

SOFT SKILLS EMPOWERING FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN TOURISM ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

Employers currently emphasise primarily the importance of the personal and social characteristics of employees, and focus less on their professional and business skills. Contrarily, employees often consider deep professional knowledge and skills to be their key strengths, and pay little attention to personal growth and the development of personal characteristics. The aim of the research is to compare the soft skills most frequently required by potential employers in job advertisements for the position of administrator to the employee soft skills predominantly identified by the students on the Tourism Administration course. A study designed to identify employer expectations was conducted in 2019 and 2021. In order to determine the opinions of students in 2021, a written questionnaire survey of higher education students on the Tourism Administration course was conducted. The analysis of the opinions of students, and an examination of employer expectations, demonstrate that employer expectations regarding the skills of potential employees, especially personal or soft skills, and student opinions, do not always match. The impact of the pandemic created a paradoxical situation in the labour market: before the pandemic, progressively more attention was being paid to employees' soft skills; in the post-pandemic world and working in a hybrid way in the labour market, not all personal skills remain important.

KEY WORDS: administration, career, soft skills, tourism.

Anotacija

Šiuo metu darbdaviai pirmiausia akcentuoja darbuotojų asmeninių ir socialinių savybių svarbą, mažiau dėmesio skirdami profesiniams ir verslo įgūdžiams. Tuo tarpu darbuotojai savo stipriosiomis pusėmis paprastai laiko profesines žinias ir įgūdžius, mažiau dėmesio skirdami asmeninių savybių ugdymui. Tyrimo tikslas – palyginti darbdavių darbo skelbimuose į turizmo administratoriaus pareigas dažniausia nurodomus socialinius emocinius (angl. *soft skills*) gebėjimus su būsimų darbuotojų – Turizmo administravimo studijų programos studentų turimais socialiniais emociniais gebėjimais. Siekdami nustatyti darbdavių lūkesčius, išanalizavome 2019–2021 metais Užimtumo tarnybos svetainėje patalpintus darbo skelbimus į turizmo administratoriaus pareigas. Siekiant nustatyti studentų nuomonę, 2021 m. atlikta turizmo administravimą studijuojančių aukštųjų mokyklų studentų anketinė apklausa raštu. Lyginamoji studentų nuomonių ir darbdavių lūkesčių analizė atskleidė, kad darbdavių lūkesčiai ir būsimų darbuotojų nuomonės dėl darbuotojų gebėjimų, ypač asmeninių ar socialinių emocinių, ne visada sutampa. Pandemijos poveikis sukūrė paradoksalią situaciją darbo rinkoje: iki pandemijos vis daugiau dėmesio buvo skiriama darbuotojų socialiniams emociniams gebėjimams, o pasaulyje po pandemijos ir dirbant hibridiniu būdu ne visi asmeniniai įgūdžiai išlieka svarbūs.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: administravimas, karjera, socialiniai emociniai įgūdžiai, turizmas.

