

***Tesserae* of Graduates' Competences for Mosaics of Work Activities**

Luigi Fabbri, Gilda Rota, Ilaria Silvestri, Anna Boaretto¹

Padua University, Italy

Summary. In this paper, we analyse with multivariate statistical methods the frequencies of use of the basic, cross-occupational and occupation-specific competences by employed graduates. The basic idea is that competences may be *tesserae* of a mosaic of graduate's professional personality. We analyse the relationship between competences and a set of professions. We evaluated the differential effect, on competence use, of the specific degree held by each graduate, so to connect graduate's features and working environment's characteristics in terms of a selected set of competences.

Keywords: Basic competences; Cross-occupational competences; Occupation-specific competences; Multilevel analysis; Correspondence analysis; Survey on graduates; University of Padua.

1. Professional skills of employed graduates

The work activities of graduates can be characterised by the frequent and intensive use of their competences, in other words, the knowledge, skills and willingness with which they respond to professional needs. Blended together with their values, the competences define their “professional personality” or “professional style”.

Knowledge is a set of principles and usable information, abilities are durable talents that make a person capable of performing work activities, and willingness is the personality trait that favours the use of abilities.

¹ The four authors designed and realised jointly the research work described in this paper. However, A. Boaretto wrote Sections 3 and 5 of the paper, whereas G. Rota wrote Section 2, I. Silvestri Section 3 and L. Fabbri the other sections.

The skills necessary to carry out a task are complex and multifunctional. They are multifunctional in that they help solve many tasks, and for this reason we call them “cross-occupational” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Isfol, 1998; Ajello & Meghnagi, 1998). They are complex because what individuals have obtained from education and professional training is processed by experience, thus enabling individuals to choose consciously their own values and goals.

Skills can be broken down into independent units. The units identified in the DeSeCo project (Befani, 2004) are:

- (i) the capacity to face complexities, which consists of the capacity to break up and analyse reality by distinguishing between what fits within known parameters and what is new,
- (ii) the skill of perception, which consists of the capacity to grasp the sense of situations and to vary one’s own behaviour accordingly,
- (iii) the self-governing skill, which consists of a guideline of one’s own actions based on values determining what is right, opportune and desirable,
- (iv) co-operation skills, which involve the capacity of identifying in other people’s abilities the particular talents that make teamwork possible, and
- (v) the skill of narration, which consists of being able to disassociate from contingency, identify alternatives and process viable future scenarios.

Many skills are not taught in school. Many remain implicit until when they are applied to activities to be undertaken. For example, it is hypothesized that individuals are competent to work in a team if they are capable of listening, presenting problems in a suitable language and style, empathizing with others, controlling their emotions, mediating between differing interests and impositions, etc. Nevertheless, the fact that they are capable of working in a team will be proven only when they are faced with a work problem requiring teamwork.

Graduates seeking employment are required to possess various types of skills and knowledge. Those that are taken for granted in job candidates are called “basic” or “strategic/cross-occupational” skills. For a graduate, basic skills include the written and oral knowledge of English and basic computer literacy. The level required for these two skills varies according to the characteristics of the company and grows in conjunction with market globalization and the rise of education and professional training in the world².

Basic skills are relevant to the moment of initiation of a job, but are not necessarily used in the performance of professional activities. Indeed, Fabbri & Visentin (2004) found that basic skills are used in companies less intensely

² Many researchers stress that a basic skill is also the knowledge of the Italian language, not taking for granted that even people who have gone through at least 16 years of the Italian educational system know it.