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Journal of Intercultural Management
Vol. 7, No. 1, January 2015, pp. 5–21
DOI 10.1515/joim-2015-0001

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What Kinds of Skills Are Expected by Portuguese and Polish Employers?

Abstract: The main objective of the research was to establish which skills and competencies are mostly demanded by organizations/employers in Portugal and Poland. Secondly, we wanted to determine if there are any differences in this type of skills and competencies in these two countries.

In order to analyze the skills necessary in organizations, we applied the typology of soft and hard skills. In the analysis, we had to distinguish moral competencies from soft skills, due to the specificity of the formers.

In the research, we use the mixed qualitative-quantitative methodology.

In the survey, carried out on convenience samples composed of Portuguese and Polish working students, the respondents were eager to answer one open-ended question and describe/list the skills/competencies demanded by organizations. In order to categorize the answers, we employed a two-stage process of phenomenological reduction. For the purpose of conducting a comparative analysis of the data and due to a wide dispersion of results in the case of soft skills in the two samples, we grouped the soft skills according to the ESCO and interpreted the differences by referring to the cultural dimensions introduced by Hofstede *et al.* [2011].

Keywords: Soft, hard & moral skill, Portugal, Poland, phenomenological analysis/reduction, cultural dimensions.

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The results of the study in each sample clearly indicate the preference of soft skills, a secondary interest in hard skills and a marginal demand for moral competencies. The responses concerning soft skills confirmed, to a great extent, the existence of cultural differences between Poland and Portugal, which were identified in the research conducted by Hofstede *et al.* [2011]. The results-based conclusion needs more robust acknowledgments and deeper studies.

Introduction

Although Poland and Portugal are situated on two opposite extremes of the common economic area and are both classified (in economic, social, cultural, linguistic, political etc. terms) as semi-peripheral states [Wallerstein, 1992; Santos, B. 1993; Weiss, 2005; Pięta-Cândido, 2013], they share many problems such as high unemployment rate, especially among young people. Apart from general economic conditions, the reason for this phenomenon is that professional competencies are not suited to the needs of the labour market [Handel, 2003; Taylor, 2005; Sgobbi and Suleman, 2013] and, as it was emphasized by Suleman [2012], „the relevance of skills in the contemporary workplace is unquestionable” [p. 2205]. One of the manifestations of the common educational and labor market policy in the EU is the unification of educational systems. This is beneficial when considering employees’ mobility. On the other hand, however, each domestic labor market has its own specific conditions, which influence the kinds of professional competencies that are demanded there. Domestic economy specialization may be decisive for requirements regarding hard skills. Yet, social and, more importantly, cultural environment influence the demands concerning soft skills and moral competencies. The aim of the present paper is to establish what kinds of skills are more sought for by organizations and employers in both countries, but also if the types of skills and competencies are similar. Firstly, we want to present briefly the notion of ‘competencies/skills’ and the typology (division into hard and soft skills and moral competencies) of competencies, which we applied in our research. Secondly, we describe the objectives and the methodology of the empirical research. Next, we characterize the Portuguese and Polish samples and then present the general results of the research as well as a comparative analysis regarding competencies required by employers in both countries in each category. The results, concerning soft skills in the two national samples, due to their high dispersion and impossibility to carry out any further comparative analysis, were grouped according to the European Skills/Competencies Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) and analysed in the context of cultural differences between both societies from the point of view of cultural dimensions – according to Hofstede *et al.* [2011]. Finally, we add some considerations and limitations to the research.

The concept of skills and competencies and their division into soft, hard and moral

The concept of a competency was introduced *inter alia* by McClelland, who examined factors of career success. He claimed that career success does not depend solely on an IQ or school grades but also on other factors which McClelland called competencies [McClelland, 1973, 1998]. A significant contribution to the development of the concept of competencies was made by Boyatzis, who coined the definition of a competency, which is still used today [Boyatzis 1982]. In his view, „a competency is an underlying characteristic of a person that leads to or causes effective or superior performance” [p. 21].

In English language and literature there is some confusion between different terms (competency, competence and skill) that denote the same or similar phenomena, but we do not attempt to solve this problem here, leaving it to English native speakers.