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Introduction

Professional training and expertise or other solid skills that can generate quick returns offered by specialist employees have recently been the most sought-after competencies in the business world. Considering the rise in competitiveness, the requirements for employees' professional qualifications, existing skills, and abilities to develop them further and acquire new ones, are rapidly increasing too (Putra, Novitasari, Asbari, Purwanto, Iskandar, Hutagalung et al., 2020). Acquiring hard skills is straightforward. Hard skills can be readily self-taught, absorbed, developed and improved over time, both formally and informally. Acquiring and developing soft skills (social skills) is more complex, as their correlation with knowledge or competencies is limited. Despite the complexity of soft skills, they are recognised by employers as equally important or more important competencies than hard skills (Yan, Yinghong, Lui, Whiteside, Tsey, 2019; Shafie, Khuzzan, Mohyin, 2014). The concept of soft skills can be defined in various ways, but the interpretation is always notably alike. Based on research conducted by Shafie et al. (2014), Matteson, Anderson and Boyden (2016), and Cimatti (2016), in this study soft skills are defined as a set of characteristics, habits, attitudes and social skills that can provide better employment prospects and can be applicable to jobs in any field or activity. Soft skills can frequently single out an employee from many others with similar experience. Soft skills can also be defined as personal behaviour and a mindset that include personality traits, attitudes, inclinations, communication style, propensity, style of leadership, etc (Savanevičienė, Stukaitė, Šilingienė, 2008). Several research studies have been conducted to examine the importance of soft skills in different areas of activity and in different countries. Schleutker, Caggiano, Coluzzi and Luján (2019) studied the mandatory skills required by employers and their education potential in Italy and Finland by conducting in-depth interviews with 64 managers of companies operating in different industries. In their responses, the employers stressed that specific soft skills, particularly teamwork and the ability to progress, were imperative due to the increased competitive pressure. Researchers also focused on examining the need for soft skills in specific areas of activity, such as engineering and information technology (Matturro, Raschetti, Fontán, 2019; Holtkamp, Jokinen, Pawlowski, 2015; Stewart, Yeom, Stewart, 2020), finance and bookkeeping (Rebele, Pierre, 2019; Dolce, Federica, Maurizio, Chiara, 2020), medicine (Sancho-Cantus, Cubero-Plazas, Botella Navas, Castellano-Rioja, Cañabate Ros, 2023; Goldman, Wong, 2020; Myren, van der Aa, Pula, Scheele, 2019), and sport management (Budreikaitė, Kontautienė, Tamoševičienė, Grigolienė, 2021). The research findings obtained demonstrated unequivocally that the soft skills acquired by employees set them apart from their peers, and were

essential for excelling at performing direct duties in all areas of activity and at all levels. Thus, it is deemed crucial to design optimal conditions for the development of skills, particularly in the services sector. Consistent with research conducted by Shabir and Sharma (2019), soft skills are considered essential in the tourism sector. Having soft skills can also be a significant advantage in career development. Schleutker et al. (2019) also note that some soft skills have great potential for improvement; therefore, it is advisable to incorporate soft skills training in the study programmes of higher education institutions. A study by Carlisle, Ivanov and Dijkmans (2021) that was conducted based on the characteristics of the tourism and hospitality industry throughout Europe demonstrated the discernible impact of continuous competence assessment (Benaraba et al., 2022). This was further echoed in an analysis of the career planning perception and opportunities of tourism management students before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Magano et al. (2020) examined and defined the characteristics of generation Z in detail, focusing on personality traits, and emphasising strengths and weaknesses. The authors stressed that generation Z exhibited traits and strengths associated with soft skills, such as emotional intelligence, perseverance, commitment and communication; however, it lacked interpersonal relationship awareness, leadership and trust. Some of generation Z were also characterised by low self-esteem, impulsiveness and anxiety, and an inability to handle criticism.

Developing soft skills requires a conscious effort, persistent practice, and a commitment to self-improvement. At present, business and science experts are calling for the recognition of the significance and advantages of personal employee characteristics, or soft skills, within organisations. Furthermore, it is suggested that soft skills are renamed as powerful skills, or are defined using the term CORE (Competence in Organisational and Relational Effectiveness), (Cimatti, 2016; Vasanthakumari, 2019; Parlamis, Monnot, 2019).

The World Economic Forum (2020) identified that until 2020 problem-solving, critical thinking, creative thinking, people management, teamwork, emotional intelligence, evaluation and decision-making, service orientation, negotiation skills and flexibility were considered the most important employee skills. However, as stated by Wagner (2020), for the next 50 years, the position held in the labour market will be determined by the following seven personal characteristics: 1. critical thinking and problem-solving; 2. collaboration and influential leadership; 3. mobility and adaptation; 4. entrepreneurship and initiative; 5. effective oral and written communication; 6. information research and analysis; and 7. curiosity and creativity. In addition to research findings that identified the most important and desirable qualities of a future specialist, other equally important research analysed the perspective of a future specialist, the specialist's idea of his role in the labour market,

