

**METACOMPETENCES: HOW IMPORTANT FOR ORGANIZATIONS?
ANALYSIS OF A SURVEY IN PORTUGAL**

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Abstract

The models and variables leveraging productivity and the performance of corporate collaborators have been highly discussed in academic, economic and corporate fields. This paper is written according to this same spirit and aims at casting a critical view over the role played by meta-competences in the organizational structure. It simultaneously intends to reflect on strategic aspects of spirituality, such as the multiplicative variables of performance and productivity in organizations.

Therefore, it is important to analyse the feeling graduates get from applying soft skills in corporate everyday life, since they are potential “collaborators” of these institutions. After hearing their mind, we have noticed that, though mainly positive, the results obtained reveal the need for a broader reflection, which might start in organizations and reach out to Universities, as this is the production and spreading point of global knowledge, the basic skills, foundations of a future organizational collaborator. We present the result of a survey in Portugal.

Keywords: soft skills, hard skills, University, corporations, performance

Jel Classification: J24; O15; M53

1. Introduction, goal and methodology

Having in mind the strategic value of qualitative aspects in peoples’ performance in companies, it seems essential to reflect on their importance in the organizational everyday life of collaborators with a academic degree. Therefore, a questionnaire targeting licencees was built, regardless their academic background or knowledge and expertise. It is our final goal to identify the importance of soft skills in corporate everyday life as well as their role in the intangible capital assets.

The main item in the questionnaire focussed mainly on soft skills, designed according to a Likert-type scale with seven answering possibilities, where 1 (one) corresponded to a minimal means of closeness and 7 (seven) to a maximal means of closeness.

The questionnaire underwent a pre-test. It circulated amongst employed licencees of two distinct regions of northern Portugal. Some doubts and suggestions rose from the pre-test, which contributed for the quality of the final survey. Among them were emotional and spiritual questions. Since such questions bewildered most respondents, some demonstrating no knowledge about such theme, some questions were adapted and others deleted.

The pre-test was repeated on a second stage. The final survey was built on questionform (<http://questionform.com/>) and the link e-mailed to students enrolled in our Masters course.

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2. Metacompetences and the labor market: trends

The discussion on competences based on training and experience is not recent. It started back in the 1980's, part of the political and educational agenda of multiple countries. The United Kingdom is one of the examples where the educational system was criticized for considering it was essentially based on a knowledge approach, that is to say it was considered too technical and, consequently, unable to fit the requirements of labor market (Rowe, 1995). Rowe further states that qualification may not reflect on knowledge or skills, but on competences in a more pro-active way. This perspective is sustained by the need to optimize competitive advantages, since the traditional forms of competitive advantage – mainly concerned with cost, production, variety and differentiation of products – are losing some relevance to the dynamic variables of competitiveness in the current informational economy. Therefore, as argued by Schultz (1961 and 1968) in the second half of the 20th century, followed by many authors such as Becker (1975), Drucker (1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1992 and 1998) and Parlad & Hamel (1990), workers are the cornerstone of an organization, hence making the difference. These authors emphasized the level of commitment workers force on an organization, as well as on their capacity to transfer knowledge (tacit and/or encoded). Nevertheless, the tacit aspect as known today was highlighted later on. This evolution gave birth to the knowledge perspective which works as an input for organizations. Therefore, as argued by Lawler (2008), it makes sense to increase its market demand, since it connects human capital to the talent required by organizations, playing an important role in the flexibility and sustainability of organizational dynamism.

Such perspective takes into account the personal skills of each collaborator and calls for a behavioural change of economical agents when it comes to the type of competences for a labour market stronger on knowledge. This approach on personal competences differs from the functional more traditional approach, since the perspective is directed to medium and long-term. Thus, they are structural competences of corporate sustainability. Therefore, it incorporates vectors of self-confidence, emotional control and interpersonal skills, reasons why Cheetham & Chivers (1998) believe these work as an additive to functional competences. These authors go even further as they consider the conceptual model of competences would be incomplete if it did not include competences of ethics and values. Even more, and despite the lack of consensus due to little ponderation on the subject, they believe that ethics and values must be part of professional standards as they work as a guide for peoples' behaviour and performance. In fact, the functional approach of competences is mainly intended to task performance. For a long period of time this approach pleased some regional spaces, for example the United Kingdom. Therefore, based on the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), the then government encouraged the development of professional standards for all range of occupations. Within that spirit, the trainee was instilled the need to develop generic skills (generic "key skills" - formerly called "core skills"), along with the development of specific skills (job specific skills) (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998, p. 267). A new path of change is being developed as a result of the intensification of market intellectual immateriality, of the age of uncertainty and the volatility of society in general (Kwang, 2003). Underlying this condition is the need to develop personal skills to make a complete puzzle of skills which enhance professional

performance and thus overcome the statism of the traditional functional perspective of organizations.