There are many typologies of skills and competencies. They are grouped, for instance, in the work of Garcia-Aracil *et al.* [2004]. Most of the typologies cover general skills connected with work or a job title [Garcia-Aracil *et al.*, 2004]. One of the most popular, useful and applied to the job and educational market and context is a dichotomous division into hard and soft skills. But, as Chell and Athayde [2011] claim, this terminology could sometimes be misleading, as soft skills, being conceptually and apparently easy to acquire in comparison with hard skills, could become „more challenging than once was believed” [p. 616], due to a cognitive content of a skill and a context in which it is practiced or demonstrated. In this typology, ‘hard skills’, ‘technical abilities’ are the competencies in the field of technology, especially those acquired during professional education, academic education or while gaining experience; but they also include administrative procedures connected with a specific line of business of an organization [Katz, 1974/2009; Leroux and Laffleur, 1995; Cabral-Cardoso *et al.*, 2006; Maniscalco, 2010; Chell and Athayde, 2011; Laker and Powell, 2011; Rao, 2012]. On the other hand, ‘soft skills’, ‘employability skills’, ‘critical abilities’, ‘generic skills’, ‘transferable skills’, ‘key qualifications’, ‘transversal skills’, ‘non-academic skills’, ‘people skills’, are also called general, critical, universal, human, non-academic skills or skills crucial for finding and keeping a job/employment [Lopes *et al.*, 2000; Cabral-Cardoso *et al.*, 2006; Maniscalco, 2010; Chell and Athayde, 2011]. For Friberg [2012] soft skills constitute „embodied or non-certified cultural capital” [p. 1919], whereas for Laker and Powell [2011] they are „intrapersonal skills such as one’s ability to manage oneself as well as interpersonal skills such as how one handles one’s interactions with others” [p. 112].

We add to this division (into soft and hard skills) or rather distinguish in it a third category of moral competencies. This last kind of competencies is assumed by

many authors to be substantially different from the other two categories, because those competencies are not value free and they are of social nature (as opposed to individual). According to Kim and Kim [2013], moral competencies are different from the others and denote „the ability to consistently behave according to accepted ethical principles” [p. 155]. Moral competencies are „a bridge between good moral intentions and moral behavior” [Lind, 2000, p. 404]. Robichaux [2012] is of the same opinion and describes the James Rest’s Four Component Model, which is useful in developing ethical skills and, at the same time, applies it to a nursing practice. In this paper, we understand moral competencies as the ones attributed to people who are viewed as honest and virtuous, who show integrity, respect to the rights of others, detest favourism and other forms of immoral conduct that are used in order to achieve one’s aims. Such skills are denied to those who misuse power, trade in influence, resort to cronyism, use protection, embezzle, etc., whether it serves the purposes of an organization, professional group or their personal aims, irrespectively of their proficiency, mastery or other instrumental skills. This notion is similarly understood by Ossowska [1970/85], Puga and Martinez [2008] and Naughton and Cornwall [2009].

Stichter [2011] states that „Morality requires that we acquire certain moral skills, i.e. virtues./.../ virtues involve a higher motivational component, when compared to some examples of practical skills’ and ‘that every virtue is a skill, although not every skill is a virtue /.../ because not every skill deals with matters of morality” [pp. 80-85].

Objective and methodology of research

The purpose of the empirical study was to distinguish the skills that are demanded by organizations in Portugal and Poland. The research consisted of a brief self-administered survey. Respondents anonymously completed the questionnaire, which in addition to demographic questions contained a free-response and an open-ended question about employee’s skills that were demanded by the organizations in which they worked. The respondents had to list or describe them without being limited as to the type or number of skills. In the second question, we asked respondents to order the skills listed earlier from the most important to relatively less valued from the company’s perspective. The study was conducted in Portugal and Poland in January/February 2013 on convenience samples.

The Portuguese sample (N=105) consisted of working students from undergraduate and master’s programs at two higher education institutions (one public and one private), one of Setúbal (n=78) and another of Lisbon (n=27). After a primary selection, eight questionnaires were eliminated and excluded from further analysis, due to the lack of answer to the question about the skills that were demanded by the organization in which he/she worked. The final analysis sample

consisted of N=97 cases. The Polish sample (N=85) consisted of working students from undergraduate and master's programs at two higher education institutions (one public and one private), one of Białystok (n=47) and another of Warsaw (n=38).