and the future employer's point of view. Succi and Canovi (2020) conducted a research study to examine and compare student and employer perceptions of the importance of soft skills in different European countries. The findings demonstrated that 86% of respondents believed the focus had shifted to soft skills over the past five to ten years. The study also revealed that the opinions of employers and students differ, with students prioritising hard skills, and not placing so much emphasis on the development of soft skills. The authors' claims are echoed by Sharma (2018), who points out that in today's global society, neglecting the development of soft skills results in a significantly reduced likelihood of employability. Furthermore, researchers (Shaheen, Mary, Aung, Thazin, 2019; Gruzdev, Kuznetsov, Tarkhanov, Kazakov, 2018; Calanca, Sayfullina, Minkus, Wagner, Malmi, 2019; Stankevičiūtė, Savanevičienė, 2018) recommend that companies and higher education institutions work together to not only raise student awareness of the importance of soft skills, but also to facilitate students taking on individual responsibility for acquiring and developing these essential skills to be able to continually adapt to the changing conditions of the labour market and improve their employability.

Thus, methodical studies of the labour market identify both predicted future demand for the level of specialists and their areas of expertise, and analyse the skills and abilities these specialists would benefit from having when making career plans. A research study conducted by the Employment Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (2019) demonstrated that young people who entered the labour market were most likely to lack the following skills: the ability to communicate and cooperate, the ability to learn from their own and others' experience, the ability to discuss, present, justify and defend their opinions, the ability to communicate fluently in one or two foreign languages, the ability to work in a multicultural environment, and the ability to complete projects and reports. Instead, when making career plans, young people focused on professional preparation and practical experience, arguing that these skills brought the greatest added value to the employer and returns to the individual.

Research problem. Employers currently emphasise primarily the importance of the personal and social characteristics of employees, and focus less on their professional and business skills. Contrarily, employees often consider a deep professional knowledge and skills as their key strengths, and pay little attention to personal growth and the development of personal characteristics. This creates a certain contradiction, and complicates career planning. So what is the correlation between the opinions of employers and future employees on the most important soft skills integral to the successful career of an employee?

The aim of the research is to compare the soft skills most frequently required by potential employers in job advertisements for the position of administrator

to the employee soft skills predominantly identified by students on the Tourism Administration course.

1. Materials and Methods

1.1. Research design

The expectations of employers for the position of administrator were determined by analysing job advertisements posted on the website of the Employment Service. The opinions of students of tourism administration were determined by conducting a questionnaire survey of higher education Tourism Administration students in writing. As specified by Shafie et al. (2014) and Cimatti (2016), all soft skills, both those found in job advertisements and those based on the opinions of higher education students, fall into one of five competence groups: result-oriented, team-oriented, thinking-oriented, emotional intelligence-oriented, loyalty and care-for-the-organisation-oriented.

Within the five categories, the personal characteristics that exemplify the soft skills identified by employers and students are classified.

1.2. Sample and data collection

A study designed to identify employer expectations was conducted in September 2019. In September 2020, a brief synopsis of employer opinions was conducted. Detailed data analysis was not included. To compare employer expectations before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, the former study was conducted again in September 2021.

To collect survey data, a content analysis of job advertisements posted on the Employment Service website¹ using the search keyword 'administration' was carried out. In September 2021, an analysis of 175 job advertisements, of which 108 corresponded to the role of administrator, was conducted. The data obtained was compared to the data collected in September 2019 as part of an analysis of 136 job advertisements for the role of administrator.

To determine the opinions of students in September 2021, a written questionnaire survey of higher education students on the Tourism Administration course was conducted. A structured questionnaire, which asked what personal characteristics, in the opinion of the respondents, would be the prerequisites for making a career plan for employment and a successful career in the acquired profession, was used. A total of 85 students participated in the survey, and 93% of the fully completed questionnaires returned were analysed. The survey participants were full-time

¹ <https://portal.uzt.lt/LDBPortal/Pages/ServicesForEmployees.aspx?>

and part-time students aged 20 to 27 years. A total of 92% of the respondents were female.

1.3. Data analysis

A network analysis of which concepts or declarative sentences (statements) relate to other concepts or declarative sentences (statements), and how they relate to each other, was applied to process the data reflecting employer expectations. It was assumed that the correlation between concepts and statements, their presence, direction, intensity and meaning reflect the most important aspects analysed in the study, i.e. employer expectations for the skills of employees.

To analyse the opinions of students, elements of descriptive statistics translating qualitative categories into quantitative data were used.