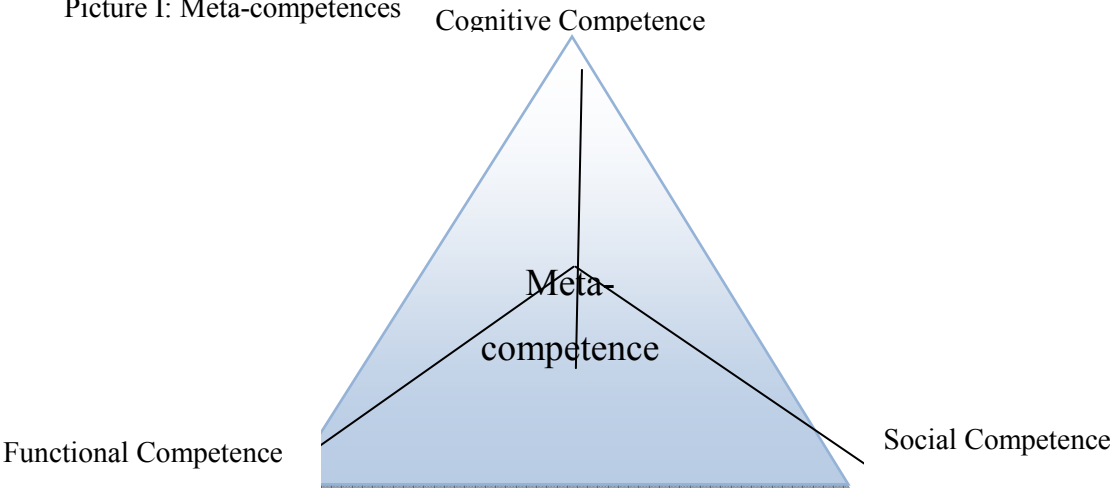
Notwithstanding the importance of such purposes, Cheetham & Chivers (1998) introduce a new strategic principle which may eventually feed and boost all the others. This new principle is called meta-competences, as demonstrated by the table below. These are frequently denominated high skills competences and play a role in the entwined mosaic of competences supporting cognitive, functional and social dimensions (Winterton, 2009). Therefore, authors include in this set aspects such as creativity (see also Kwang, 2003), analysis, problem solving and self-development skills. It is an integrated perspective which gathers Knowledge, skills and abilities (Winterton, 2009, p. 690), resulting in a holistic model of competences (table 1).

Table 1. Relationship between the competence typology proposed for ECVET and earlier models

Source	Competences				
Winterton et al (2004) ECVET Typology	Cognitive Competence (Knowledge)	Functional Competences (Skills)	Social Competences (behavioural)		Meta Competences
Cheetham and Chivers (1996) Holistic model	Knowledge or Cognitive Competence	Functional Competences	Personal or behavioural competency	Values and ethical competency	Meta Competencies
French Compétence triptique	Savoir (compétences théoriques)	Savoir-faire (competences pratiques)	Savoir être (compétences comportementales)		
German Handlungs kompetence	Fachkompetenz		Oersonalkompetenz		
	Sach kompetenz	Methoden kompetenz			
	Sozialkompetenz				
Bloom’s (1964) taxonomy	Cognitive domain (Knowledge)	Psychomotor Domain (skills)	Affective domain (attitudes)		

Source: Winterton (2009, p. 690)

