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THE PERSONALIZED MODEL FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN CUSTOMS

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Abstract. *For customs administrations to function effectively and to uphold European Union (EU) values, it is crucial that they work together, with consistent quality standards and with the uniform application of regulations and initiatives. This is because different approaches and standards in education and training make it difficult to share information on best practices and disseminate knowledge and skills between different customs administrations. The EU Customs Competency Framework (CustCompEU) sets out a consensus on the optimal set of knowledge, skills, and behaviours required by customs professionals in the EU. However, from the perspective of customs institutions, several practical issues arise – chiefly, how to provide their employees with the necessary knowledge and skills in a cost effective and efficient way, by investing in customs employee training. This study provides a flexible methodology for generating competency, which allows employers to systematize the requirements for specific customs positions and to connect with the requirements of international and supranational organizations. The approach provided is practical from the perspective of the customs institution, and provides educators and human resource managers with the necessary information regarding the knowledge and skills acquired as a result of the educational process. The meta-analysis of the study is based on the use of qualitative data from existing data sources which utilize the professional standards system implemented in Latvia, EU-implemented initiatives, and the principles of the process management system. The standards of the customs profession are a key element in the development of an integrated learning and management model, which would be a central*

element in a coordinated and harmonized vocational education and training system for professional customs officers.

Keywords: *customs education, EU Customs Competency Framework; customs profession standards; customs administration process management.*

Jel classification: *M53; H12*

1. Introduction

The development of human resources is considered to be the most important issue in the customs administrations of the EU Member States. One of the objectives of the Customs 2020 Programme (European Commission, n.d.-b) is to strengthen the skills and competences of customs officials.

There is no common system for the training and professional growth of customs employees in the European Union, and establishing such a system for the customs authorities of the 27 EU Member States would be very difficult (perhaps even impossible) as:

- Training for EU customs officers involves a wide variety of training models which lack a coherent approach;
- Training is mainly organised at educational institutions and training centres under the auspiecs of the office;
- Customs services have very different institutional affiliations and degrees to which they fall under the dependency and authority of their Ministries.

For customs administrations to function effectively and to support EU values, it is important that they operate in a uniform manner, taking into account consistent quality standards and ensuring the uniform application of regulations and initiatives. The current methods of work, the means of implementing the regulatory enactments of the European Union, and the standard skills of customs officers and officials vary greatly from one Member State to another. This situation impedes the synchronous operation of customs administrations and decreases the overall customs capacity of the EU. The various education and training approaches and standards make it difficult to share information on best practices and disseminate knowledge and skills between different customs administrations (Pētersone et al. 2013), and even between customs brokers and other border control authorities (Laurinavičius 2018; Jablonskis, Petersone, and Ketners 2018). Therefore, an EU-wide tool has been established to provide a framework within which consistently high standards could be achieved in all of the customs administrations of the Member States – the EU customs system of competences (CustCompEU). By introducing a harmonised approach, the EU hopes to establish a uniform system for the training and education of customs officers in order to enable Member States to provide customs officers with the necessary knowledge and skills.

This system of ensuring the competence of customs authorities should ensure interaction with national, World Customs Organization (2019), or internal professional

standards, if established, as well as with other competency generation mechanisms.

From the perspective of the customs institution, a number of practical issues arise regarding how to better provide staff with the required knowledge and skills:

- deciding whether to employ staff who already possess the knowledge and skills required, or whether the organisation should be engaged in conducting the training of its employees;
- establishing whether the knowledge and skills of employees are sufficient for performing their duties prior to their recruitment;
- defining the knowledge and skills that are missing that would enable employees to start performing their duties and be transferred to another workplace;
- training employees only for the needs of a specific position or functional position, effectively improving training expenditures;
- understanding whether the employee who obtains knowledge and work experience in the customs service would be interested in transferring to work in the private sector (Ketners and Petersone 2020).

The aim of this research is to provide customs administrations with a methodology for generating flexible competencies that are personalised but highly effective from the perspective of the customs institution.

2. Materials and Methods

The meta-analysis of this study is based on the use of qualitative data from the existing data sources of the professional standards system implemented in Latvia, the initiatives implemented as part of the CustCompEU, and the principles of the process management system.

