

COMPETENCE-BASED HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TRAINING

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Abstract: The paper deals with the identification of new ways and opportunities to train and develop HRMD professionals based on the competence approach. This issue is developed on the basis of the recently introduced Bulgarian Human Resource Management and Development Association’s Professional Standards. The work describes and discusses the Bulgarian experience in their elaboration and application, as well as the formation of new approaches and methods for training the candidates to be certified. It calls for introducing modern training technologies. European recognition, wide usage, quicker and easier access to already operating Professional HRMD standards could be accelerated through international social networks (and/or international strategic alliances).

Key words: competence, human resource professionals, training, knowledge-based economy, learning organization

Understanding competencies

The notion “competence” is not a new one, but it has recently come forth and has become a central discussion point for both theoreticians and practitioners in the field of human resource management and development (HRMD). Competencies have grown to be one of the “big ideas” in HRMD along with management by objectives, and total quality management. Competency management has rapidly turned into a key HR strategy (Horton, 2002).

Competency models and frameworks have been developed, applied and customized across a broad range of industry sectors. The competence-based approach is considered as a powerful instrument for contemporary human resource management.

A more detailed study of the etymology of this notion shows a great variety in its meanings, and various sciences explain this notion in different ways. It has been initially developed by Psychology, meaning the ability of individuals to meet the expectations of the environment. It is underlined, that it “has at least three components... relevant abilities to be possessed (1), ...legal qualification (2) and the recognized right to belong to a profession (3).¹ An earlier study of French sociological literature states that the notion was introduced in 1958 by Raymond Vatie in his definition of training: “ ...training is a combination of activities, capable to maintain the integrity of the personnel individually and collectively to the degree

¹ Raymond,J,(1998) ed. *Concise Encyclopedia of Psychology*. Sofia: Nauka I izkustvo, p.502

of competence, required by the activity of the enterprise. This competence refers to the knowledge, abilities and the wish of every individual and every group to work. Competence is the successful integrator of these three notions: knowledge, abilities, wish” (Vatye, 1958)². An important contribution of the author to the contemporary understanding of competence-based training is the following characteristics of competency: “never finally acquired, it is always threatened, it should always be acquired over and over again and this acquiring should be performed, because the working place changes as a result of technological progress”. It is clearly stated that the very nature of competence requires constant learning and is the core in the concept of learning organization. Two important relations to competence could be assumed:

1. relation to the process - competence is elaborated, developed, updated through action, in the process of production;
2. relation to the content – it is exhibited in a concrete situation for solving an existing problem.

The idea to test competence rather than intelligence was launched in 1970 by the Harvard psychologist McClelland and later it became a measurable term.

The managerial literature offers many explanations of competencies. Hoffman (1999) suggests that the purpose of defining competencies ‘is to improve human performance at work’. He developed a typology of the meanings of competency to show that the term has several meanings depending on the purpose for which it is used.

Usually the American (Boyatzis, 1982) and the British (Boam and Sparrow, 1992) competence definitions and concepts are discussed. The predominant US approach (Boyatzis, Ulrich and others) defines competency as the underlying attributes of a person, characterising the inputs needed to demonstrate competent performance. In contrast, according to the UK approach (Boam, Sparrow and others) competency was best used as a measure of the output learned. Competence-based training explores mainly this approach.

Some difficulties also exist in understanding the terms competence (competences) and competency (competencies): they “are used almost interchangeably leading to some confusion not least regarding whether the term refers to an activity, a personality trait, a skill or even a task” (CIPD,2001:2). Miller, Rankin and Neathey (2001) offered the solution of this problem,

² Kergoat.P (2003) *Labour and its protection in the 21 century*. Stopanstvo, p. 72

distinguishing between behavioural competencies (soft skills) and technical or functional competencies (hard skills). The first ones express how people are expected to behave in order to perform their work well. The second ones express what people are expected to know and be able to do to perform their work well. Their meaning refers to expectations of workplace performance (work-based or occupational competencies), the standards and outputs that people carrying out specified roles are expected to attain (Armstrong, 2003).