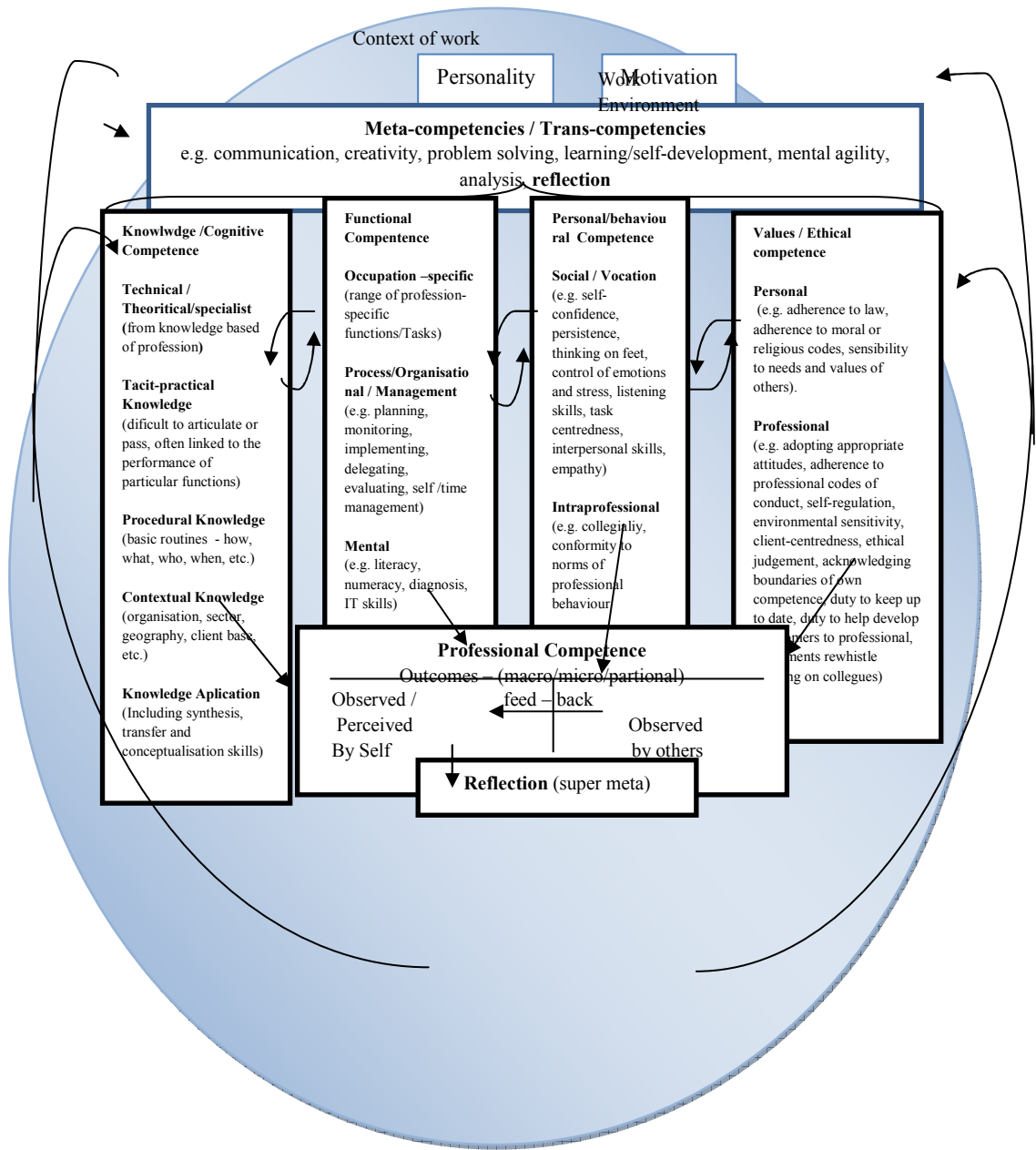
Picture I: Meta-competences



Source: Le-Deist & Winterton (2005, p. 40)

Part of this concept of holistic perspective of competence we find Winterton (2009) is tuned in with Le-Deist (2009) and Winterton et al (2005). For these three authors this perspective is based on three aspects completed by meta-competences, as demonstrated by picture 1.

