

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Social work students' views on competencies in human resources

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Abstract

The professionalism of human resources (HR) is given a lot of consideration when it comes to individual competency. This essay aims to close the gap between students' perceived and actual competencies and what they believe they will learn and acquire while in school. Our paper aims to: a) introduce competencies generally, b) define the meaning of competencies development in higher education; and c) outline the function of competencies in human resource management. This paper aims to investigate students' human resource competencies and their assessments of the competencies they have already acquired during their studies. Full-time fourth-semester students at the Parul University Faculty of Social Work were given the questionnaire in a way that represented all years of study. We have polled students on how they currently and in the future see professional competencies in the HR industry. Results based on the self-assessment and need for education and training of 15 HR competencies. The research study underscores the importance of acquiring and developing HR competencies during university education, with findings suggesting that students, as future HR professionals, recognize the value of continuous learning. As students progress through their studies, their confidence in the study program's efficacy in fostering HR competencies tends to increase.

Keywords: Study, HR competencies, HR professional, Development of students' HR competencies.

Introduction

Today's students face a variety of challenges based on their living conditions and historical and cultural context, including economic, social, and cultural issues. Any educational program should help students develop the competencies they need to use their knowledge, skills, abilities, etc., to land a job that suits them. Human resource (HR) management programs are no different, as they train students for careers in human resources.

The concept of competence is multifaceted, encompassing not only the acquisition of sufficient knowledge, skills, and abilities but also the maintenance of these throughout a person's career (Bradley, DeStefano and Drapeau (2012)). HR's previous clerical position has been

replaced with an administrative, administrative between an executive and a manager, an executive and a strategic partner, and Venkata Ratnam and Srivastava (1991; Budhwar, 2009). In order for the HR function to achieve its goals, the competencies necessary for HR professionals to carry out their duties must be possessed (Srimannarayana, 2013). According to Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung, and Lake (1995), competencies for HR professionals can be determined by an empirically tested conceptual framework or by the opinions of senior managers and other staff members. In general, they concentrate on the skills and expertise of HR specialists as well as how much they can use HR expertise to generate business success (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, and Younger, 2008).

Our study aims to present HR students' perceptions of HR competencies and their willingness to acquire the competencies that researchers have identified as valuable. We additionally examined the self-evaluation of the existence of HR competencies, the necessity for students to get further education and training to develop HR competencies, the necessity for acquiring the competencies necessary for successfully carrying out HR professionals' tasks, and the existence of student diversity. Our study aims to ascertain any variations in how HR competencies are perceived based on the year of study and program satisfaction.

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How to cite this article: Kshatriya, N. R., Nair, P. (2024). Social work students' views on competencies in human resources. *The Scientific Temper*, 15(1):1907-1914.

Doi: 10.58414/SCIENTIFICTEMPER.2024.15.1.44

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None.

Competencies in General

Competence, a multifaceted concept, is characterized by the acquisition, maintenance, and preservation of essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes, according to Rubin *et al.* (2007). Boselie and Paauwe (2004, p. 554) define competence as the prerequisites necessary for an individual to perform work with a focus on outcomes rather than mere efforts or contributions. Moore and Dainty (2002, p. 315) describe competence as the capability and willingness to accomplish tasks. Many authors, such as Kröl (2003), Kasiulis (2005), Diskienė and Marinskas (2007), emphasize that contemporary job responsibilities demand a combination of skills, knowledge, approaches, motivations, values, abilities, and other components of competencies.

The competence perspective has enriched and expanded key aspects of management theory, presenting a systemic, dynamic, cognitive, and holistic framework. Foundational concepts, identified by various names like “core competencies perspectives,” “dynamic capabilities,” and “resource base,” have evolved over recent decades (Sanchez, 2004, p. 521). Barney (1991, p. 111) posits that for a firm’s resource to confer a sustained competitive advantage, it must be strategically valuable, non-rare, and non-imitable.

According to Nelson and Winter (1982), organizational routines—the customary practices a company establishes in its application of particular resources. According to Rumelt (1994), competencies spread across industries and products by evolving more slowly than the products they enable, fostering “collective learning” within the company and welcoming competition to obtain the best knowledge and abilities.

