

ANALYSIS OF THE REQUIREMENT OF SOFT SKILLS IN THE FIELD OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, MARKETING, AND ADVERTISING IN THE STRENGTHENING OF ACADEMIC CURRICULA
ANÁLISIS DEL REQUERIMIENTO DE COMPETENCIAS BLANDAS EN EL CAMPO DE ADMINISTRACIÓN DE EMPRESAS, MARKETING Y PUBLICIDAD EN EL FORTALECIMIENTO DE LOS CURRÍCULOS ACADÉMICOS

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Manuscript information:

Received/Recibido: 21/01/23

Reviewed/Revisado: 12/04/23

Accepted/Aceptado: 25/04/23

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

competences, education, soft skills, job performance

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have a fundamental challenge since they must develop soft skills in an integral way so that professionals in Business Administration and Marketing and Advertising can achieve professional success. The transformations in organizations demand training where the need for employees to possess skills such as critical and analytical thinking, teamwork, empathy, tolerance, time management, and the ability to transform new learning into information that serves as a basis for decision-making and provides solutions to the various situations that may arise along the way. The objective of this study has been to identify and analyze the soft skills in greatest demand that the labor market requires in both careers. The research was carried out quantitatively with statistical techniques and tools. The research design was cross-sectional since the study variables were not manipulated. The results of this research indicate that there is currently no significant difference between the level of soft skills required by companies and the level demonstrated by graduates. It is expected that the findings obtained from this research, will contribute positively to raising awareness among the authorities to change and evolve the role of education from the traditional way to a new role where the formation of competencies is considered in the new study plans, in an active and dynamic way, and allow graduates to perform their work effectively and successfully in organizations.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Las Instituciones de Educación Superior (IES) asumen un reto fundamental al desarrollar en los diseños curriculares competencias blandas de forma integral para que el egresado en Administración de Empresas y en Marketing y Publicidad puedan

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competencias, educación,
habilidades blandas, desempeño
laboral

lograr el éxito profesional. Las organizaciones demandan una formación en donde se observa la necesidad que los empleados posean habilidades tales como: un pensamiento crítico y analítico, trabajo en equipo, empatía, tolerancia, capacidad para transformar los nuevos aprendizajes en información que les sirva como base para la toma de decisiones y brindar soluciones a las diversas situaciones que puedan surgir en el camino. El objetivo de este estudio ha sido identificar y analizar las habilidades blandas de mayor demanda que requiere el mercado laboral en ambas carreras. La investigación se realizó de manera cuantitativa con técnicas y herramientas estadísticas. El diseño de la investigación fue de corte transversal, ya que no se manipularon las variables de estudio. Los resultados de esta investigación indican que actualmente no existe diferencia significativa entre el nivel de competencias blandas requerido por las empresas y el nivel demostrado por los egresados. Se espera que, con los hallazgos obtenidos de esta investigación, contribuya positivamente a concientizar a las autoridades para cambiar y evolucionar el rol de la educación de la manera tradicional a un nuevo rol en donde la formación de competencias sea considerada en los nuevos planes de estudio de una manera activa y dinámica, y permitan a los egresados desempeñarse en su trabajo de una manera efectiva y exitosa en las organizaciones.

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) present new challenges and demands to enhance and facilitate the labor market insertion of future graduates. In recent years, the need for the development of soft skills has been observed, for this reason, universities must respond to the changes that occur in society. Aguinaga & Sánchez (2020), Ruiz de Vargas, Jaraba Barrios & Romero Santiago (2005), have explained that these transformations require people prepared to generate changes, with relevant and useful knowledge for the performance of their work, and timely actions in the face of the various problems of life.

Buxarrais (2013) and Ortega (2017) express that the success of a person in the development of his or her profession depends on soft skills and hard skills and describe soft skills as a set of skills that allow performing better in work and personal relationships. They allow us to put into practice principles and values that contribute to the development of the individual in different areas of action: working under pressure, flexibility, adapting to change, self-confidence, assertive communication, critical thinking, teamwork, among others.

A study conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank (2017) on employment in Latin America, pointed out that socioemotional skills are the ones most valued by executives and precisely these are scarce in young people. In this regard, Millalén (2017) indicates that organizations are concerned about the gap they perceive between the technical knowledge and socioemotional skills of young people entering the labor field. Vargas and Carzoglio (2017) express that: "the mismatch between supply and demand for soft skills ranges from the employment of workers classified in less complex activities, to the lack of specific qualifications in certain sectors". Bitar (2020) states that in Latin America there are few institutions dedicated to collecting, researching and analyzing existing data and information to understand global trends, and that in general Latin American countries do not design the public policies necessary to advance and develop training and education programs to reduce the gap in the labor market.

