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# Educación superior y negocio: perspectivas de la cooperación a largo plazo\*

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## RESUMEN

En este artículo se discute la necesidad de nuevos enfoques para mejorar la calidad de la educación en las universidades, a través de la inclusión de los profesores y los estudiantes en grupos para entrenar directamente a la compañía, con el fin de compartir experiencias, identificar las cambiantes demandas del mercado con respecto a las personas y no a los programas de ajuste, con la formación de estudiantes para colgar naturaleza aplicación del aprendizaje en la educación superior.

**Palabras clave:** recursos humanos, habilidades, desarrollo profesional, sistema educativo, programa de prácticas.

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## Higher education and business: Prospects of long-term cooperation

### **Abstract**

This article discusses the need for new approaches to improve the quality of education in universities, through the inclusion of teachers and students in groups to directly train companies, in order to share experiences, identify changing requirements in the market with regards to people instead of adjustment programs, and training students in the application of their learning in higher education.

**Keywords:** Human resources, skills, professional development, educational system, internship program.

## O Ensino superior e o negócio: perspectivas para a cooperação ao longo prazo

### RESUMO

Neste artigo, discute-se a necessidade de novas abordagens para melhorar a qualidade do ensino nas universidades, através da inclusão dos professores e os alunos em grupos para treinar diretamente à empresa, a fim de compartilhar experiências, identificar as cambiantes exigências do mercado no que diz respeito às pessoas e não aos programas de ajuste, com a formação de estudantes para a aplicação da aprendizagem no ensino superior.

**Palavras-chave:** Recursos humanos, habilidades, desenvolvimento profissional, sistema de ensino, programa de práticas.

In the technological era, quality of labor force is one of the major factors influencing economic progress and welfare gain of Russia's entire population. Taking into account the lack of adequate investment in the development of Russian enterprises, obsolete and worn-out equipment and high competitiveness of western enterprises, the profile of Russian managerial personnel producing real goods and services should be a highly-qualified young specialist. It is this inner resource that the development of enterprises should count on. However, in order to achieve this goal, Russian enterprises have to take part in training such specialists, beginning with their university education.

All human relationships, including those of employers and employees, professors and students, university administrative staff and professors, involve expectations, and conflicts tend to emerge when expectations are not met. When graduates start a new job, they should try to make sure they have a clear understanding of what the employer expects from them. It's also important to give some thought to what they expect from a new employer. Employers will expect graduates to approach the job with an open mind, so they can quickly learn what they need to do it well. They will expect graduates to take instructions and directions from the people training them and from their new supervisor. They will expect graduates to be reliable, arrive to work on time and don't leave until their shift is over. New employers will expect graduates to be honest, conduct themselves professionally and dress appropriately for the position. It is difficult to do so without any experience. Every graduate wants to make an excellent impression and exceed his or her employer's basic

expectations. Things are often more complicated in reality than they appear on paper, so the company's official organizational chart might not be sufficient to describe everything that actually needs to get done. That's why graduates need some experience before beginning to work. And they need help from their professors and university administrative staff, which could combine education process with real business cases and short-term business internships.

An employer will expect certain things from graduates, but graduates also have the right to expect things from the employer. Employee expectations include timely and accurate payment of wages, adequate training, safe working conditions, full explanation of all company policies, especially of job responsibilities, and fair and constructive feedback from the supervisor. If any of these expectations are not being met, the employee should have a conversation with his or her supervisor to discuss the situation or change job. The relationship between graduates and their employer is likely to run into trouble if either of them feels that expectations are not being consistently met.