Professional competence encompasses a broad range of attributes, skills, and practical experiences utilized in everyday work, coupled with specific knowledge and capabilities relevant to an employee’s specific field. Social competence pertains to the skill of effectively interacting with others within a group environment. In addition to cognitive abilities, analysis, and pattern recognition, personal competence involves learning, analyzing, cultivating personal qualities, and extracting insights from one’s own experiences, particularly in demanding circumstances. Managerial competence is defined by the ability to lead, inspire, handle tension and conflicts, and oversee the tasks of others. Methodological competence relates to the skill of efficiently organizing one’s work. Druteikiene, Česyniene, and Stankevičiene (2013) underscore the significance of prioritization, planning, and adaptability in this context.

Competencies in human resource management: Since the 1980s, the shift from “personnel management” to “human resource management,” as noted by Armstrong (2009), highlights the essential perspective of treating people as a valuable resource. According to Armstrong, human resource management places a greater emphasis on

business functions compared to addressing issues through problem-solving and mediation. Ulrich (1997) is recognized for formulating one of the most widely accepted versions of human resource management roles. Acknowledging the necessity for HR professionals to assume specific roles to contribute effectively to the business, it is important to note that managing human resources during organizational change poses significant challenges. HR specialists play a crucial role in the change management process within an organization, as emphasized by Ullah (2012).

The responsibilities of HR specialists need to align with the company’s demands, requiring organizations to enhance their resilience, agility, adaptability, and customer focus to thrive in today’s competitive landscape. The functions performed by HR specialists are vital for implementing changes in the business domain and effectively managing organizational change, as highlighted by Ullah (2012). The impact of information technology and globalization on the work of HR professionals is considerable, as noted by Brockbank (1997), Bawa and Ali (1999), and Caldwell (2003).

Storey (1992), a key figure in the examination of the impacts of workplace change on personnel practices, introduced four personnel roles: advisors, handmaidens, regulators, and change makers. In 1997, Abigail, Findley, Hine, Thompson, and McKinlay delved into the complementary role of handmaidens. Regulators are responsible for overseeing rules and corporate strategy. As personnel managers, change makers engage with the marketing domain to enhance employee motivation and commitment, employing calculated strategies through soft HR interventions. The ongoing role of HR specialists remains pivotal, providing expertise guidance and ensuring managerial adherence to disciplinary procedures to avert potential detrimental situations (Doughty, Kirk, and Harris, 2002). The professional HR perspective exemplifies consistency, adherence to rules, and statutory management (Gilmore and Williams, 2007).

Drawing on a foundation validated through empirical testing, competencies for HR professionals can be delineated from diverse perspectives (Ulrich *et al.*, 1995). Chanda and Kabra (2000) assert that the competency of HR professionals encompasses knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Ulrich *et al.* (1995), as cited in De-Organizacija, Volume 48 Research papers Number 1, February 2015, refined competency in alignment with business needs, likely driven by the business’s competitive advantages. Their HR model incorporates a comprehensive view of competencies, categorized into business knowledge, individual credibility, HR proficiency, and change management. To yield effective outcomes, HR professionals must demonstrate suitable behavior and embody the company’s values in handling HR-related issues. This underscores the significance of personal credibility as the second most crucial component (Ulrich and Eichinger, 1998, as cited in Long and Ismail, 2010). With their understanding of human performance,

HR professionals are well-positioned to play a strategic role and significantly contribute to a company's competitive advantage (Long and Ismail, 2011, p. 1054). In high-performing organizations, HR specialists strategically manage aspects such as connectivity, decision-making, communication, culture, and change (Boselie and Paauwe, 2004). Tarbell and Graham (2006) present the perspective of workers regarding the reliability of HR specialists. Based on a study conducted on European companies, Boselie and Paauwe (2004) suggest that personal credibility and the HR function positively impact the perceived importance of the HR function and its professionals.

The development of competencies in higher education involves a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, as mentioned earlier. This paper aims to delve into the concept of competency-based education and address related issues. One form of research is centered on competency-based higher education, which underscores the competencies gained and assessed throughout the duration of a study program (Lambrechts, Mula, Ceulemans, Molderez, and Gaeremynck, 2012). Competency-based higher education enables students to acquire relevant knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes essential for their future personal and professional endeavors (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2012, p. 67).

According to Rychen (2002), using competencies helps set the crucial educational goals that students must meet and enhances the process of evaluating students' learning outcomes. Bolster lifelong learning and educational institutions. A list of Slovenian human resource managers' competencies was used to gauge students' opinions about present and future professional competencies in the HR domain (Kohont, 2005, p. 209).