Barreto & Izquierdo (2017) recommend that one should not only master the theoretical and technical knowledge inherent to "hard competencies" but also possess "soft competencies" such as: leadership, communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, initiative, etc. New professionals must possess a wide range of hard and soft competencies, as well as the ability to integrate them.

The problem faced by HEIs is the development of a curriculum that prepares professionals to develop soft skills. Gómez Gamero (2017) states that the challenge is to prepare workers to continue updating their knowledge, and for this to become the cornerstone for the development of their skills throughout their lives. Espinoza and Gallegos (2020) specify that current education has evolved over time, so it is necessary to become aware of the importance of soft skills, both in the workplace and in everyday life.

Based on the literature consulted, the importance of training professionals who develop transversal skills for their work performance has been recognized; therefore, the research was carried out to identify, describe and determine which are the soft skills most in demand in Business Administration and Marketing and Advertising graduates. The scientific problem that was elaborated to carry out the research was: *what are the most in-demand competencies in Business Administration and Marketing and Advertising careers?* The academic importance of the study consists of improving and updating the curricular designs of the Business Administration and Marketing and Advertising careers,

so that future graduates can develop soft skills to achieve professional success in their job functions.

Method

In order to carry out the research, a problem statement was prepared and a review of the literature and research related to the topic was carried out. The general objective and four specific objectives were elaborated, and the research was designed with a quantitative, cross-sectional and descriptive approach, since the criteria and characteristics of the competencies were described, as well as the profiles of the people who participated in the research.

According to Hernandez-Sampieri and Torres (2018) quantitative research answers the research questions, which allowed examining the data in a scientific way, the analysis was performed using statistical techniques and tools. An instrument was constructed for data collection, validated by experts in the field. The paradigm used in the research was socio-critical because it was related to a dynamic, evolving reality, with the objective of improving educational practices, through observation and the participation of members of society.

The main purpose of the research consisted not only in explaining and understanding the importance of soft skills in university education, but also in improving the curricular designs so that graduates in Business Administration, Marketing and Advertising can achieve professional success.

The competencies that make up the questionnaire are the result of a review of the state of the art where the following elements were taken into account: essential competencies for professional development; previous studies related to the subject; analysis of job offers; and primary requirements of the companies. The study population was composed of graduates in Business Administration and Marketing and Advertising, and the information for the study was collected independently through a survey in which thirty-three (33) companies participated. The first part of the questionnaire contains demographic information corresponding to the respondents. In the second part there were indications for evaluating the level of importance of the competencies for the companies and the level demonstrated by the graduates of both careers; nine competencies were analyzed with their respective criteria and a Likert evaluation scale was elaborated, ranging from 1 to 5, from very low to very high, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Response category (Likert scale)*

| Importance for the company | | | | | Organization and Planning | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------|------|-----------|---|--------------|-------|------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Very Low | Downlo ad | Media | High | Very High | Very Low | Downloa d | Media | High | Very High |
| | | | | | Orders and carries out the activities of the area properly. | | | | |
| | | | | | Manages and administers time efficiently. | | | | |
| | | | | | He has a positive and anticipatory attitude. | | | | |
| | | | | | Discern what is important from what is a priority. | | | | |
| | | | | | Achieves expected results in complex activities. | | | | |

2). The questionnaire items were validated with Cronbach's alpha reliability test analysis with 33 valid cases and no excluded cases (Table

Table 2
Summary of data processing

| | N | % |
|----------|----------|----------|
| Valid | 33 | 100.00 |
| Excluded | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 33 | 100.00 |

Table 3 reflects that the Cronbach's coefficient was 0.961, which is representative of a high and satisfactory reliability.

Table 3
Reliability statistics

| Cronbach's alpha | No. of elements |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 0.961 | 33 |

The results of the quantitative study were analyzed through descriptive statistics, and tables, graphs and averages were prepared to find patterns and trends for each competency studied. Data processing provided insight into the fundamental problem of the study, as well as answers to the research questions. SPSS and Excel statistical software were used to tabulate, analyze and interpret the data.

