

## Mentoring in the acquisition of professional skills through practices in companies by degree students

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### Abstract

This work has had as objective to analyze the skills acquired through internships in business companies by students of the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University Pompeu Fabra. The internship is a basic item in order to obtain a hard connection between the University and social-economic world where University and Enterprises develop their activity. In this study we want to know about two aspects. The first one, we want to know the profit that is obtained from the Student as a consequence of internship and mentoring. Also, we want to study about the importance of mentoring as a principal element that establishes the relationship between the Student and the Company. Moreover, it has sought to analyze if certain factors such as the size of the company where the practices has been performed, the study rank level that was achieved or the fact of being a man or a woman, were among the determining factors at the time of acquiring the skills. The results presented here indicate that the size of the company that have been making the practices and the gender of the student are related to the acquisition of certain skills. There was not a statistically significant relationship related to the rank level have by the students in the practice. In the future we are going to study if the labor market Integration is easier if the Student has performed work placement.

### Keywords

Skills; employability; internship; meatoring.

## 1. Introduction

The economic, social and professional environment in which we live is changing. To survive professionally in this type of environment is not only necessary to have a baggage of important knowledge, but it is also necessary to have the capacity to adapt to these changes. That is why in the existing literature speaks of employability to define the technical and human qualities that increase the likelihood that the candidate has the job that you choose. We define 'employability' (Van de Heijden et al. 2006), (De Vos et al. 2011) as the use of skills that increase the likelihood of:

1. Achieve the objectives for which it has been hired.
2. Get a new job.
3. Create new jobs.

This is why the professional development of a person depends not only the intellectual baggage and knowledge available, but also of the competencies and skills that characterize the person (Kinicki 2008), (Van de Heijden et al. 2006). The literature suggest that when employers evaluate a candidate not only considered the specific knowledge the future candidate may have, but also the skills we describe as cross skills. There are three types of skills that are used to assess the employability of the future professional (Kuijpers 2006), (Kuijpers et al. 2006):

1. Those related to the capacity for reflection, which are characterized by a reflective behavior.
2. Those related to the educational career, which are identified by active behavior.
3. Those related to the networking, which is manifested through an interactive behavior.

The implementation of practices in enterprise on the part of the university students has clear advantages for the students since:

1. It allows to acquire relevant skills to move into the labour market. In this sense, some authors (Matthews et al. 1999) concluded that students who have done work experience

during their training have more ability to develop critical thinking, problem solving etc, than those who have not been exposed with the world of work.

2. Increases the chance of finding a job upon completion of the studies (Coco 2000).

In this study, we analyze whether there are factors that are inherent to the student in practice, and the company in which have been carried out the practices which determine the acquisition of a certain type of competency.

## **2. Context: The State of affairs**

The analysis of the factors that facilitate the acquisition of a particular type of competence is of interest to both employers and prospective employees. Employers will know through realized studies, which are the inherent characteristics of the people who increase the acquisition and development of certain types of powers which are the inherent characteristics of the people who increase the acquisition and development of certain types of competencies. Meanwhile, prospective employees may, on the one hand, to concentrate the work search on that type of companies and of work in which the personal characteristics adapt themselves better to the characteristics of the vacant job. Moreover, they can evaluate the type of skills they have to develop and improve if they want to access a particular job or develop professionally.

We have used different methods to identify the major work published on practices in companies. First, we searched through digital *metasearch* engines using keywords like: mentoring, internship, skills and competencies. Second, we analyze the search for articles published in the last four years of specialized journals such as: Journal of Vocational Behavior, Career Development, International, and Journal of Organizational Behavior. These magazines were taken as reference since they had already used as reference in earlier studies that analyzed the State of the art (Allen et al. 2008). From the results we conclude that there are basically three areas of interest to researchers:

- The study of the figure of the tutor and for its role as a companion to the student during the carrying out of the practices. The large number of articles published on the figure of the tutor and the variety of approaches that develop (Allen et al. 2008), (Fletcher, 2012) (Russell et al. 2010), (Chun et al. 2012), (Eby et al. 2008) requires a specific analysis that we will do in future work.

- The role of the student training in a company improves the relation university-company. It is also a basic element to increase the job satisfaction and rise the integration to the labor market. New pedagogic approaches gives importance to developing skills and ways of learning (Gonzalez et al. 2003; Ibernorn et al. 2005). The benefit to the students conducting business practices was studied in order to improve the relationship between academia and industry (Narayan et al. 2010; Matterhews et al 1999; Coco 2000). The educational paradigm of Bologna has an active role of the student involved in learning and training, this produced a shift of the professional profile towards more concrete functions (Benito et al., 2005). Among the competences highlights the transversal ones are considered as instrumentals, interpersonal and systemic. This way are identified the competitions that must be acquired by today's students and the professionals of the future. The entrepreneurs, on their behalf, value as key competencies the initiative and creativity (Monllau 2010 a, b).