A systematic generalisation, where the available data and opinions are categorised and included in a certain system of regularities, was used to determine the existing correlation between employer and student (prospective employee) expectations of the skill set acquired by an employee in the field of tourism administration.

2. Results

When placing a recruitment advertisement, employers name the job position of administrator rather diversely; therefore, job advertisements for analysis were selected by considering job titles. Systematised and assigned to the corresponding group of soft skills, the job advertisements placed by employers identify the desired personal qualities of candidates, presented in Table 1.

An assessment of the advertisements posted on the Employment Service website determined that the total number of job advertisements for the position of administrator were similar in 2019 and 2021. However, in 2019 a total of 19.9% of the job advertisements indicated only the professional skills required. The remaining advertisements also identified preferred characteristics as presented in Table 1. An analysis of the content of the advertisements demonstrated that a total of 20 characteristics corresponding to soft skills were identified in 111 job advertisements. Most of the characteristics (6) were observed in the '*result-oriented*' group, the least (3) in the '*team-oriented*' group.

Table 1. The need for soft skills when planning a career in the position of a tourism administrator, expectations of employers

2019 m. N = 136			Com- petence group	2021 m. N = 108		
Characteristic	Freq.	Rel. freq., %		Character- istic	Freq.	Rel. freq., %
Diligence	31	22.8	Result- oriented	Organisational skills	24	22.2
Perfectionism	29	21.3		Self-starter	10	9.3
Organisational skills	27	19.9		Perfectionism	9	8.3
Self-starter	19	14.0		Reliability	8	7.4
Efficiency	19	14.0		Consciousness	5	4.6
Self-reliance	12	8.8		Self-reliance	4	3.7
				Consistency	2	1.9
Effective and engaging communication	111	81.6	Team- oriented	Effective and engaging communication	38	35.2
Team-player	99	72.8		Team-player	11	10.2
Approachability	37	27.2		Punctuality	2	1.9
Inquisitiveness	50	36.8	Thinking- oriented	Ability to see the bigger picture/perceptiveness	8	7.4
Creativity	49	36.0		Responsiveness	7	6.5
Ability to see the bigger picture/perceptiveness	32	23.5		Openness	6	5.6
Critical thinking	17	12.5		Creativity	3	2.8
				Flexibility	2	1.9
				Curiosity	1	0.9
				Perception	1	0.9

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2019 m. N = 136			Com- petence group	2021 m. N = 108		
Characteristic	Freq.	Rel. freq., %		Characte- ristic	Freq.	Rel. freq., %
Conflict manage- ment and resolution	83	61.0	Emotional intelligen- ce-orien- ted	Resilience/ emotional stability	5	4.6
Resilience/emotio- nal stability	51	37.5		Positive thinking	3	2.8
Proactiveness/opti- mism	39	28.7		Prominence	3	2.8
				Conflict manage- ment and resolution	1	0.9
				Courtesy	1	0.9
				Empathy	1	0.9
				Non-conf- lictual	1	0.9
				Non-aggres- sive	1	0.9
Obedience	97	71.3	Loyal- ty and care-for- the-orga- nisation- oriented	Honesty	6	5.6
Initiative	27	19.9		Cooperation	5	4.6
Enthusiasm	22	16.2		Obedience	1	0.9
Commitment	13	9.6		Initiative	1	0.9
				Discretion	1	0.9

The Covid-19 pandemic changed employee and employer opinions of the labour market and the organisation of work. As a result of the pandemic, there were references in job advertisements in 2021 to previously unspecified requirements or valuable employee skills, such as organisational skills, working remotely, performing technical work in Zoom meetings, and similar programmes. A total of 64.8% of the analysed advertisements indicated only professional skills as required, such as advanced IT knowledge, clerical knowledge, experience with a cash register, document administration, computer literacy, good typing skills, document processing, and document management. Only 35.2% of the advertisements for the role of administrator identified desirable personal qualities.

Conversely, the total number of characteristics indicated went up from 20 to 30, which is a 50% increase compared to 2019. The *'emotional intelligence-oriented'*

group dominated, with eight qualities from the group named. In 2019, there were three qualities in this group. The number of qualities identified remained unchanged only in the ‘*team-oriented*’ group. In both 2019 and 2021, this group presented three qualities, two of which are the same and are ranked in the same order: effective and engaging communication, and teamwork.