Results

Data collection made it possible to identify the most important competencies in the graduates of both careers, as well as to recognize weaknesses and aspects to be strengthened in the formation of competencies. The results of the study were tabulated as follows: To determine the importance of the company and the level demonstrated by the employees, a range of importance was given from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. The MB+B+M column represents the minimum value *of importance for the company*; the A+MA column represents the maximum value *of importance given to the competition*. The same description applies to the level demonstrated by employees.

The instrument was sent to 57 companies, and responses were received from 33 companies related to the areas of management, human resources, coordinators and supervisors. Sixty-four percent of the participants were female and 36% were male. According to the results obtained, 21.2% of the participants are just starting out in the labor field and 78.2% of the sample are people over 31 years of age, which indicates that they have sufficient experience to observe the soft skills of the graduates.

Research competencies

Organization and Planning are important competencies in the professional development of managers and marketers-advertisers. Table 4 reflects the minimum and maximum results awarded by the company and the level demonstrated by employees. The five criteria selected reflect a minimal difference between the result given by the company and the level demonstrated by the employees. There is a positive consistency in this competency since the graduates are above the minimum value of the level of importance given by the company.

Table 3

Organization and planning

| Criteria | Code | MB+B+M | A+MA Company | A+MA Employee |
|---|-------|--------|-----------------|------------------|
| Orders and carries out the activities of the area properly. | OyP1E | 6.1 | 93.9 | 90.6 |
| Manages and administers time efficiently. | OyP2E | 3 | 97 | 96.9 |
| Has a positive and anticipatory attitude | OyP3E | 6.1 | 93.9 | 81.2 |
| Discern what is important from what is a priority. | OyP4E | 3 | 97 | 75.0 |
| Achieves expected results in complex activities | OyP5E | 6.1 | 93.9 | 81.2 |

Leadership: Núñez, Bravo, Cruz & Hinojosa (2018) express that a manager must possess a proactive attitude that influences people in a positive way. Six criteria were chosen to study this competence: Leads the development and implementation of plans

(75%); Anticipates risks and opportunities and manages problems that arise in a timely manner (96.9%); Assumes the objectives, orienting his/her actions towards achievement (75%); Detects needs for the accomplishment of tasks (93.9%); Manages people and resources with ownership and assertiveness (97%); Motivates and involves the team towards the achievement of objectives (97%). When analyzing the results, a positive regularity is observed, since the results of the level demonstrated by the graduates are above the minimum value expected by the employer.

Communication; To determine the importance of the communication competence, the following criteria were established: Clearly states information (84.8%); Uses appropriate channels for communication and shares knowledge (90.9%); Selects and organizes information in an appropriate manner (97%); Messages are concrete and relevant (78.8%); Uses confirmation mechanisms to ensure that it has been understood (93.3). Only two of the above criteria scored lower than expected by the companies. These results reflect a positive impact, since they exceed the minimum value expected by the employer.

Teamwork is the active capacity in the pursuit of a common goal by subordinating personal interests to team objectives (Chiavenato, 2018). In three of the six criteria, it is observed that the employee exceeds the employer's expectations: Works collaboratively and cooperatively (97%); Respects and is tolerant of others' ideas and shows empathy (90.9%); Asks questions to ensure understanding of the project (93.9). However, teaching-learning strategies should be considered to achieve better mastery in the following criteria: Knows how to listen and allows speaking without interrupting (75.8%); Strives to understand the other's point of view (78.8%); and Uses dialogue and negotiation to solve problems (75.8%).

Creativity and innovation allow analyzing different situations to seek the best alternative action in decision making, develop novel ideas, as well as improvements in processes, systems, structures or methods (Schnarch, 2020). Five criteria were established for the study of this competency and it is concluded that the results of the level demonstrated by the employees are consistent with the employer's results. Only one criterion scored lower: Generates ideas to respond to the demands of the environment (72.7%). This result indicates that more consideration should be given to this competency in a transversal manner in the curricula in order to strengthen it.

Learning capacity and knowledge management are competencies that strengthen the exchange of information and experience within an organization. Álvarez-Cedillo, Aguilar-Fernández, Álvarez-Sánchez & García & Patiño, (2020) state that knowledge management seeks to transfer explicit knowledge and reuse it to achieve better performance. Of the five criteria selected, two of them scored lower than expected by the companies: Being alert to new knowledge to detect opportunities for improvement and Positioning oneself critically in the face of information both scored 69.7.

Use of information and communication technologies (ICT), with the advances in technology, professionals must perform their work using ICT, so these become an ideal complement that promotes the development of autonomous learning. Table 5 shows that employees exceeded employers' expectations.