Students graduating from Saint-Petersburg State Politechnical University often overestimate their chances of getting well-paid, full-time jobs in their field of study, according to the results of a new survey that compared their views with those of recent graduates. Even though most recent graduates said they would need more training to get their desired job, and nearly half of those who are unemployed said they wished they had chosen a different major to make them more employable, students who are going to receive a diploma still think they will

land jobs in their desired fields without the need for additional training. Employers needed to re-examine how they hire and train their employees, and develop deeper partnerships with universities to better prepare students for the jobs that await them. But most students pursue postsecondary education to increase their prospects of finding a good job and starting a promising career. Many will argue, however, that students also attain essential life skills: an openness of spirit, ability to learn and work in fast-paced environments, social responsibility, interpersonal skills, and the list goes on. If employers eliminate or minimize job requirements that promote rote learning, they can bring vigorous, tangible and enduring changes to our education system. There is no way students know how many of those academic skills they attain as a direct consequence of schooling. The reality is that almost every existing metric that measures the return on investment of postsecondary education is based on the jobs and related salaries students earn after graduation. It is not based on how much students actually learn. Thus, the bottom line for most students is primarily to land the right job at the end of their programs, making employers key drivers for student motivation. Although students expend an enormous amount of their energy, time, and money in the hopes of pleasing potential employers with their performance, reality speaks otherwise. According to a study by McKinsey & Company, half of the youth surveyed worldwide is unsure if their postsecondary education improved their chances of finding a job. And among the youth who actually worked, the study found that only 55 per cent managed to land a job relevant to their field of study. It becomes more dismaying: Almost 40

per cent of employers say that graduating students lack the skills required for entry-level positions. On the one hand, we have students pursuing postsecondary education with the primary objective of finding a promising career opportunity. On the other hand, we have employers dissatisfied with students' lack of skills, resulting in numerous entry-level vacancies. The root problem getting in the way of a cultural shift in education is employer expectations. The exclusive emphasis on maintaining specific grade point averages or achieving certain test scores, for instance, implies that if students fail to achieve those specifications, their chances of success in finding the job they want are diminished. As a result, students are inhibited from engaging in other activities that could provide them with the necessary skills that are sought by employers in the first place.

Companies and higher education need to work together in the preparation of high-quality professionals. If these changes are carried out, we will witness a ripple effect. Institutions will be forced to re-think their delivery and assessment methods to keep up with employer demands. A diminished emphasis on grades due to a heightened focus on skills-based learning will open the door to different types of assessment, in which students will be encouraged to collaborate rather than compete to achieve higher grades. Collaboration, as opposed to interpersonal competition, leads to a competitive edge for employers.

As a rule, Russian higher schools give a good theoretical basis but students lack experience. That is why some companies cooperate with universities investing funds in

necessary equipment and training practical work skills; they provide money to conduct different research and accomplish design and experimental developments, establish basic educational departments, pay out grants and scholarships to students, and in return they get young specialists with good training and desire to work for the company which invested in their education. Basically, these are well-known large international companies doing business in Russia, such as Coca-Cola, Unilever, P&G, JTI, Philip Morris, Ford, Intel, Siemens, General Electric and General Motors, Hewlett Packard, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, Microsoft, Nestle, Nokia, etc.

Students will be forced to step outside their comfort zones and partake in activities that give them meaningful experiences with real-life applicability. Universities will join in because they have a vested interest in their graduates' place of employment. They could ignore employers, but they will do so at their risk – no institution wants their students graduating with a competitive disadvantage. Employers will obtain the skills they want. As a bonus, these changes might just decrease entry-level vacancies while also making for a richer and more diversified applicant pool. It is a win for everyone: employers, students, and education providers. But to turn ideas into action employers must work more closely with education providers.

It is quite symbolical that for the aforementioned companies the personnel is the key factor of their business success. For example, Unilever sees caring for all 171,000 employees and the increase in their loyalty as a key element of its development. But, HR Unilever specialist highlighted a disparity

between employers' expectations and graduates' readiness, and while expectations outstripped readiness, there was some good news as some colleges were driven towards producing graduates fully prepared for the workplace. Unilever is an extremely diversified organization in terms of ethnic and cultural make-up. The Executive Board of Unilever includes top-managers from 5 countries, whereas top-100 managers come from over 20 countries. Unilever has a reliable reputation concerning management quality and personnel training quality. In 2011, 128,000 people were registered in courses at Unilever Learning Academy. Education is provided primarily online with the help of over 7,600 study modules. The special task for 2012 and coming years has become to achieve understanding of possibilities of sustained development among employees, as well as involvement of young specialists trained with the help of tailor-made programs. Nevertheless, the academic environment does not always respond to such initiatives of the business. Not all universities are willing to change their educational process adjusting to the company's requirements and initiatives, as well as deprive their teachers of paid hours. In order to implement joint lectures, master-classes, business-games, joint research projects, it is necessary to constantly increase the practical qualification of teachers, otherwise participating in such events becomes unreasonable. Company surveys published on Unilever's website show that there are a number of factors directly related to young specialists in modern Russia:

- Less than 30% of Russian university graduates find or choose a job related to their first degree;

- Over a third of all vacancies provided by companies are related only with sales and marketing;
- The majority of mass media actively shape up the values of consumerism and help the development of one-dimensional image of a successful career, which does not coincide with the position of the company;
- Many major companies start an active policy of recruiting young specialists directly from university, which creates competition on the market of labor force.

Unilever implements programs of “growing” specialists from senior students in cooperation with many universities of Russia. Participants can study all aspects of the company’s business and become professionals in their sphere, laying the foundation of their further career development. Teachers can also participate and help students to solve problems set by the company. It can be rather time-consuming for teachers, but thanks to these events students get an opportunity to receive practical skills which are essential for quality university teaching.

During a two-year period, students have an opportunity of going from graduate to manager in one of Unilever’s key departments: marketing, finances, supply management, human resources, research and development. The first stage of the program is rotation in different departments, including rotation in sales department of Unilever regional office, the second stage is working in the chosen department according to their major’s profile with a possibility of training in one of the foreign offices of Unilever. Employees of the company’s training center name

the following advantages of such programs: working at real business-projects; rotation inside the company, which allows gaining multidimensional experience; international experience; professional and personal growth. Unilever Future Leaders Program is organized in such a way that during a two-year period a young specialist can study all the aspects of the company’s work to the utmost, as well as become a professional in his or her field and lay the foundation for their further career in Unilever. Such programs become especially sought-after at universities which take into account modern approach to master’s education.

In JTI the approach for preparing specialists-to-be embraces tailor-made short-term trainings, business-games and head hunting. Talent management of Japan Tobacco International is business-oriented and aims at attracting young promising specialists – university graduates, as well as management, development and retention of key company employees. This process must be part of the duties for line managers and top-managers with active support and control from the Human Resources department in partnership with representatives of the academic sphere. According to JTI investigations, the number of employers looking to hire engineers continues to rise, so do expectations of graduates, causing a shift in demand of skills. This shift, which became evident just a few years ago and which will continue to increase as Boomers leave the workforce, has created a significant need for a transformation in curriculum.

Employability of graduates should be the cornerstone of a tertiary education institution. It should be what students demand



from the university, and what they should be asking all the way through until their graduation. Professors should explain preparation for work, business life and career skills to integrate into a workplace, employers expectations from graduates, how graduates should go about getting a job and, of course, how the institution could help graduates in getting job

Modern education must meet the requirements of our times and should:

- First, form the skills of a specialist-to-be, which will provide independence, ability to make decisions in specific situations and take responsibility for the result of their own activities. The syllabus should be structured in such a way that it enables an independent choice, individual progress and self-evaluation of the result;
- Second, direct a specialist-to-be towards independent formation with the purpose of studying a specific subject, which presupposes close synergetic interaction of a teacher and a student via actualization of contents and education methods;
- Third, aim the educational process at developing knowledge with increasing share of students' independent work, when they individually choose, structure and process information for specific situations, use it to solve professional issues under supervision of teachers immediately at the lesson;
- Fourth, specialists should have a striving for self-assessment of their education outcome including a rating system of knowledge assessment used both by

an individual teacher and a department or university on the whole, which forms an interest in labor, inculcates respect to feasibility and efficiency of one's actions, including studying actions.