Student opinions on the importance of soft skills in making career plans are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The need for soft skills when making a career plan in the position of a tourism administrator

Student opinion <i>N</i> = 79			Competence group	Employer expectations, <i>N</i> = 38		
Characteristic	Freq.	Rel. freq., %		Characteristic	Freq.	Rel. freq., %
Reliability	44	55.7	Result-oriented	Organisational skills	24	63.2
Organisational skills	40	50.6		Self-starter	10	26.3
Self-reliance	26	32.9		Perfectionism	9	23.7
Courage	14	17.7		Reliability	8	21.1
Perfectionism	10	12.7		Consciousness	5	13.2
Goal-oriented	10	12.7		Self-reliance	4	10.5
Self-starter	9	11.4		Consistency	2	5.3
Perseverance	9	11.4				
Diligence	1	1.3				
Effective and engaging communication	64	81.0	Team-oriented	Effective and engaging communication	38	100
Flexibility	24	30.4		Team-player	11	28.9
Team-player	20	25.3		Punctuality	2	5.3
Cooperation	10	12.7				
Leadership	8	10.1				
Approachability	2	2.5				

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Student opinion N = 79			Competen- ce group	Employer expectations, N = 38		
Characteristic	Freq.	Rel. freq., %		Characte- ristic	Freq.	Rel. freq., %
Creativity	28	35.4	Thinking- oriented	Ability to see the bigger picture/perceptiveness	8	21.1
Inquisitiveness	22	27.8		Responsive- ness	7	18.4
Ability to see the bigger picture/perceptiveness	22	27.8		Openness	6	15.8
Responsiveness	8	10.1		Creativity	3	7.9
Critical thinking	2	2.5		Flexibility	2	5.3
				Inquisitive- ness	1	2.6
				Perception	1	2.6
Conflict manage- ment and resolution	24	30.4	Emotional intelligence- oriented	Resilience/ emotional stability	5	13.2
Self-confidence	18	22.8		Positive thinking	3	7.9
Proactiveness/opti- mism	12	15.2		Prominence	3	7.9
Resilience/emotio- nal stability	12	15.2		Conflict management and resolu- tion	1	2.6
Tolerance	12	15.2		Courtesy	1	2.6
				Empathy	1	2.6
				Non-conf- lictual	1	2.6
				Non-aggres- sive	1	2.6
Enthusiasm	23	29.1	Loyalty and care-for-the- organisa- tion-orien- ted	Honesty	6	15.8
Obedience	16	20.3		Cooperation	5	13.2
Honesty	16	20.3		Obedience	1	2.6
Initiative	14	17.7		Initiative	1	2.6
Loyalty	2	2.5		Discretion	1	2.6

It also exhibits the expectations of employers as indicated in the 2021 job advertisements for the role of administrator. As mentioned before, only 35.2% of advertisements listed required soft skills, so the sample of advertisements in Table 2 is lower than in Table 1.

An analysis of the *result-oriented group* (Table 2) demonstrates that employers emphasise future employees' organisational skills the most. In the opinion of the students, the most important characteristics are reliability and organisational skills. Employers also indicate that their expectations would be met by proactive, diligent and responsible employees. Self-reliance, in the opinion of students, is one of the three most important qualities, which is mentioned much less frequently in employer advertisements. Only one student found diligence to be an important personal characteristic; meanwhile, employers do not identify diligence in any of the advertisements as a desired candidate characteristic, but expect attentiveness, orderliness and patience from a future employee. Notably, students not only rank the above qualities differently in terms of significance, but also name more of them.

As is validated by the data presented in Table 2, all of the job advertisements analysed identify the characteristic of effective and engaging communication as desirable. Contrarily, although ranked in first place, this characteristic is not considered important by all future administrators. Notably, in the analysed sample of advertisements, five employers refer to communication skills and require that candidates are 'fluent in written and spoken Lithuanian', in two advertisements 'the ability to express thoughts fluently orally and in writing' is required, and one employer indicates that the employee 'must have a penchant for creative writing'. Teamwork is identified as the preferred characteristic by 11 employers, but only 20 out of 79 students find this characteristic relevant. Considering the pandemic, two job advertisements indicate 'the ability to work individually' as a desirable characteristic of the candidate. Potential employees prioritise working in a team, and supplement the list of qualities with flexibility, cooperation and approachability.