Table 4
Use of information and communication technologies

| Criteria | Code | MB+B+ M | A+M A Company | A+M A Employee |
|---|-------|------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Master basic aspects of computer use. | TIC1E | 3 | 97 | 97 |
| Master and use different software for information management. | TIC2E | 6.1 | 93.9 | 97 |
| Manages and uses digital tools to communicate. | TIC3E | 9.1 | 90.9 | 97 |
| Manages information through ICT. | TIC4E | 3 | 97 | 93.9 |

Foreign language proficiency was divided into four criteria: Reads and understands information in another language (84.8%); Understands texts in another language (84.8%); Writes and expresses him/herself orally in another language (78.8%); and Communicates and interacts with others in another language (81.8%). The level demonstrated by the graduates was lower compared to the score given by the companies.

Decision making is a process by which managers respond to the opportunities and threats presented to them, analyzing options and making decisions related to organizational goals (Ramirez, 2022; Hill et al, 2009). Six criteria were taken into account for this competition: Analyzes variables to identify consequences; Evaluates different alternatives before making a decision; Is assertive in justifying the decision made: Uses past experience to make future decisions; Takes into account the integral need of the team; Uses knowledge of its environment to make decisions. All criteria received a score of 97, exceeding the range of scores (87.9 - 90.9) given by the companies.

Ethical and social commitment is an attitude and skill that implies solidarity with the needs and objectives of others. Five criteria were selected for the study of this competency: Demonstrates ethical and professional commitment (90.9%); Values and respects diversity (78.8%); Demonstrates commitment to environmental conservation (97%); Demonstrates social and civic responsibility (81.8%); Acts with justice and human equity before organizational conflicts (84.8%). The only criterion that is above and beyond the expectations of companies is judgment: Demonstrates commitment to environmental conservation.

Emotional control is the ability to handle emotions in an appropriate way, by assimilating them in thought they help us to understand and reason our own and other people's emotions. Of the six criteria chosen, in four of them the scores obtained were equal to or higher than the companies' expectations: Manages stress (97%); Detects the symptoms of stress and takes measures to manage them (90.9%); Focuses emotions towards the positive (97%); and Tolerates frustration and adversity (93.9%); In general, the levels demonstrated by the graduates are above the minimum value of the level of importance for the company, which shows a positive regularity in the Emotional Control competency.

The *entrepreneurial attitude* is essential for professional and social development, as it drives the economic development of society. An entrepreneur can identify opportunities and organize the necessary resources to achieve his or her objectives. Six criteria were chosen to study this competence: Detects new opportunities (81.8%); Has initiative and self-confidence (97%); Is committed to identity and professional development (78.8%); Locates the resources available and necessary to execute a project (78.8%); Seeks continuous improvement (97%); Takes on new challenges with optimism (97%); The results show that in four of the six criteria the level demonstrated by

employees is above the score given by the company (78.9-87.9), which indicates that employees are exceeding the employer's expectations.

Flexibility / Adaptability. Modern work environments require employees and organizations to react quickly to change, so education has considerable interest in developing a curriculum that addresses this competency where personality traits can be assessed (Lang et al., 2021). Six criteria were selected for this competition: Tolerates change and uncertainty (93.9%); Applies new knowledge to daily work practice (72.7%); Adapts easily to change (72.7%); Learns new ways of working (97%); and Is available to take on new tasks or activities (84.8%); Three of them scored above expectations and the other three did not exceed company expectations.

Motivation is related to human behavior and is based on the behavior, actions and needs that generate the energy necessary to motivate the individual to achieve his or her goal. (Chiavenato, 2018). Six criteria were chosen for the study of this competency: Motivated for individual development or achievement (84.8%); Maintains a positive attitude towards work (84.8%); Generates a positive effect on the organization (75.8%); Demonstrates a commitment to perform activities with quality and precision (84.8%); and Is proactive and diligent(81.8%) These results show that curricular designs should focus a little more on the motivation of students to develop this competency in a transversal manner in the curricula.

Hernández-Sampieri and Torres (2018) state that *research* involves acquiring knowledge and skills, solving problems, innovating, improving processes, designing solutions and even evaluating whether something has been done correctly. The criteria for evaluating this competency were as follows: Detects needs and delimits problems (93.9%); Designs and manages data collection techniques (87.9%); Examines and interprets information (97. %); and Prepares a research report (93.9%); Of the four criteria chosen three of them exceeded the employer's expectations.