- The role of the practice in the acquisition of the so-called professional competencies.

In this sense, some authors conclude that many companies manage their human resources in terms of the powers they may have (De la Poza 2008; Escalona 2005). According to Brockmann's the skills influence facilitates the adaptation to a constantly changing environment (Brockmann et al., 2009). For Meijers it is important the relationship between the acquisition and the development of new skills in conjunction with the worker commitment to the company and his work (Meijers et al. 2013). On the other hand, there is a relationship between skills development, employability and career success (De Vos et al. 2011; Meijers et al 2011; Akkermans et al. 2013.). There is also a significant weight



between general and specific skills with the salary level and the own employability (Rotundo et al. 2004, Rotwell et al. 2008).

Company practices are the maximum exponent of the University-industry collaboration. Is for this reason that there are studies that analyze what factors may make this more efficient collaboration. A key factor is communication, and that positively affects trust and satisfaction (Frasquet et al. 2012). Likewise, studies that analyze the methodologies to be developed at the university for collaboration between universities and companies work better. These studies conclude that for new problems that arise in business is necessary creativity (generation of ideas). The techniques for generation videos help manage the company, allowing the identification of problems and their solutions. Likewise, binding of university knowledge with business knowledge improves idea generation, participation and student learning (Montoya Rios et al. 2011). Other analyzes in the field of pre - university studies conclude that business practices are positive as facilitate the student seeking a better professional future (Gamboa et al. 2013). Finally, there are studies, especially in the field of psychology, which examines how the practices in companies facilitate the personnel selection. Most of these studies used quantitative methodologies to analyze the information obtained through the completion of questionnaires.

When talking about skills related to business practices, reference is made to professional skills. These skills are related to the capacity of reflection, training and networking. In this regard, the studies analyze which factors enhance the acquisition of these skills and if there is a relationship between skills and professional success. Thus, we analyze whether the environment in which learning and personal variables such as gender, age and culture develops, facilitate the acquisition of such skills. The conclusions are that in high school studies the methodologies developed reflection, but do not contribute to vocational training or networking. Reflection occurs more in secondary education than in the pre - professional education (Kuijpers, et al. 2006). In addition, the studies reviewed conclude that the development of professional skills promotes success (De Vos, et al. 2011),

professional commitment (Meijers et al. 2013) and the proper well-being of the worker (Akkermans et al. 2013).

### 3. Description of methodology

Our objective is the analysis of competencies related to the employability that have acquired the students of the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University Pompeu Fabra practices that have been made in companies. Specifically, the questions that guide our analysis are:

1. Does he have followed a particular study; is a determining factor for the acquisition of a certain type of skills?
2. Does the size of the company in which the practices are carried out is a determining factor for the acquisition and development of a particular type of competence?
3. Is gender a determining factor for the acquisition and development of a particular type of competence?

To perform the study, we defined two types of variables: independent and dependent. We defined the independent variables based on the size of the company that have been made the practice, the attending grade and gender of the intern. In relation to its size we defined companies as small and medium when they have less than 250 employees, and we have considered large companies with more than 250 employees.

From our point of view, the fact of studying a degree can make the acquisition of certain competencies since the academic focus of the degrees is different. The degree of economy is characterized by a higher proportion of subjects requiring numerical skills and a strong mathematical formation, while in the degree of Management and in ADE there is a greater number of subjects of a practical nature and high enterprise content. This diversity can make a difference in the starting point of the acquisition of skills.

Finally, we have considered the gender of the trainee as it is a factor considered in other studies (Kuijpers et al. 2013).

We have taken as dependent variables the related skills of the student employability. In the definition of the competencies we have taken into account the specific and generic competences raised by the Bologna paradigm and, in particular, the Tuning project, which are related to the level of employability. Specifically, a question was included in the questionnaire that was used to collect data on up to what extent had acquired a set of competencies during practice. Subsequently, each of these competencies was classified into three groups: those that promote training, reflection, and interaction or networking.

The skills of those asked were classified according to the following groups:

- C1. Technical capacity (Formative).
- C2. Learning ability, (Formative).
- C3. Labour administration , ( Reflection).
- C4. Oral communication skills, (interaction).
- C5. Sense of responsibility, (Reflection).
- C6. Adaptability (Interaction).
- C7. Creativity and initiative, (Reflection).
- C8. Personal involvement, (interaction).
- C9. Motivation (Education).
- C10. Responsiveness of the reviews (Interaction).
- C11. Punctuality, (not been analyzed).
- C12. Relationship to the work environment (Interaction).
- C13. Ability to work in team (Interaction).