The responses, concerning the skills and competencies, were subject to the process of phenomenological analysis and reduction [Marques and McCall, 2005; Marques, 2013]. This is a mixed quantitative-qualitative and interpretive method [Bardin, 199; Lessard-Hérbert *et al.*, 1994; Marques and McCall, 2005; Marques, 2013], which is very similar to the thematic categorization in a content analysis [Mayntz *et al.*, 1985; Bardin, 1991; Romero, 1991].

A content analysis is considered to be a research technique intended to describe objectively, systematically and quantitatively the contents of communication [Bardin, 1991; Romero, 1991]. Phenomenology is a systematic investigation of the logic and content of communication of the phenomena [Lessard-Hérbert *et al.*, 1994], or as Brocki and Wearden [2006] states: „In comparison with content analysis, which seeks to produce a quantitative analysis of discrete categories from qualitative data, in IPA [interpretive phenomenological analysis] the importance of the narrative portrayal remains paramount with the final analysis providing a detailed interpretative analysis” [p. 89]. According to Miles and Huberman [2000] and Lessard-Hérbert *et al.* [1994], a data analysis in a qualitative study, proper to the phenomenological analysis, consisting of three concurrent stages, namely the reduction/condensation of data, the representation/presentation of data and the interpretation of data. The process of data reduction, which begins before data gathering and continues even after, consists essentially of a selection, a centralization/concentration, a simplification, an abstraction and a transformation. According to Brocki and Wearden [2006], the phenomenological analysis can effectively complement quantitative studies or treat specific research issues in a different, more in-depth manner. Marques [2013] highlights that an important part of the phenomenological analysis is the reduction of data achieved in the process of classification (categorization) of the results and their assignment to common themes or categories.

The presentation of the research results was preceded by a statistical analysis [Sobczyk, 2012; Jaggia and Kelly, 2013]. For this purpose, the structure and correlation analyses were being used. Characteristic features of the studied groups of respondents from Poland and Portugal were being determined by means of the structure analysis measures, i.e.: classical measures of position (mean), positional measures of position (mode, median), classical measures of variability (standard deviation, coefficient of variation) as well as classical measures of asymmetry (index and coefficient of asymmetry). Their comparative analysis was performed. It enabled the comprehensive assessment of the studied phenomenon, which constituted the basis for drawing further conclusions. In order to examine the quantitative

dependence of the Polish and Portuguese respondents' answers and group them into the hard, soft and moral skills, the Pearson correlation coefficient was being applied [Józwiak and Podgórski, 2012].

It served to establish the strength and direction of the correlation dependence. The cause-effect relation of the studied phenomenon is reciprocal, which means that the Polish and Portuguese respondents' answers interact. Moreover, it is rectilinear, i.e. the individual growth of one variable is accompanied with the growth of the average values of another variable. The existence of the rectilinear relation was verified by means of the curvilinearity measure m_{xy} or m_{yx} [Sobczyk, 2012].

All the values of the studied dependences were lower than 0,2, which indicates linear relations.

Description and analysis of results

The average age of Polish and Portuguese respondents is 27 and 35 respectively. The Polish group is dominated by women (68%), while the Portuguese one by men (87%). The average tenure in the organization of the respondents in Portugal (10 years) is 2.5 times longer than those in Poland (4 years). The vast majority of those surveyed in both countries worked for private companies, yet in Poland these were small businesses with no more than 50 employees, while in Portugal – big companies with 251 and more employees. Most of the students in both countries enjoy job security.

When listing the skills valued by organizations, the respondents gave the minimum of 1 and the maximum of 12 names or descriptions of various competencies. In total, in the Polish sample, they indicated 312 basic categories, and in the Portuguese one – 318. Such a high number of responses and the possibility to formulate the names of competencies on one's own, resulted in the necessity to group them. It was achieved with the use of the two-stage method of phenomenological reduction, conducted by three independent people/judges for each national sample; however, one judge, who had a fluent command of both languages, belonged to both groups. In the first stage, independent judges analyzed and grouped basic categories of skills listed by the respondents, assigned them to common semantic categories (shared semantic field) with the use of terms closer to the literal meaning of competencies named by the respondents and eliminated repetitions. The second stage aimed to finally allocate them to the reduced number of skills. The final categories belonged to the three types, which are the subject to the analysis contained in this paper. The following operational definitions of the competencies were used: *soft skills* – general/universal, transversal, non-academic skills, which are not related to education or any technical function, personality traits, aims, preferences and motivation, career attributes such as the ability to communicate, to participate in a dialogue, to respond and cooperate with others,