Medina and Caro, (2021) indicate that *customer orientation* is a characteristic of the employees of organizations, and is also a factor of excellence, since it reflects a positive attitude when satisfying customer demand. Six criteria were used to measure this competency; Responds promptly to clients' demands (78.8%); Resolves complaints and suggestions (97%); Orients its work to satisfy clients' needs (87.9%); Identifies clients' needs and expectations (81.87%); Pays attention to clients and their needs (97%); Establishes and maintains relationships of respect and trust with clients (97%). It should be noted that this competency exceeds the employer's expectations, since in general of the six criteria established, three of them exceed the maximum expectations of the level of importance for the company, only two of them are below the score given by the companies.

Self-criticism plays a fundamental role in the workplace, as it is a skill that is constantly under construction, and a variant of critical thinking. Employees must possess an analytical capacity as a process of self-knowledge and a positive attitude to generate a reflection-action (Rodríguez Gómez P., & Rodríguez Gómez, J., 2022). Six criteria were selected to analyze this competence: Recognizes its limitations: Accepts responsibility for failures and apologizes for them; Accepts feedback with an open attitude and a desire to improve; Accepts the opinion of others with a positive attitude; Adopts a constructive attitude towards mistakes; The results obtained from the level achieved by the employees exceed the expectations of the companies, achieving 97% in all the criteria.

Chiavenato (2018) defines *negotiation skills* as the process of making joint decisions when the parties involved have differences. The following criteria were considered: Prepares in advance on the subject to negotiate (72.7%); Researches the most relevant points to negotiate (69.7%); Is cordial and communicative during the negotiation

(78.8%); Listens attentively and respectfully to the other negotiator (81.8%); Explains his or her point of view in a cordial and assertive manner (97%); Of the criteria established, only one exceeded the employer's expectations.

The *organization's capacity for vision* enables it to define the path to be followed in order to achieve organizational goals. Chiavenato (2018) indicates that it is a future state of where the organization is desired to arrive. To determine the importance of this competency, five criteria were chosen: Identifies the contribution each area makes to the organizational value chain (90.9%); Can describe the functions of other areas and/or departments (97%); Recognizes that its decisions may affect other areas (72.7%); Distinguishes the processes that affect other areas and/or departments (97%); Respects the functions assigned to other areas (75.8%). The level demonstrated by the graduates exceeds the employer's expectations in three of the criteria, the remaining two criteria exceed the minimum score awarded by the companies. Therefore, it can be concluded that this competency has a positive impact on the professional development of graduates.

Global Profile

Table 6 represents the global profile of the competencies selected according to the level demonstrated by the graduates of the Business Administration and Marketing and Advertising degrees. In the first column are the numbers of each competency; the second column describes the competency; the third column represents the acronyms of the competencies; the fourth column indicates the minimum value given by the companies to the competencies; the fifth column represents the positive results, where from that number the graduate is performing in an optimal way; the sixth column represents the real valuation of what was demonstrated by the graduates: The last column represents the actual assessment of the competency, i.e., if this result is achieved, the graduate would be performing the competency at one hundred percent.