Picture II: Revised model professional competences



Source: Cheetham & Chivers (1998, p. 275)

We find Cheetham & Chivers (1996 and 1998)'s perspective on people's personal skills quite interesting, since when it comes to performance, both authors separate the results observed by the individual from the results observed by others, communicated to the individual through feedback as well as analysis and reflection. However, in order for the right intensity to be evidenced, it is important to highlight the interaction between intra and inter functions. Importance is given to the existence of tacit knowledge and its applicability, as well as the personal/behavioral and ethical skills which, when associated to functional skills – more scientific and encoded – lead to the construction of an evolutionary and skill gathering spiral, that is knowledge in its state of “wisdom”. On the other hand, including meta-competences in the model is remarkable, as they facilitate the process of reflection. Similarly, they create appropriate environments for the development and applicability of creativity, for the predisposition to creatively solve problems in order to induce mental agility in the individual, group or organization, leading them to analyse, reflect and communicate (Lam & Law, 2008; Sharan, 2002). Such philosophy heightens motivational standards for learning and self-development, providing sustainability to the implementation of innovative processes in organizations. Hence, the organization benefits from social and economic values deriving from their employees' skills. Nevertheless, collaborators also benefit from social values and personal development, although the economic aspect is more evident in the predictability of wage rises, assuming there is corporate sustainability.

According to Cheetham & Chivers (1996 and 1998), the confluence established by central and sub-functions leads to the production of outcomes which can be analysed in a triple perspective:

- (i) macro view (long term): wide global outcomes,
- (ii) micro view: outcomes from more specific activities and
- (iii) partial view: outcomes from a partly concluded activity.

Such outcomes are evident and measurable with the purpose of assessing skill degree. Such results lead to the conclusion that in Cheetham & Chivers' model (1996, 1998) it is considered as a meta-competence or trans-competence, which leads to the production and/or redefinition of competences. Such comment may even lead to the behavioral change and to the improvement of professional skills, as advocated by Godoy et al (2009).

In Cheetham & Chivers' model (1996 and 1998), one can notice another relevant aspect related to professional skills, as it includes work context and work environment. Work context is thus defined as the particular situation in which the professional is invited to perform. It refers to a specific situation where the individual develops an activity, whereas work environment refers to the physical, cultural and social conditions which surround the individual at work (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). However, they are both pressure variables which surround and affect individual and organizational performance.

Variables of personality and motivation also assume an important role in the process of creating competences in this model. According to these authors, personality may positively or negatively influence the competence. In turn, motivation affects not only

individual performance but also the spirit to acquire and/or improve competence pool, with harmful consequences over productivity, individual and organizational performance, and the well-being of populations.

3. Metacompetences and organizational spirituality

As demonstrated by holistic models of competences, the perspective that competences based on meta-competences give great importance to the intangible values of spirituality. In learning organizations, spirituality may be seen as reason and consequence of an increase in honesty and trust (Wagner-Marsh & Conely (1999), besides being a relevant variable leading to creative behaviours (Freshman, 1999) as well as improved levels of dedication and commitment intra and inter organization.

In fact, a discussion on competences in literature about social, economic and business sciences has brought to light a growing interest in cognitive, emotional and spiritual competences. However, one cannot believe that spirituality in organizations is a fresh topic (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Brandt, 1996; Bryant, 1998; Graber & Johnson, 2001; Gunther, 2001; Herman & Gioia, 1998; Kwang, 2003; McCarthy, 1996; McLaughlin & Whaterman, 2011), as it started being discussed in the 1980's with the arrival of the informational revolution. Recently authors have even started approaching corporate spirituality from a perspective of creativity and innovational dynamism (DeGraff & Lawrence, 2002; Kwang, 2003; Lam & Law, 2008; McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1997), as referred in the economy of innovation, appealing to the teachings and principles of Schumpeter's theories (1934, 1939 e 1944).

Nowadays, this perspective is growing and spreading, as demonstrated by the example of the development and acceptance of coaching guidelines as a thrusting variable of intangible assets. This coaching perspective springs from the need to implement holistic models of competences, where the spiritual side is a pivotal variable in the pool of competences. On the other hand, the consequences over corporate outcomes may be surprising, as they frequently and uncontrollably burst from individual conscience.

We can state that the positive impacts of spirituality equally affect the society, the environment and still provide the global development of the individual (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Guillory, 2000; Neck & Milliman, 1994). As stated by Guillory (2000), such an aspect might thus be faced as an individual's internal conscience, aligning with the conditions of daily working practices and global conditions. It is within the context of such importance that for Naylor et al (1996) the absence of spirituality in an organization may be interpreted as an "existential illness", because it produces lack of significance in daily work. In fact, when the human "compass" of spirituality is not aligned with the organization, there is a higher probability for the establishment of an environment of apathy, neglect and slouch at work. Such a scenario may lead to a decrease in productivity and competitive weakness. Recently many papers have been published as a response to similar situations, demonstrating the benefits of spirituality in organizations, especially at the levels of honesty, trust, creativity, innovation and commitment (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001; Lam & Law, 2008; Wagner-Marsh & Conely, 1999). Such a invisible but alive aspect allows the organization to become stronger and more consistent, benefiting all who interact with it.