Working in a multicultural team is part of relationships in many international companies. Graduates from Russian universities tend to start their careers and build it gradually in the international company. So they try to receive some experience in special international staff trainings. International staff training weeks are becoming a popular component of internationalization at European Higher Education Institutions. The ERASMUS program has been providing higher education institutions with funding for exchanges and European mobility for more than 25 years. ERASMUS supports two forms of staff exchanges: exchange of academic staff for teaching, and participation in staff training activities for both academic and non-academic staff members. It can improve the quality of teaching and become key factor for making educational process a success. Staff training weeks could be defined as training events hosted by higher education institutions aiming specifically at university administrative staff from foreign partner universities. These intercultural opportunities enable to increase professional skills for administrative staff and its role in the internationalization of higher education institutions. Knowing that education professionals need opportunities to gain more understanding of cross cultural concepts if they want their students to become interculturally competent, ERASMUS' experience becomes the basis for beginning some reformation program in Saint-Petersburg State Politechnical University. The idea is to make

cooperation efforts to increase quality of education and interest of partner companies namely in the graduates of Saint-Petersburg State Politechnical University. Students and teachers have had access to funding for mobility and exchanges for many years and are frequent visitors in international conferences. It may be regarded as an opportunity for members to go abroad, gain international experience and develop cross-cultural competencies. Both visitor and staff members at host institutions or partner companies will benefit at a personal level but these factors will also be beneficial for employers on both sides. Benefits could be in developing cross-cultural competencies, improving foreign language skills, exchanging information and best practices in professional fields, expanding professional networks.

Being included in the process of international training courses and education, a participant is no longer bound by his or her own culture. Instead, acquaintance with other systems regulating the behavior of individuals takes place. Interaction with foreigners on a regular basis leads to participants understanding that other systems exist and that one has to interact with people who use other principles as guidelines for their actions. Cultural patterns, therefore, are no longer taken for granted. That is important in understanding the basis of personal enrichment. Students studying abroad need to revise the methods to perceive and estimate the world introduced by their national education system, and as a result revise the behavioral models accepted and justified in a cultural environment that used to be familiar to them. They could compare the approaches for education, business and relationships, and it will help to expand personal enrichment.

Experience of American higher education proves efficiency in the cooperation of universities and businesses. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is a good example of efficient education where students are entitled to choose courses and faculties conduct research; for instance, they develop energy-saving technologies and new methods of treating various diseases.

This is how most progressive universities in Russia proceed. When students have a possibility to do really serious research and institutes change their programs by providing the most modern courses, the volume of sponsors' help will multiply. Then Russian graduates will be able to easily find a job both in Russia and abroad.

Pressure on employment in the current international business climate can be eased if the worlds of employment and education work together more closely to prepare citizens and societies for the labor challenges of tomorrow. Partnership between the worlds of employment and education is not just a matter of employers and universities discussing a curriculum that fits the needs of local entrepreneurs. Rather it is an all-encompassing process that is set to become an integral part of how we go about developing education. This is because, in a lifelong learning environment, such strategic alliances between companies and education can respond to changes in the labor market much faster than universities working on their own. This is critical for companies and countries to maintain their competitiveness and critical for individuals to maintain their employability in a working environment.

On the basis of the implemented research studying efficiency of education and business cooperation in Russia, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Development of national economy is impossible without increasing the influence of higher education institutes on the economic sphere at regional level.
2. To develop information and scientific corporation centers a system of interaction and interconnection between companies of different levels and educational centers at universities is necessary.
3. The quality of specialists' preparation at universities depends on the number of training programs implemented in partnership with business environment in correspondence with subjects studied, as well as the extent of teaching staff's involvement in these programs.
4. Preparation of high-level young specialists with proper attention from universities' management should become mutually beneficial for all participants of the educational process: universities' efficiency increases and their image improves on the whole (teachers upgrade their qualifications, university attracts more school-leavers, the system of extended education develops, etc.); a graduate possesses practical skills and meets requirements

of the labor force market, which guarantees their employment and adequate salary levels; companies gain access to academic knowledge, extended education of their own employees; besides, they get an opportunity to adjust the young specialists' training process and save costs on their search and inside education.

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