to work as part of a team, to solve problems and conflicts, to motivate, boost, encourage, support, and facilitate, the ability to adapt, creativity, initiative, good manners, knowledge of the code of conduct; *hard skills* – technical skills acquired through professional and academic education, experience, or through practicing a profession, which are also related to administrative procedures connected with the line of business of an organization, e.g. operating machines and devices, knowledge of safety rules, computer literacy, knowledge of software, financial/accounting skills; professional and technical experience; *moral competencies* – the ability to consistently behave according to accepted ethical/moral principles, e.g. honesty, transparency, fairness, respect, courage, yet exclusive of the abilities considered by Ossowska [1970/85] as practical virtues/predispositions or pertaining to the so-called protestant ethics.

In the process of defining the above listed categories, we identified six respondents' answers which were incomprehensible or unrelated to the notion of competence/skill. They were classified as 'other categories' and were excluded from further analysis.

Among the competencies listed in the survey, the soft skills played the predominant role (Figure 1), which accounts for 75% of the responses in Poland and 79% in Portugal. The second were hard skills, which were indicated by 18% of the Polish respondents and 17% of those from Portugal. Moral competencies were mentioned least frequently, by a mere 7% of the Polish students and 4% of the Portuguese ones.

The most frequently mentioned soft skills in Poland and Portugal were: organization/management, motivation/engagement/commitment, communicativeness/ the ability to participate in a dialogue/communication, punctuality, responsibility. The most prevailing hard skills in both countries were: knowledge, technical skills, command of languages, IT skills. The most dominating moral competencies, on the other hand, in Poland and Portugal were: honesty and loyalty.

Figure 1. Categories of skills and competencies demanded by organizations/employers in the opinion of the Portuguese and Polish employees (%)

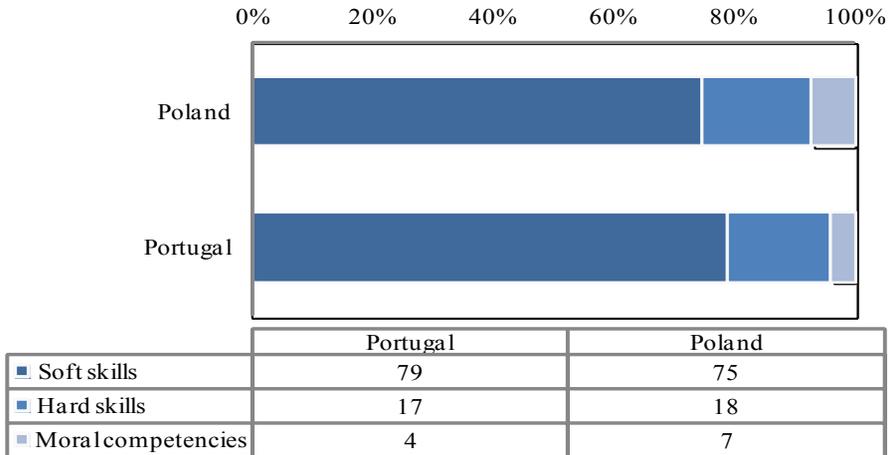
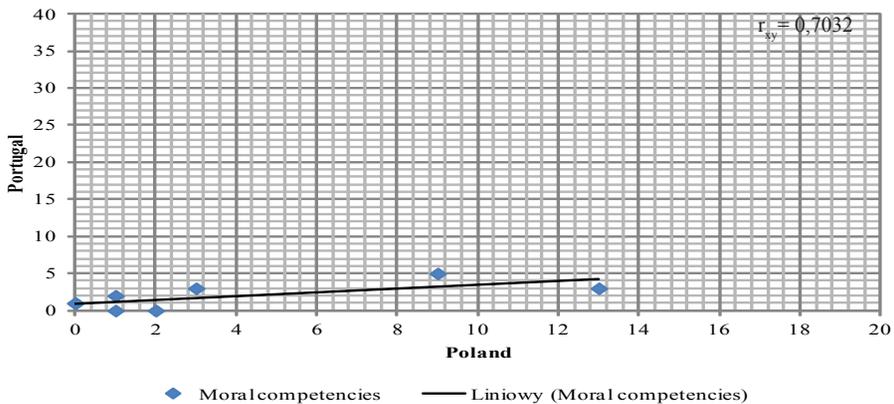