In the realm of HR professionals, Kohont (2005, p. 117) outlined fifteen competencies: innovation and creativity, professionalism, people orientation, results orientation, business knowledge, time and work organization, leadership, strategic thinking, teamwork, communication, change management, decision-making and responsibility, creativity and innovation, professionalism, precision, critical thinking, and ICT utilization. Limited empirical evidence is available in current research regarding the impact of academic higher education on the professional development of students (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Förster, and Kuhn in Blemeke, Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Kuhn, and Fege, 2013, p. 159). The study is based on Klieme and Leutner's (2006) definition of competence as a context-specific performance disposition. This implies that subject-specific knowledge and thinking are essential for conceptualizing competence in a particular field of study. Unlike personality traits, competencies associated with specific behaviors can be acquired through learning (Bird, 1995).

Educators face the task of creating learning opportunities (Bjornali and Støren, 2012). Taconis, Van der Plas, and

Van der Sanden (2004), along with Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirschner, and Van der Vleuten (2007), highlighted the importance of designing competence-based curricula that integrate knowledge, skills, self-esteem, and attitudes in an interconnected manner. This is essential, as addressing each of these components separately is inadequate for fostering the desired competent professional behavior.

This study aims to examine the existence of HR competencies within students enrolled in the HRM study program, along with their perspectives on further education and training for competency development. Additionally, the research aims to explore variations in the development of HR competencies based on students' levels of satisfaction with their studies. The study also investigates discrepancies in students' assessments of how well the study program facilitates the acquisition and enhancement of competencies essential for effective performance in HR professional roles. A research question (RQ) is formulated in alignment with the study's objective.

Objectives of the Study

Q1. To know what is the number of student groups determined by their self-evaluation of the presence of fifteen HRM competencies?

Q2. To understand additional education and training to enhance those competencies compared to students with a lower self-assessment of their current competencies.

Methodology

The demographic section of the survey comprises inquiries about gender, the type of study, and the academic year. Respondents were requested to self-assess their existing proficiency in each of the fifteen competencies (outlined in Table 1) and subsequently gauge the necessity for additional education and training in those competencies, along with the degree of competency development during the ongoing study program. All competency-related variables were gauged on a 5-point Likert scale, where '1' signifies 'not present at all,' and '5' signifies 'completely present.' Students were also prompted to assess their satisfaction with the study program and the program's effectiveness in facilitating the acquisition and development of competencies essential for successful HR professional tasks.

Population, Sample and Data Collection Method

The survey was performed in 2023 among students of Human Resources of the Faculty of Social Work, Parul University. The questionnaire was delivered in Google form to a non-probabilistic convenience sample of students who attended lectures. A total of 51 questionnaires were completed.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from the survey were first analyzed, and the significant differences in student needs for additional education and training for the development

of HR competencies between two groups of students were examined according to their level of present HR competencies. The student study programme and their opinion that it enables them to acquire and develop the competencies necessary for the successful performance of tasks of HR professionals was examined. The differences in the students' opinion that the study programme enables them to acquire and develop the competencies necessary for the successful performance of tasks of HR professionals were investigated with analysis of variance.

Results

Sample description and description of the questionnaire item.

The sample consists of 51 students.

Graph 1 shows that the majority of female students, 67.37%, n = 33, are the study respondents, whereas 35.3% n = 18 are male respondents.

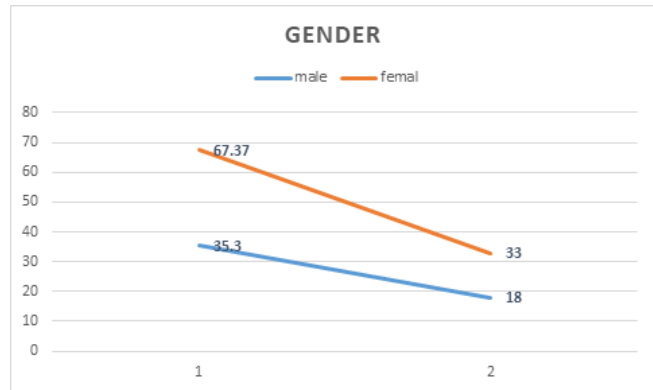
Based on the responses provided by the participants in the self-assessment, there is a notable self-awareness and acknowledgment of both strengths and areas for improvement across various competencies. Here is an interpretation with respect to the respondents:

Leadership

Respondents generally recognize their leadership abilities, with a notable percentage (36%) acknowledging room for improvement. This suggests a willingness to develop and refine leadership skills.