4. Metacompetences in the everyday life of a graduate worker

264 questionnaires were gathered between March 2nd and May 10th 2012. As 135 were not accurately filled out, they were disposed, resulting in our sample of n=129. Still, some respondents included in our sample did not answer all questions. Out of the 129 valid questionnaires, 119 were employed and 10 unemployed. The largest part of our sample is made of women, total of 87, corresponding to 67,4% and only 42 men, corresponding to 32,6% of respondents.

As stated by Guillory (2000), it was first assumed that spirituality is related to a person's internal conscience. Therefore, we appreciated the graduates' sensitivity and ability to listen, hear and understand the other, their ability to make decisions, adopt a responsible stance and work ethics, as well as critical and participative spirit and self-control. It seems to us these are relevant domains in corporate environment and spirituality values in particular and meta-competences in general. Table 2 gives us the descriptive statistics of average and standard deviation for those variables.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Capability and trust in decision making	129	5,64	1,267
Responsible attitude at work	129	6,33	1,155
Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	129	5,60	1,349
Making an ethical commitment at work	129	5,98	1,305
Ability to listen to others	129	5,71	1,383
Critical and cooperative spirit	129	5,65	1,297
Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	129	5,05	1,351

Source: Own elaboration

By analysing the data on table 2 one can verify that, on average, the answers are generally quite positive, since the average results vary between 5.05 and 6.33, in a scale of [1 and 7]. It is also shown that the respective standard deviations are relatively close to one another, which is translated into dispersion in the average results.

On a second stage, we analysed the answers, grouped according to age group and net monthly income, for the following variables:

- (i) capability and trust in decision making,
- (ii) responsible attitude at work,
- (iii) motivation and enthusiasm for and at work,
- (iv) making an ethical commitment at work,
- (v) ability to listen to others,
- (vi) critical and cooperative spirit,
- (vii) tendency to have high levels of self-assurance.

It was our goal to check for a significant difference in graduates' answers and feelings regarding their physical maturity. Therefore, we stratified population in the following age groups: (i) up to the age of 24, (ii) aged 25 to 34, (iii) aged 35 to 44, (iv) aged 45 to 54 and (v) over the age of 55, according to table 3.

According to table 3 we can verify that the external echelons, which is to say the youngest (up to the age of 24) and the oldest (over the age of 55) answer in a less positive form. The average obtained from the variables for these age groups is similar to the average reference rate which would be 4, though all are on its right. Simultaneously, a greater dispersion around the average value for the same age groups is verifiable through the standard deviation, while the opposite is verified in the remaining age groups.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, by age groups

Age	Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Up to 24years	Capability and trust in decision making	13	5.00	1.581
	Responsible attitude at work	13	5.54	1.854
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	13	4.92	1.605
	Making an ethical commitment at work	13	5.00	1.958
	Ability to listen to others	13	4.46	1.450
	Critical and cooperative spirit	13	4.69	1.601
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	13	4.08	1.498
	Valid N (listwise)	13		
From 25 to 34 years	Capability and trust in decision making	77	5.82	1.022
	Responsible attitude at work	77	6.48	0.940
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	77	5.79	1.139
	Making an ethical commitment at work	77	6.09	1.149
	Ability to listen to others	77	5.95	1.099
	Critical and cooperative spirit	77	5.77	1.111
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	77	5.22	1.221
	Valid N (listwise)	77		
From 35 to 44 years	Capability and trust in decision making	26	5.38	1.444
	Responsible attitude at work	26	6.50	0.648
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	26	5.50	1.393
	Making an ethical commitment at work	26	6.08	1.017
	Ability to listen to others	26	5.69	1.619
	Critical and cooperative spirit	26	5.65	1.355
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	26	4.96	1.455
	Valid N (listwise)	26		
From 45 to 54 years	Capability and trust in decision making	9	6.33	0.866
	Responsible attitude at work	9	6.33	1.118
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	9	5.33	1.500
	Making an ethical commitment at work	9	6.44	0.527
	Ability to listen to others	9	6.00	1.323
	Critical and cooperative spirit	9	6.33	0.500
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	9	5.44	0.882
	Valid N (listwise)	9		
Over than 55 years	Capability and trust in decision making	3	4.33	3.055
	Responsible attitude at work	3	4.33	3.055
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	3	5.00	3.464
	Making an ethical commitment at work	3	5.00	3.464
	Ability to listen to others	3	4.00	2.646
	Critical and cooperative spirit	3	4.33	3.055
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	3	4.00	2.646
	Valid N (listwise)	3		