In the education sector, a quality-oriented service requires excellence in the design and planning of the service activities, as well as in their delivery and the accepted method of assessing the performance of the services (Lupo 2013). In order to avoid possible confusion, partial ignorance, and subjectivity, the content of both the study programme and the training programme should be prepared based on the requirements of the main stakeholder in the outcome of the study process – the employer.

In this case, the guidelines for the content of the study process will be professional standards. Professional standards determine the basic tasks and duties of professional activity corresponding to the profession, the requirements of professional qualifications, and the general and professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies required to perform these tasks and duties. Based on the professional standards of the customs processes, it is possible to create an integrated and complementary model of education and training in customs matters.

2.1. EU Customs Competency Framework

In 2011, the European Commission (EC) performed a wide-scale study on the training and education of EU customs employees. The study of the Directorate General Taxation and Customs Union regarding the training of customs employees and entrepreneurs in the EU revealed that: 75% of the member states conduct internal training for customs employees; 55% carry out training for customs officials only in classrooms – a rather formal method of training, in which less than a half of the required professional competences are acquired; 20% provide workplace training; 14% implement training remotely via the internet; and only 4% conduct training through seminars, conferences, or other training events (European Commission 2016).

In 2015, the EC published the first version of the CustCompEU. This framework aimed at harmonising and raising customs performance standards throughout the EU. The CustCompEU is the foundation which sets out a consensus on the optimal set of knowledge, skills, and behaviours required by customs professionals in the EU (European Commission 2019; n.d.-a).

The EU Certificate of Recognition ran its first pilot year in 2018, during which the process, methodology, and accompanying documentation were evaluated in terms of quality, clarity, and usability. The certification process for master's and bachelor's degree programmes in the field of customs was launched, and 11 bachelor's and master's degree programmes were recognised in the EU (EU Reference Training Programmes for Academic Customs Education 2019).

2.2. Process Management System

The synergy of the process management system in managing human resources is an innovative approach. There are workplace descriptions, position descriptions, and professional standards that supplement each other and are conceptually contracted. For example, if a change in the process occurs, it is necessary to introduce changes to workplace descriptions, which, in turn, provide a basis for changing the description of the position. In particular, how changes in processes affect professional standards is analysed. An organisation's internal documentation in the field of human resource management is used as a basis for an objective background analysis. This documentation follows the principle of compatibility, where processes and process actions are identified, and the final product(s) of the process, their performance indicators, and the required general and special knowledge and skills are identified for the implementation of each process. Consequently, the general and special knowledge and skills identified for the implementation of the process form the basis for both descriptions of positions and professional standards (Pētersone and Krastiņš 2012).

Such an approach to training will eliminate weaknesses in three key areas: 1) flexible financing options; 2) awarding credit for prior learning; and 3) enhancing strategic community partnerships. Parallels are drawn to similar challenges the EU faces in meeting the social dimension of the Bologna Process (Serowick and Cardelle 2015) and

other socio-economic problems (Barinov et al. 2020; Okunevičiūtė-Neverauskienė and Rakauskienė 2018). The Bologna Process contributes to the fact that higher education is no longer isolated from lifelong learning, since the knowledge and skills acquired beyond studies can be expressed in credits which can count towards the total amount of study needed to acquire a degree/qualification or a specific study module. The integrated education and training module will ensure flexible financing options (Erins and Erina 2015; Arhipova 2014; Arhipova et al. 2017) and the cost-efficient training of customs officers.

3. Results and Discussion

To systematize the requirements of specific customs service positions, a methodology for the identification of key knowledge and skills is proposed, which combines them with the requirements of international and supranational organisations and provides an educational system with the information necessary regarding the knowledge and skills acquired as a result of the educational process.

The general and special knowledge and skills that are necessary to perform the relevant process are identified and formulated for each process (Pētersone and Krastiņš 2014), and an identification code is assigned for each indicator of general and special knowledge and skill. Thereafter, each indicator of general and special knowledge and skills is given a value depending on its importance in the appropriate professional standard. This value ranges from 1 to 30, where 1 is the least significant and 30 the most significant indicator of general and special knowledge and skills in the professional standard. Indicators of general and special knowledge and skills can only be identified and formulated by those involved in the process concerned, together with organizers of training as experts of the methodology. The EU competence framework (CustCompEU) and the World Customs Organization's (2019) *Professional standards* can be used as guidelines for the formulation of general and special knowledge and skills. Table 1 provides the procedure for identifying the value of each indicator of general knowledge.