Strategic Thinking

A significant portion of respondents (30%) recognize their strategic thinking skills but is open to further improvement (12%). This indicates an awareness of the importance of strategic thinking and a desire for enhancement.



Graph 1: Showing gender

Time and Work Organization

Most respondents (35%) acknowledge proficiency in time and work organization but show a recognition (13%) of the need for continued improvement, demonstrating a proactive attitude towards organizational skills.

Teamwork

Respondents generally acknowledge their teamwork abilities, with a substantial portion (31%) recognizing areas for improvement (16%). This reflects a positive attitude towards collaboration and a commitment to enhancing teamwork skills.

Change Management

While fewer respondents feel completely present in change management (8%), a significant portion (25%) recognizes the need for improvement. This suggests a recognition of the challenges associated with change and a willingness to adapt and grow.

Table 1: Need for additional education and training

Competency	Completely present (%)	Present (%)	Don't know (%)	Not present (%)	Not present at all (%)
Leadership	15	27	5	2	2
Strategic thinking	12	31	5	0	3
Time and work organization	15	27	5	2	2
Teamwork	17	30	2	1	1
Change management	8	27	13	1	2
Creativity and innovation	13	31	4	2	1
People-orientation	14	28	6	2	1
Results-orientation	13	23	10	3	2
Business knowledge	11	28	8	0	4
Accuracy	15	26	6	2	2
Analytical thinking	14	31	5	0	1
Communication	21	24	3	2	1
Use of ICT	10	21	17	2	1
Professionalism	15	29	5	1	1
Decision-making and responsibility	13	29	8	0	1

Creativity and Innovation

Respondents show a moderate level of confidence in creativity and innovation (10% completely present), with a substantial number (34%) acknowledging the potential for improvement. This reflects an openness to fostering a more innovative mindset.

People-Orientation

A notable percentage (25%) acknowledges the need for improvement in people orientation, indicating a commitment to enhancing interpersonal skills and understanding.

Results-Orientation

Respondents generally recognize their results-oriented approach, with a substantial portion (29%) acknowledging areas for improvement (8%). This suggests a commitment to achieving outcomes and a willingness to refine results-oriented skills.

Business Knowledge

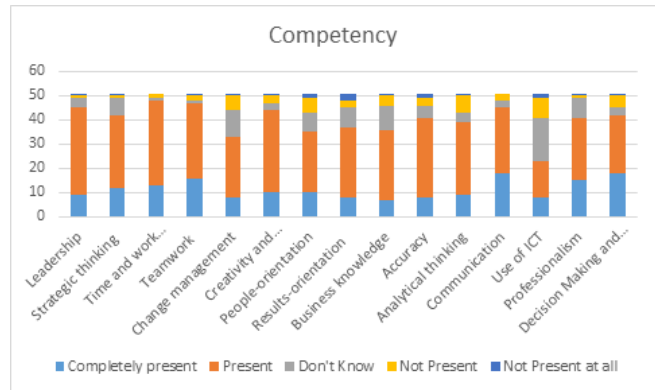
While a lower percentage feels completely present in business knowledge (7%), a significant portion (29%) recognizes the need for improvement. This reflects an awareness of the importance of continuous learning in the business domain.

Accuracy

Respondents generally acknowledge their accuracy skills, with a substantial portion (33%) recognizing areas for improvement (8%). This suggests a commitment to precision and an openness to refining accuracy-related competencies.

Analytical Thinking

A modest percentage (9%) feels completely present in analytical thinking, while a substantial number (30%)



Graph 2: Self-assessment of current competencies

acknowledges the potential for improvement. This indicates a recognition of the analytical skills needed in problem-solving and decision-making.

Communication

A higher percentage (18%) feels completely present in communication, with a significant portion (27%) recognizing the potential for improvement. This reflects a commitment to effective communication and a willingness to enhance communication skills.

Use of ICT

Respondents generally acknowledge their ICT skills, with a significant portion (15%) recognizing areas for improvement (8%). This reflects an awareness of the evolving nature of technology and a willingness to stay updated.