Figure 2. Moral competencies – the relation between the responses in Poland and in Portugal

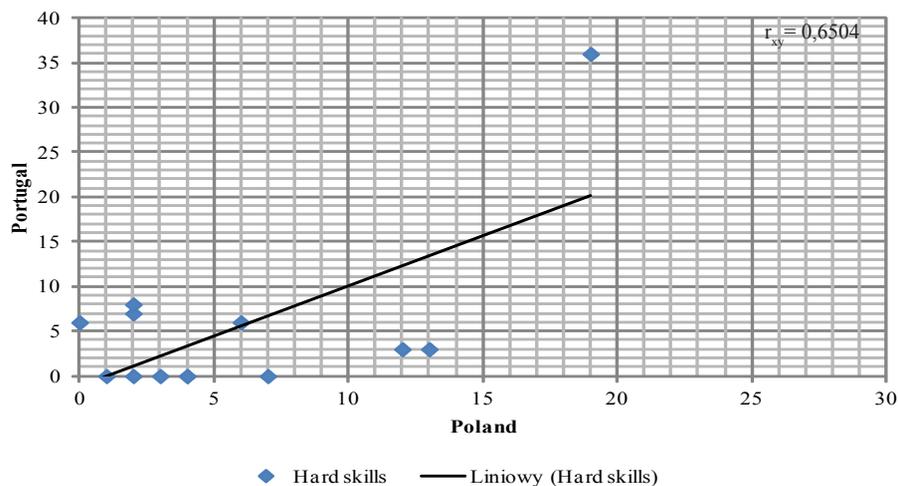


The analysis of the responses divided into soft and hard skills and moral competencies (including intermediate categories) reveals a certain dispersion of results, yet, not identical within each category. The slightest differences are observed with respect to moral competencies (Figure 2). It results from, among others, the lowest number of responses in comparison to other categories (44 responses, accounting for 5% of the total). The moral competencies indicated by both Polish and Portuguese respondents were grouped into the following categories: loyalty,

sincerity and trust. Nearly half of the respondents from Poland also pointed to honesty, which was in turn indicated by merely every fifth respondent in Portugal. Such a difference may be the consequence of the size of the organizations where the respondents worked. The majority of the students in Poland worked for small businesses, while in Portugal for big companies. In small companies, where people know each other, transparency plays a vital role, which is why there were so many 'honesty' responses. On the other hand, in big organizations employees are more anonymous and, although honesty was undoubtedly important there as well, the need to indicate it as a competency valued by an organization was weaker.

The differences between hard skills, indicated by the respondents in Poland and in Portugal, are also minor. It is probably connected with a position or a kind of tasks performed by the respondents rather than with country-dependent conditions (Figure 3). The most dramatic dissimilarities were in naming such hard skills as: IT skills, professionalism, formal education or professional experience. Hard skills that were indicated by the respondents in both countries were: technical knowledge and skills and the command of languages.

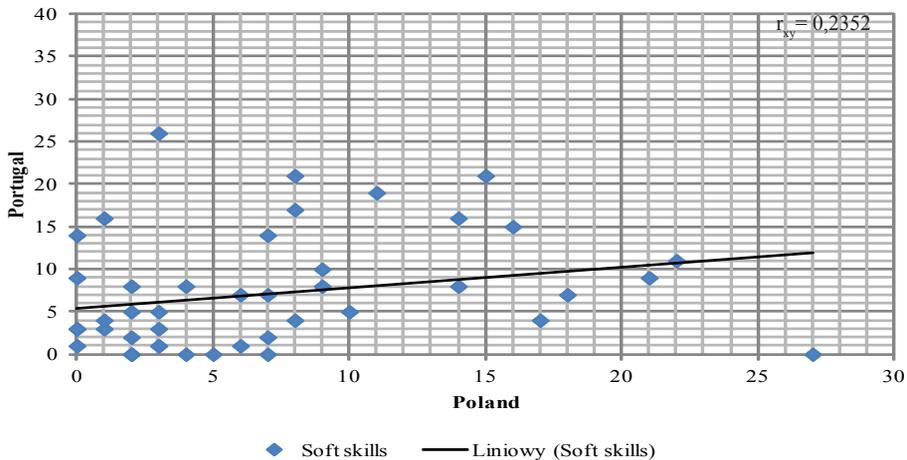
Figure 3. Hard skills – the relation between the responses in Poland and in Portugal