Source: Own elaboration

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics, according to net monthly income

Group	Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Up to 499€	Capability and trust in decision making	17	5.06	1.676
	Responsible attitude at work	17	5.35	1.835
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	17	4.88	1.900
	Making an ethical commitment at work	17	5.35	1.835
	Ability to listen to others	17	5.29	1.829
	Critical and cooperative spirit	17	4.94	1.784
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	17	4.59	1.805
	Valid N (listwise)	17		
From 500€ to 749€	Capability and trust in decision making	28	5.36	1.420
	Responsible attitude at work	28	6.46	0.881
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	28	5.54	1.319
	Making an ethical commitment at work	28	5.89	1.133
	Ability to listen to others	28	5.68	1.362
	Critical and cooperative spirit	28	5.39	1.449
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	28	4.61	1.370
	Valid N (listwise)	28		
From 750€ to 999€	Capability and trust in decision making	31	5.77	0.920
	Responsible attitude at work	31	6.32	0.909
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	31	5.81	0.980
	Making an ethical commitment at work	31	6.03	1.224
	Ability to listen to others	31	5.90	0.908
	Critical and cooperative spirit	31	5.81	0.910
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	31	5.19	1.167
	Valid N (listwise)	31		
From 1000€ to 1499€	Capability and trust in decision making	28	6.14	0.803
	Responsible attitude at work	28	6.79	0.499
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	28	6.07	1.120
	Making an ethical commitment at work	28	6.43	0.879
	Ability to listen to others	28	6.14	1.145
	Critical and cooperative spirit	28	5.93	1.016
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	28	5.36	1.062
	Valid N (listwise)	28		
Over than 1500€	Capability and trust in decision making	23	5.61	1.469
	Responsible attitude at work	23	6.30	1.363
	Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	23	5.30	1.428
	Making an ethical commitment at work	23	5.91	1.505
	Ability to listen to others	23	5.35	1.722
	Critical and cooperative spirit	23	5.83	1.302
	Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	23	5.17	1.337
	Valid N (listwise)	23		

Source: Own elaboration

Analysing the data, we believe both the youngest group (up to the age of 24) and the oldest group (over the age of 55) deserve a more careful analysis as, compared to the remaining, both groups demonstrate lack of nobility, positive attitude, trust, motivation, ethical commitment, ability and willingness to listen to others. They also reveal little critical spirit, cooperation, low self-esteem and trust. To supplement our curiosity on graduate's opinion on soft skills, we later studied the responses according

to net monthly income. Our purpose here focused on verifying if the monthly income affected their answers or if they were significantly different according to income, with statistical data on table 4.

Through the data we can see that the lowest average and the higher standard deviation are observed in the lowest income group, which is, income up to 499 €. All the remaining income groups present quiet significant average values and lower standard deviations, except for the group over 1500€, whose standard deviations are the second highest.

Generally speaking, the weak score of motivation and enthusiasm for and at work suggests the need for further reflection, because the absence of these aspects within the organization neutralizes the impulse for creativity, proper problem solving and the increase of commitment, among others. Also, the presence of critical and cooperative spirit presents low average results, same for the variable self-assurance. Since these are key ingredients for better performances in the organization, data can demonstrate a less positive aspect which urges to be eradicated.

Table 5: Correlations Matrix (Spearman's coefficients)

	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)	(I)	(J)
(A) Capability and trust in decision making	1.000									
(B) Responsible attitude at work	0.476 **	1.000								
(C) Motivation and enthusiasm for and at work	0.571 **	0.521 **	1.00 0							
(D) Making an ethical commitment at work	0.310 **	0.464 **	0.51 1**	1.000						
(E) Ability to listen to others	0.413 **	0.407 **	0.50 9**	0.656 **	1.000					
(F) Critical and cooperative spirit	0.378 **	0.455 **	0.51 0**	0.524 **	0.460* *	1.000				
(G) Tendency to have high levels of self-assurance	0.461 **	0.222 *	0.46 4**	0.298 **	0.416* *	0.502* *	1.00			
(H) Age	0.075	0.038	0.03 6	0.125	0.155	0.175* 6	0.10	1.000		
(I) Gender	0.026	0.221 *	0.14 7	0.320 **	0.254* *	0.231* *	-0.098	-0.077	1.000	
(J) Net Monthly income	0.186 *	0.247 **	0.09 2	0.180 *	0.062	0.218* *	0.196 *	0.498* *	- 0.157 *	1.0

