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## PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF THE QUALIFIED ECONOMIST IN THE LABOUR MARKET

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### **Abstract**

*Today, professionals with an economics degree are in demand in the Ukrainian labour market, as there is a need for them at enterprises, establishments and organisations of almost all branches of economic activity. In the meantime, the economists' functions are now broadening due to the increase of current requirements for the quality and results of work, particularly for that of economic orientation.*

**Key words:** *professional competence; professionalism; specialists-economists; the labor market; labor force; higher education; professional functions; the strategy of professionalisation.*

**Statement of the problem in the context of modern pedagogical science.** Apart from traditional demands for analytical skills, such kind of specialists should acquire some practical skills and abilities in order to work in different social and economic spheres of public life in the country. For example, there is an ever increasing need in highly qualified specialists in strategic business management, formation of investment projects, introduction of new technologies and innovations, etc. These changes are due, in large part, to the fact that employers gradually revise their attitude to staff in general, as the latter is now recognized as an important competitive advantage of companies in the market. For this reason, the requirements to an economist's professional competence become higher that results in bigger relevant standards of professional higher education and in the need to introduce changes in a training system for such specialists.

**Analysis of recent studies and publications.** The entry of Ukraine into the European and global socio-cultural space presupposes changes in training process of professional economists that are in demand in the labour market, namely the rise of requirements to the formation of their professional competence. The problem of professional competence development was studied in the works of N. Bibik, O. Bida, L. Vashchenko, I. Zymnia, B. Elkonina, N. Kuzmina, M. Kademiia, L. Koval, A. Kolomiiets, O. Lokshyna, A. Markovs, L. Mitina, O. Ovcharuk, E. Pavlyutenkova, L. Paraschenko, A. Pometun, I. Prokopenko, S. Rakova, I. Rodyhina, O. Savchenko, H. Tarasenko, S. Trubacheva, A. Khutorska, M. Choshanova, V. Shahova and others. Meanwhile, there is still no generally accepted definition of the term, as researchers mostly examine only some separate parts of this issue.

The analysis of scientific literature allows to identify such areas of research concerning the problem of professional identity formation, as psychological activity theory, relation between activity and personal development (I. Bekh, L. Vygotskyi, O. Leontiev, G. Shchedrovtskyi and others); conceptual aspects of education development in Ukraine at the present stage (V. Andrushchenko, I. Ziazun, B. Korolov, V. Luhovyi, V. Palamarchuk and others); development of education systems and professional education in Ukraine and abroad (N. Abashkina, H. Kozlakova, K. Korsak, V. Kremen, E. Lusik, V. Maiboroda, N. Nykalo and others); aspects of professional training and elements of professional education (V. Andrushchenko, H. Ball, V. Bezpalko, O. Oleksiuk, M. Ievnukh and others), justification of modern requirements for student training (V. Bondar, A. Piekhota, S. Sysoieva and others).

Despite the multidimensional nature of scientific studies on the formation of an individual's professional competence, many issues of this problem remain unresolved. Currently, there is a contradiction between the level of university graduates' professional competence and the requirements of the modern labour market; between the processes of globalisation and the informatization of society and the level of modern specialist training; between students' preferences and

abilities and the existing education paradigm. Therefore, the following issues were not sufficiently covered in the scientific literature: Specificity and diversity of specialist's professional functions; Uneven development of labour market segments in Ukraine; Use of new technologies and advanced methods of economists' work; Factors of effective formation of specialist professional competence; Analysis of modern approaches to training competent professionals in accordance with European and international standards, etc.

*The aim* of this article is to study the content and structure of professional competence of qualified economists in the modern labour market of Ukraine.

Due to the specified aim, it is appropriate to cover the following research objectives:

- to define the concept of professional competence and basic stages of its formation;
- to determine structural components of professional competence;
- to outline the areas of formation and the levels of professional competence acquisition;
- to realise a comparative study of the main economist's professional duties according to the list of functional responsibilities with their actual appraisal.