By far the largest differences are observed with respect to the soft skills (Figure 4). On one hand, it is the consequence of the most considerable number of responses (312 in Poland and 318 in Portugal). Among the soft skills listed by the respondents, the most common ones were: motivation/sacrifice/engagement, punctuality, ability to learn/develop, ability to work as part of a team, positive attitude/assertiveness, timeliness/ability to carry out one's duties and promises,

ability to act/take decisions quickly. However, such a noticeable dispersion of responses makes it impossible to carry out any further comparative analysis and draw conclusions. For that purpose, the soft skills were grouped according to the European Skills/Competencies Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), which defines the following competencies: ‘language and communication’, ‘attitude and values at work’, ‘social skills and competencies’, ‘thinking skills and competencies’, and ‘application of knowledge’. The ESCO is a tool developed within the European Employment Strategy in order to unify skills and competencies for the needs of labour markets. It is accessible at the special European Council portal [ESCO, 2014]. The classification was chosen on the basis of its universality, which will provide comparative data for future research.

Figure 4. Soft skills – the relation between the responses in Poland and in Portugal

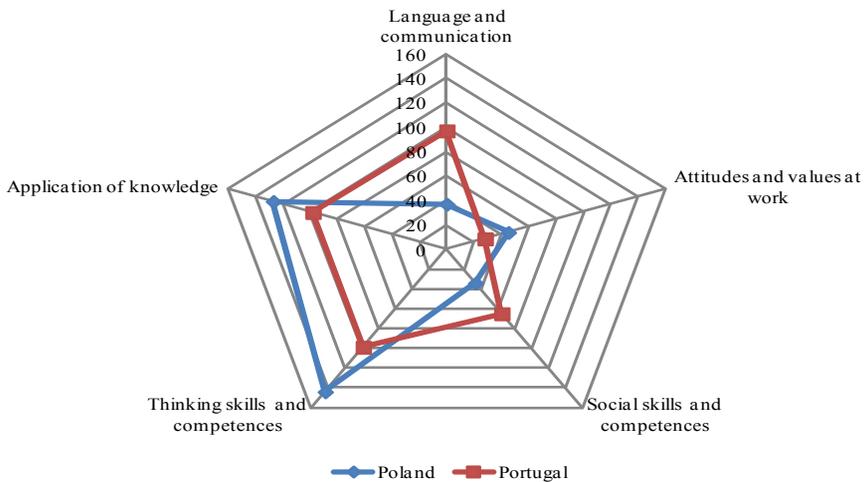


The differences in responses from both countries can stem from the conditions described in the aforementioned discussion on hard skills. However, an attempt to explain them can be made with reference to cultural conditions described by Hofstede *et al.* [2011].

The location of Poland and Portugal was analyzed according to the classification of cultural dimensions by Hofstede *et al.* [2011]. There are no significant discrepancies between Poland and Portugal with respect to the Power Distance Index (PDI) [Hofstede *et al.*, 2011]. From the perspective of this dimension, both countries are situated in the middle of the continuum between the highest PDI and the lowest PDI societies, however, slightly closer to the former ones. The results from the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) [Hofstede *et al.*, 2011] are also similar. Portugal (together with Greece) ranks first with reference to this index among all the