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Source: Own elaboration

On a later stage we studied the degree of association between the variables in analysis and added the variables (i) age, (ii) gender and (iii) net monthly income, as demonstrated by table 5.

We verified that, according to the Spearman's coefficient, there is a positive and statistically significant association at a 0.05 level between the variables tendency to have high levels of self-assurance and responsible attitude at work. In all remaining qualitative variables (A, B, C, D, E and F) the correlation is positive and statistically significant at a 0.01 level. The association between variables age and critical and cooperative spirit is positive and statistically significant. For the remaining associations with variable age, there is no evidence of significant relevance. Concerning the association between variable gender and the remaining, there is already evidence of statistical relevance with variables (i) responsible attitude at work, (ii) making an ethical commitment at work, (iii) ability to listen to others and (iv) critical and cooperative spirit. The variable monthly net income reveals lack of significance with variables motivation and enthusiasm for and at work and ability to listen to others, showing significance to all others.

At a certain point, though, our attention was focused on analysing answers concerning variables of the spiritual domain, crossing trust and honesty values, according to Wagner-Marsh & Conely (1999). Therefore, we selected questions Q14.10 (responsible attitude towards work), Q14.14 (making an ethical commitment at work) and Q14.29 (tendency to have high levels of self-assurance).

The age group over the age of 55 presents the lowest average, most of them being modest values when compared with other echelons, and their standard deviations are the highest. Nevertheless, it is a not a very significant echelon, given the limited number of respondents. Generally, the remaining echelons show higher averages and lower standard deviations. The age group up to the age of 24 features the recent graduates and those who have little cumulative experimental patrimonial value. Since the age group over 55 may be translated as a pre-retirement situation, one can assume that some answers are less consistent and more divergent from the numbers of spiritual capital, as well as less aware of the importance of the remaining meta-competences.

It is interesting to see that there is a higher female pre-disposition to the perception and creation of immaterial patrimonial environments. Though showing sensitivity and an open mind (Lam & Law, 2008), men are more resistant to practicing such values. Unemployed people are also more sceptical and react in a less positive way than employed graduates.

Answers also demonstrate inconsistent behaviors according to the income echelon. Yet, considering the results, our attention is drawn to the variable tendency to have high levels of self-assurance. Its outcome is very modest when compared to the remaining variables. As this could be a revolving variable in structuring the remaining skills in the dynamics of sustainability, productivity and performance, it seems motivating to continue studying it. Since we stand before graduate collaborators, we find it relevant to analyse it inside and outside the organization, as these are knowledge workers and important elements in its diffusion.

We even believe the discussion should be broadened to University in order to be reflected on students' curriculum and academic record (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011), training them for a labor market demanding in behaviors and soft skills, since academic knowledge, linked to hard skills, are proving insufficient in a labor market rich in information and an economy based on knowledge.

5. Discussion and reflection on the future of competences: the role of higher education

Considering the current context of behavioral and structural change of all economic institutions, and hoping to contribute for reflecting on social well-being, which necessarily means an efficient resource allocation, we find it relevant to ask:

- (i) Are teaching institutions, especially higher education ones, entrepreneurial and do they offer a curriculum which highlights the attributes of meta-competences, as suggested by the informational revolution?
- (ii) Are higher education institutions prepared to develop and implement strategies focusing on the needs of social agents and transfer of global knowledge?

Such questions are already underlined in the spirit of Entrepreneurship education, which has recently been strongly publicized. The importance of goals in training and educational structures is already debated here, and it is considered an input *par excellence*. Their guidelines also show and underline other considered key requirements, such as diverse skills to create an open and particular mentality (Anderson & Jack, 2008). Since it is also related to lifelong training and to key competences, the guidelines focus on the role of soft skills in adult education, particularly higher education, since higher education institutions are considered the best place and the best space for students to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences for an entrepreneurial environment (Adcroft et al, 2005; McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011).