*Summary of the main research ideas.* The key concept of an individual's professional competence is a professionalism, approaches to which vary depending on the work content for different jobs. The scientific literature regards a "professional" as a one who chose any activity as its profession; a specialist of his/her craft. This definition in itself contains contradictions.

Who should be considered as a professional: someone, who has obtained a degree in a given specialty, or someone, who has reached the height of skill in this occupation? Certainly, it is quite important when the focus is on the second meaning — a master of his/her craft. Consequently, the "professionalism" is defined as a profound learning of profession, a high quality performance of professional tasks, high professional standards compliance, and so forth. Thus,

professionalism is the characteristic of a personality that has a set of capacities, knowledge, abilities, and skills, necessary for result-oriented, substantive, productive work [4, p. 56].

It is obvious that the researchers put the same or at least similar meaning in the concept of “competence” and “professionalism”. A professional competence generally means an ideal knowledge of his/her craft, the highest development of professional skills. Today, the boundaries of professional competence extend to the ability to take independent professional decisions, the ability to effectively solve new unusual tasks, and so on (i.e. now, creativity is taken into account too). Professional competence also demonstrates the level of education, life and professional values.

Professional competence is not only an integral part of the socialisation process, but also an indicator of how successfully it passes. The evolution of professional competence is an active process that continues throughout a man’s working life; unfolds gradually according to the individual’s professional development that acquires new forms at every stage of a specialist’s formation. The competence passes a number of stages in its formation: professional adaptation, professional identification, professional individualisation and professional personification.

The stage of professional adaptation is characterized by the process of adapting to the profession and professional responsibilities in changing social and cultural conditions. Professional adaptation has two forms: active — when a person seeks to interact with the social environment (which defines his/her speciality), and passive -when he/she does not try to influence this environment. The main feature of professional identification stage is that a novice-specialist participates in the system of professional relations that means he or she becomes aware of being part of a particular professional group, has a certain professional orientation and obtains his/her professional and social status. The sense of professional individualisation stage is the formation of professional content — those professional and personal qualities and traits that make professionals really unique, interesting and useful to others. The professional personification

stage involves vocational self-actualization and self-identity of an individual as a professional. It is clear that the personification professional stage plays a very important role in the formation of an individual's professional competence, as it is related to his/her own activities aimed at professional development and formation.

The level of professional competence formation is a result of the combination of an individual's professional experience, a consequence of its accumulation during his/her professional life and professional activity. Professional competence is a specialist's integral feature that is manifested in the following aspects:

- 1) content-oriented (knowledge, experience, skills, powers);
- 2) object-oriented (specific sphere of activity);
- 3) level-oriented (focus on a particular fullness of knowledge, experience, skills, powers, that allows to determine the appropriate level of competence);
- 4) juridical-legal (an opportunity to be engaged in a certain professional activity may be fixed) [3, p. 14].

In a personal sense, professional competence is a capacity in which, at all its integrity, it is possible to single out separate components: cognitive-value component; emotional and motivational; interactive and communicative; behavioural and activity-related component.

The cognitive-value component of professional competence structure supposes some professional knowledge, ideas and system of person's professional values, the understanding of the significance of his/her vocation in terms of social reality, professional mentality formation.

The emotional and motivation component is characterized by emotional attitude to the occupation and motives of professional self-determination and professional activity, interest in the methods and results of work; feeling of satisfaction in his/her job. The leading reasons are acmeological, inner factors that contribute to the need for self-development, creativity and self-improvement.

The interactive and communicative component provides for productive communication with individuals and groups (with

which the profession presupposes some interaction), performance of different roles of social communication (that are outlined by the occupation).

The sense of behavioural and activity-related component demonstrates the degree of a value-related attitude to the professional occupation regarding the behaviour and activities which are determined by professional abilities, skills and the place in a company.

The above-mentioned structure of professional competence stipulates its functions: informative, subjective, life-futurological, reflexive, communicative, activity-related.