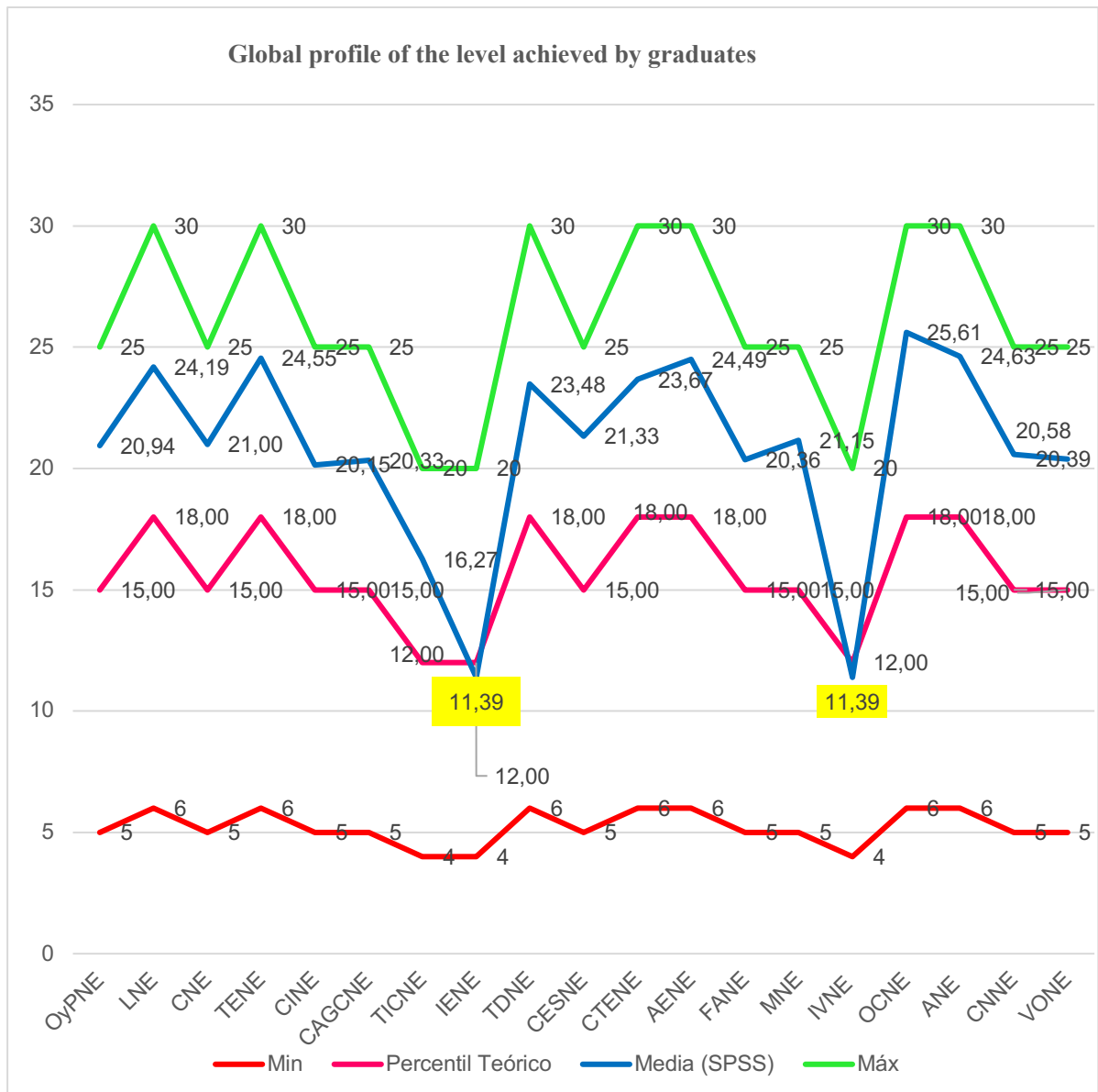
Table 5
Global Profile of the Level demonstrated by employees

| N o. | Competition | Abbreviat ed competition | Mi n. | Theoretic al Percentile | Mea n (SPSS) | Maximu m |
|-----------------|---|---|------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Organization and Planning | OypNE | 5 | 15.00 | 20.9 4 | 25 |
| 2 | Leadership | LNE | 6 | 18.00 | 24.1 9 | 30 |
| 3 | Communicati on | CNE | 5 | 15.00 | 21.0 0 | 25 |
| 4 | Teamwork | TENE | 6 | 18.00 | 24.5 5 | 30 |
| 5 | Creativity and Innovation | CINEMA | 5 | 15.00 | 20.1 5 | 25 |
| 6 | Learning and Knowledge Management | CAGCNE | 5 | 15.00 | 20.3 3 | 25 |
| 7 | Information and Communication Technology | TICNE | 4 | 12.00 | 16.2 7 | 20 |
| 8 | Foreign Language | IENE | 4 | 12.00 | 11.3 9 | 20 |
| 9 | Decision Making | TDNE | 6 | 18.00 | 23.4 8 | 30 |
| 10 | Ethical and social commitment | CESNE | 5 | 15.00 | 21.3 3 | 25 |
| 11 | Emotional Control | CTENE | 6 | 18.00 | 23.6 7 | 30 |
| 12 | Entrepreneur ial Attitude | AENE | 6 | 18.00 | 24.4 9 | 30 |
| 13 | Flexibility / Adaptability | FANE | 5 | 15.00 | 20.3 6 | 25 |
| 14 | Motivation | MNE | 5 | 15.00 | 21.1 5 | 25 |
| 15 | Research | IVNE | 4 | 12.00 | 11.3 9 | 20 |
| 16 | Customer orientation | OCNE | 6 | 18.00 | 25.6 1 | 30 |
| 17 | Self-criticism | ANE | 6 | 18.00 | 24.6 3 | 30 |
| 18 | Negotiation Skills | CNNE | 5 | 15.00 | 20.5 8 | 25 |
| 19 | Vision of the Organization | VONE | 5 | 15.00 | 20.3 9 | 25 |