Table 1. *General Knowledge Assessment*

Process	General knowledge code	General knowledge indicator	Value		
			1–10	11–20	21–30
P.004.004	P.004.004.vz001				
	P.004.004.vz002				
	P.004.004.vz003				
P.004.005	P.004.005.vz001				
	P.004.005.vz001				
P.nnn.nnn	P.nnn.nnn.vz001				
	P.nnn.nnn.vz002				
	P.nnn.nnn.vznnn				

Source: *Table made by the authors*

The same methodology is used to identify and formulate indicators for specific knowledge and skills as well as general skills, and a value is assigned to each unit. Accordingly, the model consists of a four-row matrix obtained according to the professional standard, position description, and both the workplace and professional qualifications of the employee. First, according to the requirements of a particular profession and the standard of competence, a standard professional matrix is obtained (see formula 1).

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & a_{13} & \dots a_{1i} \dots a_{1n} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & a_{23} & \dots a_{2i} \dots a_{2n} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} & a_{33} & \dots a_{3i} \dots a_{2n} \\ a_{41} & a_{42} & a_{43} & \dots a_{4i} \dots a_{2n} \end{bmatrix} \quad (1),$$

where A = professional standards;

$a_{11}\ a_{12}\ a_{13} \dots a_{1i} \dots a_{1n}$ – general knowledge in the professional standard;
$a_{21}\ a_{22}\ a_{23} \dots a_{2i} \dots a_{2n}$ – general skills in the professional standard;
$a_{31}\ a_{32}\ a_{33} \dots a_{3i} \dots a_{3n}$ – specific knowledge in the professional standard;
$a_{41}\ a_{42}\ a_{43} \dots a_{4i} \dots a_{4n}$ – specific skills in the professional standard.

When formulating the description of a particular position in the customs service, the respective indicators should be taken into account: general knowledge, general skills, specific knowledge, and specific skills (see formula 2).

$$B = \begin{bmatrix} b_{11} & b_{12} & b_{13} & \dots b_{1i} \dots b_{1n} \\ b_{21} & b_{22} & b_{23} & \dots b_{2i} \dots b_{2n} \\ b_{31} & b_{32} & b_{33} & \dots b_{3i} \dots b_{3n} \\ b_{41} & b_{42} & b_{43} & \dots b_{4i} \dots b_{4n} \end{bmatrix} \quad (2),$$

where B = description of the specific position;

$b_{11}\ b_{12}\ b_{13} \dots b_{1i} \dots b_{1n}$ – general knowledge in the position description;
$b_{21}\ b_{22}\ b_{23} \dots b_{2i} \dots b_{2n}$ – general skills in the position description;
$b_{31}\ b_{32}\ b_{33} \dots b_{3i} \dots b_{3n}$ – specific knowledge in the position description;
$b_{41}\ b_{42}\ b_{43} \dots b_{4i} \dots b_{4n}$ – specific skills in the position description.

In this way, the position description matrix is assessed (see formula 2). Since, in most cases, the descriptions of the positions of customs officials do not reflect a whole series of processes and process activities, the value of these indicators will be 0. This means that the value of several indicators of the position descriptions will, in most cases, be lower than the value of the same indicators of the professional standard. Still, there remains a theoretical possibility that they will be identical to the values of the position description when one customs official works alone at one customs control point while performing all of the duties there (see formula 4).