To carry out the research a questionnaire was provided to all students who have undertaken curricular practices at the Faculty of Economics and Business Studies during the course 2012-13. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample. In this case we have not

considered students of International Business Administration (IBE). The response rate of questionnaires was 28.7% (until July 2013).

**Table 1 .** Distribution of the sample characteristics

	<b>Big Business</b>		<b>PIME</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>ADE</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>55.6%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>44.4%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Men	5	13.9%	2	5.6%	7	19.4%
Women	15	41.7%	14	38.9%	29	80.6%
<b>ECONOMY</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>61.1%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>38.9%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Men	5	27.8%	5	27.8%	10	55.6%
Women	6	33.3%	2	11.1%	8	44.4%
<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>41.7%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>58.3%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Men	4	16.7%	6	25.0%	10	41.7%
Women	6	25.0%	8	33.3%	14	58.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>52.6%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>47.4%</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source : Authors.

The methodology used was quantitative. Quantitative research is useful when trying to see how often an event occurs, or if you want to get a general idea without losing too much information (Kirk et al. 1990). This type of analysis is appropriate when you want to obtain a first description of the population and the heterogeneity that characterizes it. To analyze whether there is a significant relationship from the statistically analyzed between skills and independent variables we used the analysis of variance. The software used was Excel 2011.

Moreover, a qualitative analysis was realized on the importance that the students give to the practices and the importance of the role of the tutor in the company as well as the academic tutor. In this case, we used a quantitative methodology that allows us to obtain a first approximation to the roles played by mentors in conducting the practices. To review the tutors performance we performed in-depth interviews to all students who have completed the curriculum practices.



The working hypotheses were:

1. During the practices, students give more importance to the generals and specific competencies.
2. The work in large companies requires and facilitates the acquisition of skills that facilitate interaction with other people.
3. The structure of economics studies facilitates the acquisition and development of skills that encourage reflective behavior.
4. The structure of the studies that are directly related to the business environment (ADE and Business - Management) facilitate the acquisition and development of training skills.
5. The women have more developed than the men, the competitions related to communication.
6. The both mentoring business and academia are considered as a factor guaranty success and utility practices.

#### **4. Discussion of the proposal and results**

The results obtained in the degree of importance that has been given to the competencies are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Rating competencies that have been developed during practice (in relative terms)

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>No Value</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>c1</b>	28.2%	53.8%	16.7%	1.3%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>c2</b>	74.4%	20.5%	1.3%	3.8%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>c3</b>	71.8%	19.2%	5.1%	2.6%	1.3%	100.0%
<b>c4</b>	47.4%	34.6%	15.4%	2.6%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>c5</b>	74.4%	21.8%	2.6%	1.3%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>c6</b>	41.0%	48.7%	9.0%	1.3%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>c7</b>	26.9%	42.3%	26.9%	2.6%	1.3%	100.0%
<b>c8</b>	39.7%	53.8%	5.1%	1.3%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>c9</b>	56.4%	32.1%	9.0%	1.3%	1.3%	100.0%
<b>c10</b>	39.7%	43.6%	14.1%	2.6%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>c11</b>	50.0%	29.5%	20.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>c12</b>	57.7%	30.8%	9.0%	0.0%	2.6%	100.0%
<b>c13</b>	56.4%	26.9%	11.5%	3.8%	1.3%	100.0%

Source: Prepared

From the results obtained we see that the most valued skills have been the learning ability, the ability to manage work, sense of responsibility, motivation to work, be on time, the relationship with the working environment and the ability to team work. We wish to note that, during the interviews that are made to students to assess academically the practice carried out, many of them have emphasized the importance of managing the work and the learning of relations in the working environment. These results are consistent with performed studies showing that a relationship between wage levels and the acquisition of a cognitive factor (a general cognitive factor) has more to do with general competencies than with specific skills (Rotundo et al. 2004). Our first hypothesis which states that the acquisition of general skills has an important weight in work development and therefore in the future employability of workers is confirmed.

The least valued competencies were technical ability, creativity and initiative. The fact that technical capacity is one of the least valued skills is consistent with the fact that for a large academic assessment of students stated that in their opinion the companies " hired " interns in the last years of the degree, not for having a specific knowledge, but because throughout the studies they had learned to act in a more analytical manner. The fact that the initiative and creativity is not valued in contrast to the study done in 2010 (Monllau et al. 2010a) in which one of the results was that one of the skills most valued by employers was the initiative and entrepreneurship. In our opinion, this difference is caused by the fact that the objective characteristics and dynamics of the practice may condition the objectivity of this response. Typically, students are hired to do odd jobs where little initiative is required.