Figure 1 shows the global profile of the competencies of the level demonstrated by the graduates, where the red line represents the minimum score awarded by the companies, i.e., it is considered the worst scenario that the competency can obtain. The magenta line signifies the borderline of the score for the competency, i.e., if the score obtained is less than the number in that column, the graduate has not fully developed that particular competency. The blue line is the actual performance of graduates, and the green line represents the ideal scenario for a given competency. Likewise, Table 6 shows that there are two competencies that are below the minimum border; Foreign language and

Research, both with 11.39. These results indicate that HEIs should pay attention to these competencies and improve the lines of action in their curricular designs in order to position them above the frontier. Figure 2 shows in a yellow box the minimum points that represent the competencies in Foreign Language and Research. While it is true that these two competencies are below the minimum point of the expected border, a positive impact is observed for the rest of the competencies, since the other competencies are above the border (magenta line) and above the minimum score of the level expected by the graduates (red line).

Figure 1
Overall profile of the level demonstrated by employees



Discussion and Conclusions

The modern society requires a higher education that must integrate soft skills in the curricular designs in a transversal manner for a better job performance of the

graduates. This research focused on describing and analyzing the soft skills that contribute to the performance of workers, in order to make the necessary changes in the curricular designs of the Business Administration and Marketing and Advertising careers. The data collected in the research showed that the results of the level achieved by the graduates are above the minimum value expected by the employer and mostly exceed the desired expectations. This information indicates that the competencies set forth in the curricula have been effectively developed during the years of student life in both careers. When analyzing the specific criteria by competencies, certain areas of opportunity were observed, which must be improved so that the graduate can perform successfully in his or her career. The conclusions of each of the competencies studied are presented below, to be taken into account in future curricular designs.

1. *Organization and Planning.* The competition was divided into five criteria, two of which scored lower than expected by the employer: Possess a positive and anticipatory attitude and Discern what is important from what is a priority. To achieve a positive attitude in Business Administration, Marketing and Advertising students, workshops should be developed where the student reflects on the importance and benefit of having a positive attitude. These workshops can be taught as an extracurricular activity linked to subjects in the curriculum. In addition, in order for the student to be able to discern what is important in the priorities, it is suggested that students in the core and professionalizing subjects know and develop prioritization matrices so that they can be effective in the fulfillment of activities.
2. *Leadership.* According to the global profile, there is a positive impact on the level achieved by the graduates in this competency, which indicates that this competency is being worked effectively in the curricular designs.
3. *Communication.* This competence is gaining importance in companies. The results of the global profile indicate a positive regularity in the development of this competence. However, two criteria did not achieve the expected average. To overcome this gap, workshops should be held for the graduate to develop confidence and security in presenting his or her ideas in a clear and concise manner to the audience.
4. *Teamwork.* The overall profile of this competency indicates that the level demonstrated by the graduates has a positive impact on the development of this competency. However, three of the selected criteria scored below the level of importance given by the companies. In order to improve these criteria, it is recommended that graduates receive training to help them improve their listening skills, understand the other person's point of view and use dialogue to solve problems.
5. *Creativity and innovation.* This soft skill allows the company to adapt to changes in the organizational environment; in four of the selected criteria, graduates exceeded employer expectations.
6. *Capacity for learning and knowledge management.* Graduates exceeded company expectations in four of the selected criteria. It is recommended that in order to improve the criteria: being alert to new knowledge and appropriating information, business simulators and case studies should be used to identify risks and offer various action plans for organizational improvement.
7. *Use of Information and Communication Technologies.* In the use of ICTs, the graduates demonstrated a superior level, exceeding the expectations of the companies that participated in the study.