Thinking-oriented characteristics are more frequently recognised by employers. However, although ranked differently, both the employers and the students list essentially the same characteristics. Employers rank the ability to see the bigger picture or perceptiveness first, responsiveness second, and openness third. Students, contrarily, put creativity first. In second place they name curiosity, which in scientific research (Hunter, Abraham, Hunter, Goldberg, Eastwood, 2016; Liu, Gong, Zhou, Huang, 2016) is often associated with creativity. And in third place they put the ability to see the bigger picture or perceptiveness. A total of 10% of future administrators identify responsiveness or quick thinking as one of the most important personal characteristics. Meanwhile, in the job advertisements analysed, this characteristic is not mentioned once, and a flexible and savvy future employee

is preferred. Students do not mention these qualities as important to their future careers as administrators.

Special attention has recently been paid to the development of emotional intelligence. However, according to data from the conducted study, it can be argued that employers place little emphasis on the personal qualities of potential employees in this area. Job advertisements identify three personal qualities as the most desirable by employers: emotional resilience and emotional stability, positive thinking, and attentiveness. Students' responses also mention these three qualities, but they are ranked differently: in the first place, although not as often as in job advertisements, is conflict management and resolution; while emotional resilience and emotional stability remain at the bottom of the list, along with proactiveness and optimism. Tolerance, which is not mentioned at all by employers, is mentioned 12 times by the students. For future administrators, self-confidence is quite important, as it is mentioned by almost 23% of respondents. Meanwhile, courtesy and empathy are important to only a few employers.

It has been observed that the job advertisements also contain qualities that are named once each, with a negative no-: non-conflict and non-aggressiveness. Conventionally, there is a tendency to present candidates positively, identifying the requirements for them with positive characteristics, and expressing positive nouns, adjectives and participles. The positive characteristic, formulated in the negative, was observed for the first time. Obedience, initiative and honesty are named by both employers and students, but ranked differently in order of importance. Unlike the employers, two students also mention loyalty, which employers do not identify as an important personal characteristic. Thus, employer expectations regarding the skills of potential employees, especially personal or soft skills, and student opinions regarding skills that have a critical influence on employment and becoming a successful employee, do not always match.

3. Discussion

The term 'administration' is used very broadly, with the concept being introduced back in 1916 in H. Fayol's publication 'General and Industrial Management' (Fayol, 1987) which describes administration as an aggregate activity of managing an organisation, including the organising and direct management of technical and technological, commercial, financial and accounting activities, and guarding the enterprise. Thus, in the broadest sense, an employee of any rank or position in an organisation who performs the functions of affairs manager, from a secretary to the head of the organisation, can be called an administrator. New professions are emerging, and study programmes are being devised in higher education institutions, the

names of which include the keyword administrator, for instance, health administrator, tourism administrator, sports administrator, etc. This affects students' choices of both higher education institution and study programme (Grigolienė, Tamoševičienė, 2020). However, the word administrator to describe a position is usually used in a narrow sense, for instance, as an affairs manager in the company. To describe the position, several variations of the role are used in job advertisements: administrator, office administrator, administrator-secretary, remote administrator, administrator of the clerk's office, secretary, administrator of internal office procedures.

The findings of the study demonstrate that employer expectations regarding the skills of potential employees, especially personal or soft skills, and student opinions of skills that have a critical influence on employment and becoming a successful employee, are different. Since hierarchical relationships in organisations are increasingly being succeeded by horizontal connections, personal characteristics and skills, such as the ability to communicate in writing and orally, to work in a team, to effectively resolve and manage conflict situations, to learn quickly through active participation in activities, and to be creative, analytical, responsible, inquisitive and dutiful, are the exact employee characteristics that employers focus on. The greatest impact on the career path, in the opinion of future tourism administrators, would be made by developing personal qualities such as enthusiasm, proactivity, reliability, creativity, effective and engaging communication, and the ability to effectively resolve and manage conflict situations (Shaheen, 2019). The findings of the research study conducted to explore the significance of soft skills in a job search, as well as in achieving a productive, successful and fulfilling career, also show that both students and employers are aware of the importance of these skills. In addition, employers emphasise that the soft skills of students often exceed their expectations. Van Heerden et al. (2023) note that, based on the knowledge of the characteristics and skills that are most difficult to develop, employers may give preference to applicants who already have these qualities in the recruitment process. Therefore, as is stated by Caggiano, Schleutker, Petrone and González-Bernal (2020), and Zhao, Ma and Qiao (2017), the opinions and recommendations of graduates regarding qualities that need to be developed in the study process, and which methods, in their opinion, are most appropriate, become very important.

