechanisms to monitor changes in the labour market and the requirements of basic consumers to the quality of education.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the study allows to conclude that the existing masters programs in economics and management do not fully meet the modern requirements of the business environment. The authors revealed a gap between what they teach on programs and what is demanded by the market now and in the future. Management systems for master's programs at Russian universities are not flexible enough and do not provide an operational change in their content and teaching methods. As a way to improve the management of master's programs, the authors proposed a transformation of the training model and the program management system.

Master training is important to focus not so much on research and teaching activities, as it is recorded today in regulatory documents, but on highly skilled practical work using design and innovative research areas.

The training of elite personnel is effectively implemented only when the educational process is a unity of education, consulting activity, and also applied research in a wide range of activities carried out jointly by the university and the customers.

Methods of teaching and learning is one of the main factors determining the quality of master's programs: the development of curricula and programs of educational disciplines is almost half of the success of teaching. At the master's level, interactive research methods, a case study method, information technology training should prevail over traditional ones. At the same time, the most important thing is the professional and qualified provision of studying a particular discipline not only in the classroom, but also as part of the independent work of students.

The introduction of the proposed model requires the transformation of the management system of master's programs by involving employers-partners in the academic council of the program and creating a structure that ensures the application of modern methods of project management in the development, implementation and updating of master's programs.

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