These aspects are also part of the guidelines from the European Council of March 2005. On this matter, Bonnet (2012) believes it is necessary to promote entrepreneurship amongst students and adds that training fostering such spirit must take place from primary school up to university, providing students with creative skills and self-assuring, develop critical spirit and further raise awareness to socially responsible attitudes and behaviors. Hence, Audretsch et al (2006) sees entrepreneurship as a knowledge filter, because when generic skills are linked with specific skills, the individual may resort to abstraction, analyse problems, come up with proper solutions, identify behavior patterns understand different types of relationship and filter information. In this process, nonetheless, generic skills of social character, which follow the individual along his/her professional career, play a key role in structuring empathy, followed by the development of group work, commitment and empathic knowledge (Yukl, 2002).

The role of empathic committed behavior with peers and with the sustainable company development seems to match responsible attitudes at work, ethical commitment at work, confident spirit and self-assurance, ability and confidence in decision making,

among others. Such feelings are applied in corporate everyday life, as our respondents demonstrate in our questionnaire (see Spearman correlation matrix on table 4).

Such qualitative variables expand a graduate's pool of competences, taken as reference at work by further elements. In fact, when an individual shows responsibility and ethical commitment at work, a sign of trust is sent to the corporate community. If aspects such as empathic relationship, tolerance towards diversity and multiculturalism and insight in making conscientious and convenient decisions are added to it, the individual becomes a role model for the peers, leading them into a voluntary conversion towards corporate common goals (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011). Nevertheless, if this collaborator works as an inspiration for the remaining colleagues revealing trust and encouragement, his/her own attitude will improve, and so will corporate assets and productivity.

Other soft skill variables work as an impulse in suiting professional behaviors and personal performance, such as synthesis, analysis, spirit of communion, critical and cooperative spirit, motivational and leadership skills, among others. A question then arises: shouldn't the critical and cooperative spirit be fostered and encouraged throughout the academic course? Couldn't this critical and constructive attitude lead the individual in the search for further knowledge, particularly complementary and generic apprenticeship? Given the role played by the teaching and training system in the development and transfer of skills, Kwang (2003), Conway et al (2010), Sharan (2002), Lam & Law (2008) and Whitty & Willmott (1991) believe it is necessary to develop certain aspects in the student, such as intellectual resources, imaginative and creative skills, understanding their judgments, actions and problem solving skills, their communicative abilities and relationships. The authors also consider this concern reflects the need to provide visibility to skill transfer. This topic needs a new reflection on students' academic course as well as on the economic and social search for abilities and skills. Like Gelderen (2010), this guideline even leads us into questioning the meaning of entrepreneurship in the educational system and if curricular plans are aware of this theme. The importance of such problematic is as big as human's conscience for a society where the importance of being should be greater than the importance of having and doing, philosophy which is perfectly aligned with the fundamentals of coaching.

6. Conclusion

Competence is related to the individual's ability to take risk, to behave beyond the rules, to take over situations in different moments, to be responsible and recognized by the peers. This is a humanist perspective. On the other hand, the sociological perspective on approaching competences is also relevant. It believes new competences are proliferating in corporate and educational worlds, namely through its use to create public policies of employment and employability focused on flexibility, personnel and resource management, entrepreneurship, among others. Such approach is quite pertinent as it also part of the society as generator of social cohesion and well-being. Due to the complementarity of insights on new competences, it is our belief that the generator does not belong to the sociological, philosophical, psychological, economical, administrative, educational domains, but to a complex social generator

which requires interaction between all areas of knowledge, given the impact they have on each other and mainly due to endogenous effects, making it an incomplete concept.

In order to contribute to an academic change, the curriculum should lead students to: (i) stimulate their critical and cooperative spirit, (ii) develop the taste and need to search for further knowledge, (iii) create awareness on ethical, critical and cooperative behaviors, (iv) awake the interest for intangible capital assets, (v) lead to tolerant abilities and behaviors of compromise, commitment, companionship, sharing, cooperation, group work, among others. It is a multiplicative variable of individual performance and corporate competitiveness. This guideline to immateriality is a cornerstone to corporate sustainability and social cohesion and inclusion, with graduate answers already revealing awareness to this matter. Greater organizational outcomes will come from more awareness of these perspectives, with positive external economies spreading through society and increasing social well-being.

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