8. *Foreign language.* The graduates did not demonstrate the level expected by employers, although they did surpass the minimum borderline score given by the companies. It is recommended that curricula be revised to include strategies that motivate students to learn a second language, such as: conversation clubs, international fairs to exhibit in another language, essays written in English, awareness campaigns.
9. *Decision making.* The results observed in this competency exceeded the expectations of the employers, so it is considered that the graduates in both careers have an excellent command of this competency.
10. *Ethical and social commitment.* The results obtained in the global profile of the competency indicate a positive regularity in terms of what is expected by the companies and the level achieved by the graduates. To ensure greater mastery of this competency, it is recommended to conduct social responsibility activities in order to encourage good practices or actions to awaken interest in ethical and social commitment.
11. *Emotional control.* The graduates exceeded four of the criteria for employer perspectives, which is demonstrated in the results of the overall profile of this competency. In two of the criteria where they did not achieve the expected average, but did achieve the minimum rating, it is suggested that seminars on emotional control, relaxation spaces, and sports activities for the development of human relations be promoted.
12. *Entrepreneurial attitude:* In order to observe this competency, six criteria were selected; in two of the criteria a lower score than expected was obtained, even so, the overall profile shows a positive incidence in the development of this competency by graduates in both careers.
13. *Flexibility / Adaptability.* There is a minimal difference in two of the criteria selected for this skill, so it is suggested to include in the curricular plans the use of business simulators to apply acquired knowledge and experience corporate situations where students can provide pertinent solutions to organizational situations they are presented with.
14. *Motivation.* In this competency, the results expected by the company and the level demonstrated by the graduates are almost similar, which indicates that this competency is being worked on effectively in the curricular designs.
15. *Research.* Four criteria were selected to study this skill in graduates, three of them exceeded the employer's expectations, the criterion where the score was lower than expected was the design and management of data collection techniques, so it is recommended to include practices in the management of statistical software for data collection such as SPSS, AcaStat, MaXStat, Minitab, Stata.
16. *Customer orientation.* The overall profile indicates a positive consistency in the results of this competency: It is suggested that in order to improve the resolution of customer demands and identify customer needs and expectations, teaching-learning strategies such as: Role-plays, plenary sessions and seminars on customer service techniques.
17. *Self-criticism.* The results obtained in this skill showed that the graduates exceeded the expectations of employers in all aspects.
18. *Negotiation skills.* Graduates obtained a lower score than expected by the company, so consideration should be given to revising the curricula to include this competency in a cross-cutting manner, as well as including the use of business simulators, case studies, role-playing and negotiation seminars.

19. *Vision of the organization.* The overall profile indicates a positive regularity in this competency, although the score in the criterion of identifying the contribution of each area and respecting the functions assigned to another area should be improved. To overcome this weakness, it is suggested to teach the student the technique to go "out of the box" to think in an innovative way, encourage brainstorming, use of strategic process maps to define where the organization wants to be in the future.

Regarding the research questions, it was determined that the most in-demand competencies required by employers in Business Administration and Marketing and Advertising careers are: Leadership, Customer orientation, Communication, Organization and planning, Teamwork, Negotiation skills, Negotiation skills

The second research question refers to the soft competencies that should be strengthened to increase the possibilities of professional success in the graduates of both careers, among them we have: Research, Foreign language.

Next, the third research question refers to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in soft skills. The strongest competencies demonstrated by the graduates were: Creativity and innovation, Use of information and communication technologies, Decision-making, Self-criticism. The competencies with the greatest weaknesses: Foreign language and research. The opportunity that graduates have by improving the competencies in which they showed the greatest weaknesses is that by overcoming them they will have better success in their work performance, and the threat would be that by not developing the competencies in which they have less mastery, it will be difficult for them to achieve work success and therefore their opportunities for improvement will be reduced.

Every research study has limitations consisting of aspects that were not studied for various reasons. The limitations found in the study were:

1. *The sample size* only took into account companies in the department of Managua and not in the country as a whole, so the conclusions only apply to HEIs in Managua.
2. *Reliable answers with objectivity in the questionnaire*, the answers obtained are based on the perception of the people related to the human resources area.
3. *Lack of previous research studies*, the topic of soft skills in Nicaragua is a relatively new topic, as well as their transversality in the curricula; however, this weakness gives us the opportunity to identify new fields of research.
4. *The time factor* is a limiting factor in the research, since requesting companies to participate in the study requires time to complete the survey. Unfortunately, valuable information was lost from companies that had expressed interest in completing the survey and did not do so due to lack of time.
5. *Qualitative research*, the study was carried out in a quantitative manner, when interpreting the results of the data the researchers realized that through open-ended questions important information could have been collected for the study.

According to Vásquez (2022), job performance competencies influence employability, as well as professional academic training to achieve successful professional development. Likewise, they constitute knowledge and skills that the graduate can apply to carry out activities that are transferable to the labor market. (Almerich, Díaz, Cebrián, Suárez, 2018). The training of a professional is the result of planning that is in the hands of HEIs, experts in curriculum design and teachers. It is an institutional process and is the result of a research process in which the different actors participate and draw a coherent and systemic route in the profile of each career, contents,

competencies, teaching-learning strategies and the necessary evaluation for knowledge management.

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