Professionalism

A higher percentage (15%) feels completely present in professionalism, with a significant portion (26%) recognizing

Table 2: Self-assessment of current competencies

Competency	Completely present (%)	Present (%)	Don't know (%)	Not present (%)	Not present at all (%)
Leadership	9	36	4	1	1
Strategic thinking	12	30	7	1	1
Time and work organization	13	35	1	2	0
Teamwork	16	31	1	2	1
Change management	8	25	11	6	1
Creativity and innovation	10	34	3	3	1
People-orientation	10	25	8	6	2
Results-orientation	8	29	8	3	3
Business knowledge	7	29	10	4	1
Accuracy	8	33	5	3	2
Analytical thinking	9	30	4	7	1
Communication	18	27	3	3	0
Use of ICT	8	15	18	8	2
Professionalism	15	26	8	1	1
Decision making and responsibility	18	24	3	5	1

areas for improvement. This suggests a commitment to maintaining high professional standards and continuous improvement.

Decision Making and Responsibility

A higher percentage (18%) feels completely present in decision-making and responsibility, with a significant portion (24%) recognizing the potential for improvement. This indicates a commitment to making informed decisions and taking on responsibilities effectively.

In summary, the respondents' self-assessment data reveals a balanced perspective, with an acknowledgment of both strengths and areas for improvement. The interpretation reflects respondents' proactive and positive attitude towards personal and professional development, showcasing a commitment to continuous growth and enhancement of their competencies. Data analysis according to (Table 2).

Leadership

Respondents recognize their strengths in leadership to some extent (15% completely present), but a significant portion (27%) acknowledges the need for additional education and training to enhance their leadership skills.

Strategic Thinking

While there is an awareness of strengths in strategic thinking (12% completely present), a considerable percentage (31%) believes that further education and training could contribute to improvement.

Time and Work Organization

Respondents acknowledge their proficiency in time and work organization (15% completely present), with a notable percentage (27%) recognizing the potential for improvement through additional education and training.

Teamwork

The majority recognizes their effectiveness in teamwork (17% completely present), but a significant proportion (30%) identifies room for improvement through further education and training.

Change Management

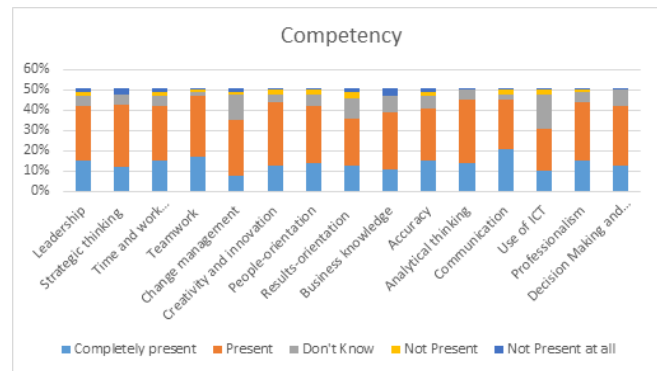
Participants express varying degrees of confidence in change management (8% completely present), with a considerable percentage (27%) acknowledging the need for additional education and training in this area.

Creativity and Innovation

Respondents recognize their creativity and innovation skills to a certain extent (13% completely present), but a notable percentage (31%) believe that further education and training could enhance these competencies.

People-Oriented

There is a recognition of strengths in people-orientation (14% completely present), and some participants (28%) see



Graph 3: Need for additional education and training

the potential for improvement through additional education and training.

Results-Oriented

While strengths are acknowledged in results-orientation (13% completely present), a significant proportion (23%) identifies areas for improvement and sees the value of additional education and training.

Business Knowledge

A proportion of respondents recognize their business knowledge (11% completely present), but some participants (28%) believe that additional education and training could contribute to further enhancement.

Accuracy

Respondents acknowledge their accuracy skills (15% completely present), but a percentage (26%) recognize the potential for improvement through additional education and training.

Analytical Thinking

Participants recognize their analytical thinking abilities (14% completely present), with a significant percentage (31%) identifying the need for additional education and training.

Communication

A considerable majority expresses confidence in their communication skills (21% completely present), but there is still recognition (24%) of the potential for improvement through further education and training.

Use of ICT

While there is an acknowledgment of skills in the use of ICT (10% completely present), a notable percentage (21%) believes that additional education and training could contribute to further proficiency.

Professionalism

A significant portion recognizes their professionalism (15% completely present), and some participants (29%) see the potential for improvement through additional education and training.