countries analyzed by Hofstede *et al.* [2011]. Poland also occupies a high position (in the first ten places). This means that both societies are characterized by a relatively high fear of the unknown. Poland and Portugal hold similar positions considering the Indulgence Versus Restraint (IVR) dimension [Hofstede *et al.*, 2011]. Both societies are highly restrictive, the Portuguese one slightly less than Polish. A little larger dispersion can be observed between Poland and Portugal with respect to Long-term/Short-term Orientation (LTO-WUS) dimension [Hofstede *et al.*, 2011]. Polish society attaches a little more significance to pragmatic features, which are meaningful in the long run; while in Portugal, the features important as for now are valued a little less. These differences, though, are not as considerable as is the case of the following two features. Within the Individualism Versus Collectivism (IDV) dimension, there are huge discrepancies between the countries under consideration [Hofstede *et al.*, 2011]. With regards to this dimension, Portugal is situated closer to the highly collectivist societies, while Poland is placed a little closer to the middle of the continuum, yet on the side of the individualist societies. Another dimension, which differentiates both societies, is the Masculinity and Femininity of cultures (MAS). Polish society is more ‘masculine’, while the Portuguese one more ‘feminine’ [Hofstede *et al.*, 2011].

Figure 5. Skills and competencies distribution obtained from the Polish and Portuguese samples according to the ESCO classification



As it is presented in Figure 5, the Portuguese respondents indicated more often the competencies from the ‘social skills and competencies’ and ‘language and communication’ categories, which are connected with teamwork. This may

confirm the collectivism of this society. Greater individualism of Polish society may be portrayed in the larger number of responses relating to specific competencies including: creativity/entrepreneurship, ability to learn/develop, diligence/efficiency/willingness to make an effort, conscientiousness/thoroughness/meticulousness, and, specifically, autonomy and independence. On the other hand, the collectivism of Portuguese society may be reflected in more frequent indications to such competencies as: social skills/human relations, availability, flexibility/polyvalence/adaptability as well as cronyism/favoritism/pulling the strings. Yet, it needs to be emphasized that there are responses which seem to defy this thesis.

A noticeable shift towards the masculinity of Polish culture may be confirmed by more frequent indications to the significance of the competencies which form the category of skills connected with applying knowledge. Among specific competencies, the Poles in the survey more often pointed to the features which are rather attributed to 'male' cultures such as: endurance/determination, ability to solve problems, ability to work under pressure/resistance to stress. The 'femininity' of Portuguese culture may be proven by more common indications to: good manners/politeness, empathy/friendliness/kindness, cooperation/help, and physical appearance. This also included examples that are exceptions to the rule (more frequently occurring indications to dynamism and leadership in Portugal). However, it needs to be stressed that the Polish respondents indicated the competencies proving the 'masculinity' of culture even though the sample consisted mostly of women (68%). And conversely, the Portuguese respondents reported the 'femininity' of culture although men accounted for 87% of the sample.

Another dimension in the survey was 'Indulgence Versus Restraint'. The Hofstede *et al.* [2011] research showed that Polish society is more restrictive, while the Portuguese one is more indulgent. This seems to be confirmed by more numerous responses from the Polish respondents, which form the 'attitude and values at work' category as well as more frequent indication to moral competencies, especially to honesty and loyalty. It must be admitted, though, that the analysis of specific social competencies is by no means unequivocal. Greater restraint of Polish society can be corroborated by recurring indications to the competencies which are absent in the case of the Portuguese responses: regularity as well as conscientiousness/thoroughness/meticulousness. However, the fact that the Portuguese respondents indicated to such competencies as attendance/reliability could be interpreted conversely.

As it was mentioned above, the surveyed societies are not strikingly different in the 'Uncertainty Avoidance' dimension. The survey fails to provide clear results either. Higher 'uncertainty avoidance' among the Portuguese in the survey may be presented in a slightly higher number of indications to such competencies as: organization and management or attendance at work mentioned above. Yet, on the

other hand, the Poles in the survey pointed more seldom to flexibility or mobility. It is not insignificant that the majority of the Polish sample consisted of the inhabitants of the eastern part of the country, i.e. a more conservative one.

The survey seems to confirm the already-mentioned slight difference between the societies in Poland and Portugal with respect to the 'Power Distance' dimension. It can be alternatively assumed that more frequent indications to managerial skills (organization and management, leadership) by the Portuguese respondents prove that the employees in this country are expected to participate more, which is characteristic of lower PDI countries.