During the global Covid-19 pandemic, both the world and relationships evolved. Face-to-face communication, relationships between employers and employees, and employees and organisations, changed. As working remotely from home becomes the 'new normal', loyalty and unconditional devotion to organisations are no longer required, enthusiasm, approachability and optimism are not as important, and diligence and work efficiency become a natural order for the independent-

ly working and time-planning employee. Indisputably, the post-pandemic labour market also singles out a group of ‘digital competence-oriented’ characteristics in addition to soft skills (Carlisle et al., 2021). The group of ‘digital competence-oriented characteristics’ is regarded as imperative. Characteristics identified as priorities in this research study are also found in the ‘digital competence-oriented’ group, and include organisation, self-reliance, effective and engaging communication, responsiveness, creativity, curiosity, etc. The importance of soft skills to the development of digital skills is also emphasised (Caputo, Cillo, Candelo, Liu, 2019). This belief additionally links digital skills with the introduction of innovation.

The results of the research conducted and the comparative analysis demonstrate that employer expectations regarding the soft skills of potential employees, future administrators, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, are changing. Soft skills were indicated in 2019: obedience, conflict management and resolution, curiosity and creativity, communication, teamwork, approachability and reliability were all desired abilities. In 2020, the expectations were raised for candidates to independently plan their time and organise office work remotely using various computer programs. In 2021, the expertise and professional skills of the candidates were relied on. Soft skills were relatively less prominent, but a need for organisational skills, proactiveness, punctuality, perceptiveness, emotional stability, honesty, and cooperation was observed.

Thus, an interest in the rapidly changing requirements for the employee in order to overcome the challenges posed by the workplace and the desire to improve personal soft skills should become the foundation of personal career planning. As argued by Prentiss (2021), a more personal touch must be applied, and a more digital future explored. It is important to note that employers also need to change their outlook. Organisations that want to attract and maintain human resources for businesses in the future, recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, and withstand other upheavals, must change the current situation in which human resources are consumed rather than developed. This assessment is also corroborated by Fahmi and Ali (2022) in a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on the subject. Human resource management must become sustainable and respond to changes in society, the labour market, and labour relations.

Conclusions

Considering the rise in competitiveness, the requirements for employees’ professional qualifications, existing skills, and the ability to develop them further and acquire new ones, are rapidly increasing, too. Professional training and expertise

or other solid skills that can generate quick returns offered by specialist employees were recently the most sought-after competencies in the business world. Despite the complexity of soft skills, they are recognised by employers as equally or more important competencies than hard skills. The impact of the pandemic created a paradoxical situation in the labour market: before the pandemic, progressively more attention was being paid to employees' soft skills. Soft skills were developed, emphasised, and invested in. In the post-pandemic world and in the wake of hybrid working in the labour market, not all personal skills remain important. During the pandemic and working remotely, soft skills partly gave way to professional skills.

Students who are still studying on the Tourism Administration course indicate reliability, effective and engaging communication, creativity, conflict management and resolution, and enthusiasm, as the most desired skills necessary for a successful career path as an administrator in their assessment. Employers focus on the ability to communicate in writing and orally, to cooperate, to interact, to work in a team, to learn quickly, to participate in activities, and to be creative, analytical, dutiful and loyal to the organisation. Thus, a comparative analysis of the opinions of students, and an examination of employer expectations, demonstrates that employer expectations regarding the skills of potential employees, especially personal or soft skills, and student opinions regarding skills that have a critical influence on employment and becoming a successful employee, do not always match.

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