The informative function stands for the existence of knowledge on work methods, attitude to professional objects and working environment.

The subjective function is characterized by subjective value system, which dictate socially accepted behaviours within the professional occupation.

The nature of the life-futurological function consists in the ability to project their own future actions and foresee the consequences of their actions regarding further professional activity.

The reflexive function is aimed at professional self-analysis and self-assessment of his/her actions and deeds made by an individual as a professional.

The communicative function is defined by the ability to effectively interact with others, the circle of whom is determined by a professional occupation.

The activity-related function ensures applying gained professional experience both indirectly and directly at practice.

In view of the assumption that the professional competence is an ability acquired by an individual, it is necessary to define the factors that contribute to its formation: an inclination to a chosen profession; a conscious career choice; participation in professional activities; subjective professional interaction; continuous self-education.

The inclination to a chosen profession provides for those psychophysiological and psychosocial properties that are required to master successfully the speciality.

The conscious career choice is characterised by a free choice of an individual according to his/her interests and abilities, since inner motivation, which is based on self-interest, is the driving force of professional competence acquisition. This factor also implies readiness to meet certain professional standards and to act within professional and ethical code.

Participation in professional activities presupposes the active involvement of an individual in their various types that means obtaining new knowledge, acquiring professional skills, gaining new experience, that is to say, contributes to the fastest professional development, and therefore creates favourable conditions for professional competence formation.

Subjective interaction is based on the idea of interaction between partners-professionals on equal terms, taking into account the inherent worth of every person as an individual and as a professional. Subjective professional interaction stands for an interaction at different levels:

- between colleagues who have the same level of experience (exchanging views, searching for new effective ways of solving professional tasks);
- between an experienced colleague and novice (transferring and mastering in a creative way advanced professional experience, combining experience and fresh professional ideas);
- between a specialist and a client (gaining direct professional experience, his/her professional special skills).

Continuous self-education ensures constant self-renewal and improvement of existing professional knowledge and skills as well as mastering of new professional technologies.

All five factors, taken together, create favourable conditions for the formation of a specialist's professional competence. The absence of even one of these factors slows down the process of professional competence formation, and sometimes even makes it impossible.

Besides, a diploma in a particular specialty does not make a professional from a separate individual and by no means indicates the level of professional competence. The diploma gives only the right to practice a particular professional activity and singles out the range of positions provided by a specialty.

It is noteworthy that the level of an individual's professional competence determines the success of the process of self-realization, socialisation; affects the realisation of his or her own life scenario, successful career building; indicates his or her personal success rate and the degree of subjective sense of self-efficacy, confidence and presence of leadership skills.

Professional competence formation takes place in three main spheres:

1) consciousness (what is comprehended by a specialist and consciously adopted as a result of reflection, understanding, comparison);

2) subconscious (what a person has learned at the level of professional stereotypes and he or she has taken as a guide to action);

3) superconscious (what is gained during a powerful professional activation and then becomes an individual style).

Apart from the specified content, structure, functions and spheres, one can also define its manifestations, limits and levels in the model of professional competence. The model of professional competence can be complemented by a number of manifestations, such as strategic, tactical, functional, managerial, specific and situational.

The strategic manifestation is characterized by a global and systemic thinking, problem solving ability and building of a secure relationship. The tactical one shows up as an inclination to analytical thinking and usage of a complex approach to their duties; the ability to learn different ways of self-expression and self-development; to identify and classify problems, to generate options for their solving. The functional one is manifested in the ability to make decisions, to be proactive, flexible in work, to apply effectively professional knowledge and skills. Managerial manifestation provides for



organisational talent, power of persuasion, a director's authority and manager's behaviour. The specific manifestation is described in terms of professional knowledge and an ability to implement it at a quite high level as well as a capacity to plan his/her future professional development. The situational manifestation stands for an ability to act in accordance with a situation assessment. [2, p. 16].

