

# Context-Specific Relevance of Competencies – A Sport Managers’ Perspective

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## **Aim and Theoretical Background**

The concept of competency is used in many societal and organisational settings. For example, business corporations develop distinct core competencies and align their human resource development with concepts of competencies. Furthermore, competencies have become a central part in recent reforms carried out throughout almost all educational systems. In this respect, it seems obvious that employers’ demand for labour is associated with specific qualification requirements and expectations of competency. However, previous research has shown that “competencies in real practice are rather context specific” (Chyung, Stepich, & Cox, 2006, p. 308) and there is an indication that different sets or patterns of competencies are considered important in different work environments (Cuskelly & Auld, 1991; Hayes, Rose-Quirie, & Allinson, 2000). Consequently, we keep hold of, “agency setting plays a role with respect to the importance placed on sport management competencies” (Barcelona & Ross, 2004, p. 39). However, recent empirical findings for sports science graduates (Schlesinger, Studer, & Nagel, 2016) indicate that differences regarding the perceived relevance of competencies mainly exist between professionals of the field “sports in schools” and those working in sports-related fields outside of schools or working outside of sports. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to examine, how different sectors of sport — understood as sport managers’ fields of employment — are related to specific patterns of competencies. To foster an understanding of the context-specific relevance of competencies, we firstly examine which competencies sport management alumni perceive as relevant related to their current main job. Secondly, we analyse differences in the alumni’s assessment of competencies depending on the fields of employment, respondents currently work in.

## **Research Design and Data Analysis**

Our study setting is based on an online survey of alumni graduating from our institute of sports science with a bachelor’s and/or master’s degree in sport management. We focused on those alumni from the dataset (n=111) who had already entered professional life at the time of data collection. A comparison between the total population of graduates and the sample with regard to “degree”, “year of graduation”, and “gender” provides evidence that our sample is largely representative with regard to these characteristics. Referring to the concept of competencies already applied in sports-related studies (Schlesinger et al., 2016), respondents had to assess the relevance of these competencies with regard to their current main job (on a scale 1 – not at all to 5 – to a very large extent). In contrast to Schlesinger et al. (2016), we distinguished between the sport managers’ fields of employment according to the Vilnius definition of sport (European Commission, 2013), the “core sports sector” (statistical definition of sport), the “upstream sports sector”, the “downstream sports sector”, and non-sport-related occupations (“outside sports”) to identify similarities or differences in the assessment of competencies. In this regard, and also considering socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, and academic degree, analyses of variance and Mann-Whitney-U-tests were conducted.

## Results and Implications

Descriptive statistics show that alumni rate 6 of the 11 competencies with a score of at least 4.0 in terms of relevance for their current main job. Communication skills (M=4.83, SD=.42), planning/organisational skills (M=4.72, SD=.62) and team skills (M=4.52, SD=.71) are generally stated to be highly relevant. With regard to fields of employment, only minimal differences can be observed. Nevertheless, significant differences across different sports sectors exist. For example, “sports-specific expertise” and “practical sports skills”, both are most pronounced in the “core sports sector”. All results of this study as well as their managerial implications are discussed in the full-length paper. The results give hints about patterns of competencies required in different fields of employment. This could be relevant for higher education institutions when developing curricula and programmes of study. Alike, the results could help prospective and actual sport management students to substantiate their studies and professional careers.

## References

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