While the study described in this paper is not representative, its results are by far close to the research addressed to entrepreneurs in Poland conducted by the Warsaw School of Economics, the American Chamber of Commerce in Poland and by Ernst & Young in February and March 2012, published in May 2012 [*Kompetencje*, 2012]. For the purpose of the research, the authors singled out 79 competencies, which were classified into four groups: personal skills, interpersonal skills, intellectual abilities, skills and knowledge that is general and adequate to the performed work ('hard knowledge'/professional). 53 managers from the companies of various sizes and types took part in the survey. They were to determine what competencies are expected from higher education graduates and how the level of these competencies represented by the graduates was rated. The most expected competences were, in turn: effective communication/command of languages, openness to acquiring knowledge and constant development, commitment, ability to work in a team, the ability to determine and justify priorities, ethical behavior as the basis for performance, responsibility, the ability to organize work and effective time management, flexibility and ability to adopt. On the other hand, the biggest rift between the expected competencies and the level represented by the graduates, in the opinion of the employers, was in case of: the ability to determine and justify priorities, the ability to organize work, effective time management, proper self-evaluation, understanding one's own strengths and limitations, effective communication, ability to formulate and solve problems, ability to work in a team, commitment and the ability to manage projects. Although the most demanded competence belonged to the category of hard skills, the vast majority was composed of soft skills. High position of moral competencies is also worth highlighting. The authors noticed also the differences in needs between big and small businesses. Big companies demand mostly soft skills and fluent command of languages (especially English) and the ability to use IT tools. Small companies value those skills as well. However, they by far more frequently indicate the importance of professional education or hard skills [*Kompetencje*, 2012]

Conclusions and limitations to the research

Many papers have been written about competencies and very often they are the result of empirical studies. However, the literature on the subject is still characterized by unequivocality and imprecise terminology. Additionally, the range of competing typologies is vast. Yet, this diversity does not seem to be a hindrance. Quite to the contrary, it contributes to the development of research on the phenomenon of human competencies viewed from various perspectives.

The supply-demand structure of competencies in labour markets fluctuates and here similarly instead of clear results, which would indicate present or future tendencies, we must face phenomena which are not sufficiently studied or thoroughly investigated. This also creates a welcome opportunity for researchers. As the authors of the OECD report on education put it: „The economies of OECD countries depend upon a sufficient supply of high-level workers. Educational attainment is frequently used as a measure of human capital and the level of the skills of individual workers. This indicator shows how well the supply of skills matches the demand. For example, high unemployment rates could indicate a mismatch between the educational attainment of the population and the labor-markets demand” [OECD, 2013, p. 74].

The fact that the soft skills outnumber the other two surveyed types of competencies in both sample groups and that they are much more diversified prove their popularity. However, such a significant predominance of soft skills is surprising as 59% of the respondents in the Portuguese sample and 74% in the Polish one did not hold any managerial position; therefore, it seems that the technical competencies should be in the lead. On the other hand, however, we do not know what jobs/tasks the respondents performed for their organizations. Moreover, well-developed soft skills are required in the tasks and functions connected with establishing and cultivating human relations. Unfortunately, this question was not included in the survey. One interesting result is that the responses in both countries, concerning soft skills, confirmed to a great extent the existence of cultural differences between Poland and Portugal, which were identified in the research conducted by Hofstede *et al.* [2011]. What influenced the differences in results was also the fact that the respondents in Poland were people employed in small companies and in Portugal – in big ones. The studies conducted in Poland in 2012 [*Kompetencje*, 2012] by other authors lead to similar conclusions concerning differences in competencies valued in small and big companies.

A small number of indications to moral competencies, in comparison with the remaining two kinds, may prove the lack of importance of these competencies to employers/organizations. But their low number and diversity may also mean that such competencies are regarded as inherent to employees.

The empirical study discussed in this paper was conducted on a non-probabilistic sample of working students, so it cannot be treated as the basis for generalization for

all organizations in Portugal and Poland. On the other hand, however, our objective was also to use the data collected in the investigation that essentially intended to acknowledge the diversity of skills valued by organizations in order to establish a starting point for a more comprehensive and thorough research in the future. The list of competencies collected in this study, with the use of content analysis/phenomenological reduction, will serve for the construction of a standardized instrument to be applied in a subsequent research. In future studies, it is necessary to ensure a similar structure of samples in both countries, concerning the size of companies employing the respondents. It could be matched to the structure of Polish and Portuguese businesses, where more than 80% is occupied by companies employing up to 9 people (in Poland and in Portugal in non-financial business economy more than 95% of enterprises are micro enterprises), and less than 20% - by the rest [Eurostat, 2012].

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