Decision Making and Responsibility

There is confidence in decision-making and responsibility skills (13% completely present), and a significant proportion (29%) identifies areas for improvement, acknowledging the value of additional education and training.

In conclusion, the responses suggest a nuanced understanding among participants, balancing recognition of strengths with a willingness to invest in further education and training to enhance specific competencies. The varied percentages in each category highlight the diverse perspectives and self-awareness of the participants regarding their professional skills and areas for growth.

Discussion

The research on acquiring and developing competencies crucial for successful work performance of HR professionals, along with the empirical findings, serves as the foundation for discussing the results in two sections. The first part involves students' self-assessment of their developed competencies and the perceived need for acquiring and enhancing HR professional competencies. Recognizing the right competencies is crucial for students to manage the further development of both well-established and inadequately developed competencies necessary for their intended HR profession. While university education plays a role in competency development to some extent (Pavlin, 2012, p.125), it is essential for each student to further acquire and enhance them through additional training and education. The research indicates that students hold high estimations of their current HR competencies, with no competency self-assessment expressing lower levels or none at all. Based on the self-assessment of current HR competencies, students are categorized into two distinct groups: those with higher self-assessments and those with lower self-assessments of HR competencies.

In discussing HR competencies, attention is drawn to individuals opting for the HR professional profession taking responsibility for decisions regarding their professional and career paths (Devjak, Devjak, and Polak, 2014, p.4). They contribute to realizing aspirations and ambitions in faculties that serve as the foundation for developing a creative and knowledge-based society, aiming to educate high-level experts for sustainable development. As the third participant in this relationship, organizations play a crucial role, with Adamska and Minárová (2014, p.69) highlighting the importance of knowledge creation, development, application, and evaluation for the organization's ongoing development and maintaining a competitive advantage.

HR competencies are integral to the effective performance of HR professionals, given that appropriately educated and trained individuals can adeptly respond to anticipated changes in the business landscape (Garavan and McGuire, 2001). Thus, understanding which competencies

should be instilled in HR professionals becomes imperative. In alignment with this, HR professionals should acquire suitable education and develop the necessary HR competencies throughout their study. The research results demonstrate that participants widely agree that the study program enables them to acquire and develop competencies essential for successful HR professional duties during their course of study.

Additionally, statistically significant differences are identified among students of different years concerning their opinions on whether the study program allows them to acquire and develop competencies for successful task performance as HR professionals during their course of study. As students progress to higher years of study, their opinion scores increase. This outcome is expected, attributed to the fact that students in the last year have been acquainted with the entire program during lectures, whereas first-year students have only been exposed to the theoretical part of the program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study delves into students' perceptions of HR competencies and their satisfaction with the study program. The self-assessment data reveals a balanced view, showcasing students' awareness of both strengths and areas for improvement. Notably, students express a proactive attitude toward personal and professional development. The research underscores the importance of acquiring and developing HR competencies during university education, with findings suggesting that students, as future HR professionals, recognize the value of continuous learning. As students progress through their studies, their confidence in the study program's efficacy in fostering HR competencies tends to increase.

Summary of Key Findings

Competency self-assessment

Students generally have positive self-assessments across various HR competencies. Leadership, strategic thinking, time and work organization, teamwork, and communication are competencies where students express a mix of confidence and acknowledgment of areas for improvement. There is an overall willingness to develop and improve competencies, as indicated by the acknowledgment of areas for improvement (Graph 2).

- *Need for additional education and training*

Students recognize the need for additional education and training across various competencies. Leadership, strategic thinking, and time and work organization are competencies where a significant portion of students sees the potential for improvement through further education. The results suggest a proactive attitude toward continuous learning and development (Graph 3).

- *Satisfaction with study program*

Students generally express satisfaction with the study program's contribution to the acquisition and development of HR competencies.

As students progress in their studies, their satisfaction with the study program's effectiveness in developing competencies increases.

Recommendations

The study program could consider incorporating more practical elements and real-world scenarios to enhance competencies. Continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms can be established to address evolving student needs. Collaborations with HR professionals and industry experts can provide valuable insights into current industry requirements. This summary provides an overview of the key findings and recommendations. Further details and specific nuances would be present in the full text, and additional insights can be gained by reviewing the complete study.

Acknowledgment

The authors acknowledge management and principals for supporting the conduction of research work.

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