A specialist's competence is ensured by what kind of limits of his/her education, he/she tries to set. The limits of competence may be defined by a range of specific issues that determine the breadth of a specialist's accomplishment, his/her competency regarding his/her working functions and the workplace; in his/her own professional field (if one takes it in a broader sense of meaning); in a narrow range of professional issues; in related types of professional activity and related professional functions; for the purposes of the mission, strategy and more.

When the limits of competence have eventually shifted into the sphere of professional experience, it becomes possible or, on the other hand, complicated to move to a new level of competence, basing on a gained professional experience. Being at a certain level of competence, a professional has to understand that he needs to climb to a higher stage of professional development. This is true for a self-actualiser.

The level of professional competence is determined by several criteria: gnostic worldview, professional values, self-reliance, dynamism, effectiveness, conformity. Therefore, it makes sense to offer the following levels of professional competence that may be used for an employee performance appraisal: primitive, standard, optimal and unique.

1. The primitive level is a minimum level of competence based on fragmentary professional knowledge and skills.

2. The standard level is characterized by systematic professional knowledge and a set of universal skills..

3. The optimal level is a higher than average level of competence that is defined not only by systemic professional knowledge, skills, professional experience, but it also depends on certain personal

abilities, personal character traits, and resources of mental power, etc.

4. The unique level is an expert's level specified by a high degree of professional culture that is grounded on systematic profound knowledge, unique skills and abilities.

Thus, professional competence is a combination of professional knowledge, skills and psychosocial characteristics (required for a particular occupation), which allow to execute professional responsibilities at a high level and apply creatively their knowledge in problem situations. For example, according to the list of functional responsibilities, the main professional duties of economists are the following functions [1, p. 32]: participating in business projects; selecting the team members; providing administrative support to human resources; staff adaptation; organising staff education; making a staff performance appraisal; motivating the team members; reporting; organising corporate events; working with the media; creating personnel reserve; supporting social insurance programs; handling payroll; travelling on business trips and more.

However, education and vocational training program for economics specialists does not contain in a sufficient way learning skills for organising staff recruitment, adaptation, professional skills training, development of various projects and so on. This problem may be solved, providing the intensification of education within training forms, business games, individual exercises, which permit to involve students in scientific work, to engage them in executing creative tasks, etc.

It is noteworthy that modern professional economist are expected to not only achieve the general training level, but also develop personal skills, including communication ones, receive legal and psychological training. The latter requires knowledge of psychology, law and labour law, computer literacy and other special things.

Since areas of economic activity expand, qualified economists should master new knowledge and skills that are in demand in the labour market. Nevertheless, today the unification of job titles and professional training levels reduces objective evaluation of the

content component, level and scope of functional responsibilities, which are set by the employer. However, there is an objective need for systemising, classifying different ways of formulating job titles that will allow mostly expanding on professional competence of the specialists of this branch. Finding a right job title should be based on practical implementation of professional activity forms and areas, taking into account their depth, specific nature and this job's place in the general corporate management structure. In particular, the use of the term "qualified economist" in a job title should be conditioned by the degree of responsibility, status and the sphere of influence in the completely corporate management structure. Matching between the vacancy's name proposed by an employer and its content will help adequately identify the position according to its probable functions, increase efficiency of employment and redeployment of staff in the market, reduce time and cost for staff recruitment and so forth.

The analysis of vacancies in the labour market in relation to professional economists shows that the requirements which are put forward to them vary a lot [1, p. 32]: staff recruitment skills; computer literacy skills, knowledge of special programs; HR administration skills; communication skills; knowledge of a labour code; sense of responsibility; working experience in this sphere; result orientation; ability to work with a large amount of information; higher education; diligence; friendliness; fluent English; ability to create employee appraisal systems; ability to make decisions on one's own; emotional stability (stress resistance).

According to the research results, the main functional responsibilities of qualified economists were defined: calculating working time; overviewing the labour market; generating employee schedules; participating in business projects;

ensuring internal communication; rotating employees; fulfilling marketing research; consulting online; optimizing organizational culture; executing functions of a secretary or office manager; studying the psychological climate in the team;

developing performance indicators; resolving conflicts; supporting the internal site [1, p. 33].