When formulating the description of the specific workplace of the customs service, the relevant indicators should be taken into account – such as general knowledge, general skills, and the specific knowledge and skills needed to fulfil work duties at the corresponding workplace. Following a similar methodology, the workplace is identified (see formula 3).

$$C = \begin{bmatrix} c_{11} & c_{12} & c_{13} & \dots c_{1i} \dots c_{1n} \\ c_{21} & c_{22} & c_{23} & \dots c_{2i} \dots c_{2n} \\ c_{31} & c_{32} & c_{33} & \dots c_{3i} \dots c_{3n} \\ c_{41} & c_{42} & c_{43} & \dots c_{4i} \dots c_{4n} \end{bmatrix} \quad (3),$$

where C = description of the workplace;

$c_{11}\, c_{12}\, c_{13} \dots c_{1i} \dots c_{1n}$ – general knowledge in the workplace description;

$c_{21}\, c_{22}\, c_{23} \dots c_{2i} \dots c_{2n}$ – general skills in the workplace description;

$c_{31}\, c_{32}\, c_{33} \dots c_{3i} \dots c_{3n}$ – specific knowledge in the workplace description;

$c_{41}\, c_{42}\, c_{43} \dots c_{4i} \dots c_{4n}$ – specific skills in the workplace description.

In this way, the workplace description matrix is calculated (see formula 3). The description of the workplace reflects processes and activities from the process management system according to the functionality of a specific workplace and the institutional affiliation of a series of processes and process activities from the process management system. Depending on the size of the Customs Control Point (CCP), several workplaces where one or more persons can work at the same time are provided. Therefore, the value of multiple indicators may also be 0. This means that the workplace will always be less than the position description (see formula 4).

$$A \geq B \geq C, \quad (4)$$

Following a similar methodology, it is possible to determine professional qualifications of each customs officer to ascertain whether they comply with the professional standard (see formula 5).

$$D = \begin{bmatrix} d_{11} & d_{12} & d_{13} & \dots d_{1i} \dots d_{1n} \\ d_{21} & d_{22} & d_{23} & \dots d_{2i} \dots d_{2n} \\ d_{31} & d_{32} & d_{33} & \dots d_{3i} \dots d_{3n} \\ d_{41} & d_{42} & d_{43} & \dots d_{4i} \dots d_{4n} \end{bmatrix} \quad (5),$$

where D = professional qualification of the employee;

$d_{11}\, d_{12}\, d_{13} \dots d_{1i} \dots d_{1n}$ – general knowledge of the employee;

$d_{21}\, d_{22}\, d_{23} \dots d_{2i} \dots d_{2n}$ – general skills of the employee;

$d_{31}\, d_{32}\, d_{33} \dots d_{3i} \dots d_{3n}$ – specific knowledge of the employee;

$d_{41}\, d_{42}\, d_{43} \dots d_{4i} \dots d_{4n}$ – specific skills of the employee.

By analysing the existence of the general and specific knowledge and skills of each individual customs official, it is possible to compare their individual indicators both with the professional standard indicators and with the position description indicators (see formula 6).

$$A \geq B \geq D, \quad (6)$$

If D is less than A, this indicates that the customs officer does not have the corresponding professional qualification. On the other hand, if D is less than B, this indicates that the customs officer needs to improve some of their general knowledge and skills or their specific knowledge and skills.

According to this methodology, when analysing the professional qualifications of employees, it can be concluded that it is rational for customs authorities to employ workers

with the required general and specific knowledge and qualification-based skills. By comparing each indicator, it is possible to identify and complement gaps in knowledge and skills.

Such a comparison and analysis of the knowledge and skills of employees is consistent with the performance assessment system of the civil service, and forms the basis for algorithms in the management of the progress of services.

4. Conclusions

Standards for the profession of customs officer are universal operational tools which help both universities and training centres, regardless of their institutional affiliation, to provide customs authorities with the required staff without their direct involvement. Professional standards, in a similar way to position descriptions and workplace descriptions, are derived from the objectives and tasks of the employer. The standard of the customs profession is the most important element in the development of the integrated learning model, which would be a central element for a coordinated and harmonised vocational education and training system.

In the field of training, the EU Customs Competencies Framework offers the integration of four elements: customs; the private sector; the national level; and the international level, where training remains the individual responsibility of the Member States and is managed in accordance with national requirements. However, the following issue of the customs operation remains: there are 27 national customs authorities, all of which are separately regulated in the content of their training programmes and in the various elements of their training structures, such as the requirements of professional standards and competence.

Future studies should concern the impact of training activities based on the knowledge and skills identification methodology of the process management system on the performance indicators of customs authorities.

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