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# Acquire competencies which Finnish employers expect

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*In this competitive job market, there is no other alternative than to acquire needed competencies to be recruited for a job or to thrive at the job or to start entrepreneurial activities. Depending upon the type of task performed or entrepreneurial activities done, competency requirements may vary. However, while you are in Finland and trying to search for a job or planning to start a business, acquire specific competencies which Finnish recruiters expect.*

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Competence means that you have the ability to do something well. You are capable of performing a task or job efficiently (Seik 2020). Efficiency means a person or company using minimum possible amount of resources needed to produce its products. The aims of the article are to focus on the competence or skill mixes which international degree students coming to Finland for higher education worth to consider acquiring for (1) entering the Finnish job market (2) continuing at the job and (2) embarking to entrepreneurial activities after graduation. In addition to secondary information, the article is based on the author's own experience, the interviews of two international students who have successfully entered into the Finnish job market after graduation, human resource staff members of two Finnish IT companies and an immigrant couple employed in Tampere.

The following steps may be instrumental for the international degree students to develop their competences and thereby increasing the possibility for entering the Finnish job market, continuing with the job and starting entrepreneurial activities.

## **1 Develop yourself through education and training**

Technology and ICT infrastructure are highly developed in Finland. Consequently, the use of ICT is an integral part of everyday working life from a factory worker to a primary school pupil. This could be the background that when schools and organizations were shut down due to the corona pandemic (which is yet to over and the 2<sup>nd</sup> web is on its way now) in different parts of the world then Finnish organizations continued their operations online instead of on site – distance task became a natural mode to serve customers. The common trend with technology is that it changes quite fast. Therefore, one should update himself or herself through education and training – both are crucial for competence development. Sometimes a company itself may send its workers for further education or training. According to Korolainen-Kujala (2020), “a worker should make commitment to continuing working with the contributor company after completion of training or education, otherwise, a company's contribution ends up without any return.” Continuous education and life-long education are two popular self-development models.

## **2 Develop skills to work in Finnish organizations and with the Finnish people**

Finnish organizations are characterized by a flat hierarchy as opposed to a tall Eiffel Tower like hierarchy which is common in many parts of the world. The operational structure is not

like command and control type but more like self-directed. According to Isohanni (2020), “in organizations with a flat hierarchy one should have the ability to discuss problems openly to find solutions together. The working culture is solution-oriented, not blame-oriented. Being self-directed is crucial as no one is going to tell what to do and what not to do.” Taking initiative is very important to work in Finnish organizations. The position role in the organizational structure does not limit cross-departmental or cross-functional cooperation, these are encouraged. The superior is of course there but there is not any show of authority. Korolainen-Kujala (2020) “pays emphasis for openness while working with the Finnish colleagues.” Transparency, openness and accountability are integral parts of working with the Finns. In any development initiative to operational issues, providing with critical opinion, feedback, suggestions are highly appreciated.

### **3 Increase your Finnish language skill**

English is usually the working language of IT companies who have their own products. However, this is not the case in all IT firms. As Isohanni (2020) says, “Vincit Plc is an IT consulting firm that often works with Finnish companies, developing software according to their needs. Most of our IT professionals work in close cooperation with our customers, and when our customers’ working language is Finnish, our teams need Finnish language skills, too.” On the other hand, Korolainen-Kujala (2020) emphasizes for “good command in English from the workers with international background to work for Wapice.” According to Khondoker (2020), “it is very important to learn Finnish language for social integration. Learn the language from the very beginning he repeats.” Having an international background, English of course you need, however, you need Finnish as well. Skill in Finnish language enhances your opportunity in Finland. Aatur (2020) “advise people having international background to learn Finnish language as it is linked to interaction skills and knowledge about the Finnish culture.” Learning language and culture go hand in hand. Separating one from the other is theoretically unrealistic.

### **4 Learn the culture actively**

Learning culture is not an official process. It is informal and unofficial. We all know what culture is but sometimes we get confused to hear a question like what is not culture? No everything is not culture. Let us define culture as a learned behavior pattern. We understand a foreign culture through interaction. We learn it also through interaction where our surrounding plays a vital role. Our behavior is exposed through interaction. There are different ways to classify culture. However, for this text family, organizational, and national culture are prioritized though the focus will be on culture in general. According to Kazi, “Finnish culture is a homogeneous and strong culture – difficult to get in but comfortable once you are in (Kazi 2009). The simplest formula to learn the culture is to start the Finnish language learning and at the same time whenever possible interact with the Finnish people, participate in events, read Finnish newspapers and watch Finnish TV programs. Take very seriously all the courses and training offered by your university and the International HUB Tampere aiming to promote your skill for entering the Finnish labor market or starting entrepreneurial activities. In your free time, enhance your outdoor presence whether it is summer, winter or autumn in the form of participating in sports, visiting sauna, passing time in a library or just walking across the forest.

### **5 Acquire teamwork skill**

A work team generates positive synergy through a coordinated effort. Their individual efforts result in a level of performance that is greater than the sum of those individual inputs (Robbins 1998, 286). Therefore, positive synergy is the base of every work team. A work

team is usually formed to perform a certain task. According to Cameron, current organizational structures rely heavily on teamwork (Cameron 2011, 201). Skills to work in a multi-professional (Isohanni 2020) and multi-cultural team is very important and expected. Skills which may assist you working as a team player may include, among others, (1) active listening skills; (2) cross-cultural communication skills; (3) empathy; (4) cooperation; and (5) flexibility. There is strong leniency among Finnish organizations to a teamwork model. Therefore, international degree students should improve their readiness to work in teams.

Apart from the above-mentioned top five competencies – openness, interaction skill (Korolainen-Kujala 2020), critical problem-solving ability (Chowdhury 2020) and willingness to learn new things – are crucial. One needs to be very good in his/her own field (Chowdhury 2020 & Isohanni 2020) i.e., if you are a software developer then you should be very good, for instance, at programming and mathematical analysis. To thrive while at work according to Chowdhury (2020), “sincerity is a key player in Finland. Chowdhury further reiterates that one should have strength to accept failure while searching for a job in Finland.” To an international job seeker’ it is not so easy to find a job. Therefore, one should apply almost every day for a job to somewhere. Competency is a key for job hunting or starting a business in Finland. Syeda (2020) suggests, “for preparing unique CV and networking through social media, for instance, LinkedIn.” Don’t be depressed to negative replies, keep on applying – one day you get the golden ball. Finland is a high-tech society – cutting edge technology use is widespread in companies. Therefore, technological readiness is important – keep your eyes open to technological changes and update yourself accordingly.

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