The principle areas of activities, tasks and functions of professional economists at the Ukrainian companies were summarized by the HR National Union in the 2010 research review [1, p. 33]. They defined the main areas of activities, which generally coincide with the above list of economist's professional duties, though they have some differences: methods of the construction and implementation of new technologies; knowledge of the law; knowledge of psychology and pedagogy; general management skills; knowledge of the economics; methods of teaching and development of personality; computer skills; communication methods; methods of personnel administration; methodologies of development of professional's competences; recruitment methods; methods of management according to set goals;

theory of quality management; other knowledge and skills.

It is quite complicate to make the unbiased estimate of the labour market's current state and hire qualified economists due to the following factors:

1) absence or unreliability of statistical data from HR departments;

2) a significant number of jobs and types of employment in the economic field;

3) a variety of economic activities at enterprises, organisations, institutions, having various forms of ownership;

4) mismatch between qualified training of professional economists and modern conditions of professional activity, etc.

***Research conclusions and perspectives.*** Only a detailed study of the nature, structure, functions and components of professional competence of qualified economists in the labour market will enable to resolve up-to-date problems of a specialist's professional competence and permit to make a methodologically correct choice in the field of various forms and means of training of this branch's specialists, to form the appropriate strategy to professionalise workforce competence in the development of higher education in Ukraine.

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## **ПРОФЕСІОНАЛЬНА КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТЬ СПЕЦІАЛІСТІВ- ЕКОНОМІСТІВ В СФЕРІ РИНОКА ТРУДА**

### **Аннотация**

*В условиях расширения направлений экономической деятельности, которые видоизменяются сегодня под влиянием изменчивых обстоятельств, возникает необходимость в овладении новыми знаниями, умениями и навыками, которые имеют спрос на рынке труда Украины. Ведь на сегодня унификация профессиональной подготовки специалиста снижает объективную оценку содержательной составляющей, уровня и масштаба функциональных обязательств, перспектив дальнейшего возрастания в направлении непрерывного процесса обучения и удовлетворения спроса на квалифицированную рабочую силу. Решение современных проблемных вопросов профессиональной сущности, структуры и составных компетентности специалистов в сфере рынка труда даст возможность осуществить методически правильный выбор во многовариантном поле форм и средств подготовки специалистов одного направления, сформировать соответствующую стратегию профессионализации компетентности рабочей силы в условиях развития высшего образования в Украине.*

**Ключевые слова:** профессиональная компетентность; профессионализм; специалисты-экономисты; рынок труда; рабочая сила; высшее образование; профессиональные функции; стратегия профессионализации.

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**ПРОФЕСІЙНА КОМПЕТЕНТНІСТЬ ФАХІВЦІВ-ЕКОНОМІСТІВ  
У СФЕРІ РИНКУ ПРАЦІ**

**Анотація**

В умовах розширення напрямів економічної діяльності, що видозмінюються під впливом змінних обставин сьогодення, виникає потреба в опануванні нових знань, умінь і навичок, які мають попит на ринку праці України. Адже на сьогодні уніфікація професійної підготовки фахівця знижує об'єктивну оцінку змістовної складової, рівня та масштабу функціональних обов'язків, перспектив подальшого зростання у напрямі неперервного процесу навчання та задоволення попиту на кваліфіковану робочу силу. Вирішення сучасних проблемних питань професійної сутності, структури та складових компетентності спеціалістів у сфері ринку праці надасть змогу здійснити методично правильний вибір у багатоваріантному полі форм і засобів підготовки фахівців даного напрямку, сформувати відповідну стратегію професіоналізації компетентності робочої сили в умовах розвитку вищої освіти в Україні.

**Ключові слова:** професійна освіта, професійна компетентність; професіоналізм; фахівці-економісти; ринок праці; робоча сила; вища освіта; професійні функції; стратегія професіоналізації.