The statistical contrast done may be noted that, when you relate the competencies analyzed with the size of the company, there are statistically significant differences in competencies C3: labor administration and C6: Ease of Adaptation. Specifically, the fact of making practices in a large firm makes easier to learn to manage the job. In addition, working in large companies requires a greater ability to adapt to situations and environment. Having completed a degree does not make a significant difference with any of the competencies under study. Ability to work in team: When we relate skills and a statistically significant gender difference in the case of the C13 competition is observed. The women considered, to a greater degree than men, that they have acquired and needed the ability to work in a team. However, it should be noted that the sample used for the analysis are many more women than men. Statistical test results are shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

**Table 3.** Relationship between firm size and labor administration: mean and variance.

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Account</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Big Business	41	62	1.51219512	0.75609756
PIME	37	44	1.18918919	0.21321321

  

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Degrees of freedom</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Probabiliy</i>	<i>Critical value for F</i>
Between groups	2.02913983	1	2.02913983	4.0668	0.0472	3.9667
Within groups	37.9195781	76	0.49894182			
Total	39.9487179	77				

Source: Prepared

**Table 4.** Relationship between the size and ease adaptation work

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Account</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Big Business	41	77	1.87804878	0.5597561
PIME	37	56	1.51351351	0.31231231

  

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Degrees of freedom</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Probabiliy</i>	<i>Critical value for F</i>
Between groups	2.58446157	1	2.58446157	5.839985	0.018065	3.96675
Within groups	33.6334871	76	0.44254588			
Total	36.2179487	77				

**Table 5.** Relationship between the gender of the student in practice and teamwork

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Account</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Big Business	27	36	1.33333333	0.38461538
PIME	51	89	1.74509804	0.87372549

  

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Degrees of freedom</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Probabiliy</i>	<i>Critical value for F</i>
Between groups	2.99321267	1	2.99321267	4.2372871	0.0429729	3.9667597
Within groups	53.6862745	76	0.70639835	8	9	8
Total	56.6794872	77				

Source: Prepared

1. From the results obtained we can conclude that students who have done the practices in large companies develop a greater ability to manage work and require

greater adaptability. In addition, more women than men develop the ability to work in teams. Therefore, we can conclude that working in big companies requires some different skills than those required in smaller companies; the larger companies require organizational skills rather than interaction with other staff. On the other hand, we have not obtained any statistically significant relationship between the completed study and the type of competition that is of importance for the development of practice, we could demonstrate that test 3 and 4 hypotheses. We were observed that there are differences by gender and the women value teamwork. It is this sense our 5 hypothesis is confirmed.

All the students who were asked about the role of mentor consider that the mentor in the business is a cornerstone. It seems that there is a relationship between having a mentor in the company who is dedicated to the intern and the type of work the company does. Students who have a mentor committed to practices in the company claimed that they obtained higher level of knowledge. On the other hand, the importance given by students to the academic mentor is not as much about knowledge as is as key element that helps them solving administrative problems. Furthermore, in cases where there have been problems between the intern and the company tutor, the students perceived the academic tutor as a mediator in the conflict.

## 5. Conclusions

The study of the competencies is important because they are a cornerstone of the learning process and integration into the labor market. For this reason, it is important to know what is the perception and importance given by teachers and employers to competencies directly related to the professional future employability.

In the literature we can observe some aspects of competence have been analyzed from the academic and vocational perspective. In this sense, it has tried to identify which

competencies should be further encouraged for graduate studies. From a business perspective has studied the relationship between skills and professional success.

Moreover, it is important to examine whether certain characteristics of the future worker increases the probability that acquire and develop certain skills. This work is part of a larger project which the authors are pursuing the study of competence. Initially, were analyzed the competencies, according to teachers and employers, that students must have after graduation (Monllau et al. 2010a). Subsequently, we have analyzed the differences in skills acquisition among students of degrees in economics and business administration and management and acquired by students of political science (Monllau et al. 2010 b). Also there has been analyzed the vision that the students have with regard to the competitions acquired during its studies (Monllau et al. 2010a).

In this paper, we have focused on studies that refer to the acquisition of skills and employability (De Vos et al. 2011), skills and wage level (Rotundo et al. 2004) or competencies, employability and demographic variables (Rothwell et al . 2007). Our findings are in this line. We can say that at the time of entering into the labor market the development of general or cross-skills plays an important role as the acquisition of the specific skills. Certain differences between skills development and demographic aspects are detected. Thus, the results indicate that women values different types of skills than men. On the other hand, the size of the company can also play an important role in the development of skills related to the work organization. Our study has some limitations, since the skills were analyzed from the trainee perspective. The type of work assigned to the trainees is limited in certain skills such as the capacity of decision-making or specific cognitive abilities.



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