The ability of an organization to learn and acquire new capabilities and competencies today is accepted as a more important determinant of its competitive position than its current possession of unique resources. Companies are enabled to develop strategies that could not be imitated by others only due to possessing unique competencies. The ability of managers, supported by their HR departments and specialists to recognize, evaluate, develop and use these special or core competencies leads to excellence. Hamel (1991) view, that nowadays real competition is the competition over competencies is gaining growing popularity. A more detailed consideration of this idea developed by Sanches and Heene (1996a, 1996b) approves, that sustainable competitive advantage in a long-term period is seen to arise from the superior ability to identify, build and leverage new competencies. From the point of view of an organization, which no longer defines itself as a collection of business units, but as a portfolio of competencies, the power position, the roles and the responsibilities of the HR management deserve a new reading.

Competency management rapidly turns into a key HR strategy (Horton, 2002).

Important factors accelerating the introduction of the competency framework in European organizations are:

- the pressure from the EU and the British government to invest in human capital as the starting point for a successful business in the 21 century, widely supported by other European countries and their public and private organizations
 - adoption of the occupational standards, developed by the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and the Management Charter Institute (MCI)
 - linking personal development to the standards, set by lead bodies such as the CIPD, the BIM and others.
 - gaining accredited Investors in People Standard status, which enables companies to adopt a structured competency-based training and development strategy

- getting accredited standards from the family ISO 9000/2000/1400
- development of private consultancy companies, promoting competency management
- active dissemination of theoretical publications and information about good practice in the field.

Horton (2002) states that competency management reflects a change from a job-based to a person-based approach to people resourcing. The organizations, that have adopted competence-based management (CBM), apply it more often in the area of training and development, because of the following reasons, showing that it:

- Enables a common understanding and standard criteria to be applied across a wide range of personnel functions
 - Assists both managers and employees in identifying training and development needs
 - Enables the organization to promote its values, goals and objectives
 - Assists in the management of change
 - Enables employees to know what exactly is expected of them
 - Helps to clarify the career development milestones

The basic idea of competency-based training is that it should be:

1/criterion-related; 2/oriented to developing the ability of trainees to perform specific tasks directly related to the job they are in or for which they are preparing; 3/expressed in terms of performance outcomes and specific indicators. In other words competencies should be:

- Identified
- Measured
- Assessed
- Certified

For practical purposes, two main approaches to competencies are considered:

- The functional approach, which requires elaboration of “vocabulary of competencies” and
- The behavioural approach, which requires the elaboration of competency standards.

The available managerial literature offers various HRM competence models. The famous Michigan HR Competency Research, carried out by Brockbank, Lake, Ulrich and Yeung (Becker, Huselid, Ulrich, 2001) developed a HR competency model, which included the following four domains:

1. Personal Credibility

2. Ability to Manage Change
3. Ability to Manage Culture
4. Delivery of Human Resource Practices

Focusing his attention to the strategic HR function, Dave Ulrich defined the following four most important HR roles: strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion and change agent.

The British model of CIPD classifies the HRM competencies as follows (CIPD Professional Standards):

1. Personal Drive and Effectiveness
2. People Management and Leadership
3. Business Understanding
4. Professional and Ethical Behaviour
5. Added - Value Result Achievement
6. Continuing Learning
7. Analytical and Intuitive/Creative Thinking
8. “Customer” Focus
9. Strategic Thinking
10. Communication, Persuasion and Interpersonal Skills

All they can be identified, measured, assessed and certified according to the CIPD standards.

National, Organizational and Temporal Competence Context

Despite the stronger trend to globalization, the consideration of national differences in defining HR competences in professional standards is an important issue. Sparrow and Hiltrop (1997) divide the national context into four groups of factors: culture, institutionalization, business structures, systems and roles and practitioners competences. They explain in particular how organizations operate under different national legal frames and regulations. Currently in Europe these differences are huge. Moreover, the economic conditions as well as national labour markets situation differ significantly. All these factors affect the requirements to HRM competencies. Although it is difficult to specify how cultural features modify competences, it is commonly accepted that relationships between managers and subordinates, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, labour force mobility and other cultural factors should

be taken into consideration. Various theories support the idea, that similar organizations require similar HRM competences. The organizational context also contributes to the extent to which certain competences are required. Factors like size, type of ownership, industry, outplacement activities, geographical location, level of internationalization of the business also influence the competence framework.

Competence-based approach to training, based on National standards – the Bulgarian case

The competence framework rapidly gains popularity in Bulgaria. Four professional associations in Bulgaria have successfully introduced competence standards – the Bulgarian National Freight Forwarders Association, the Association of Bulgarian Insurers, the Bulgarian Association of Management Consultants and the Bulgarian Human Resource Management and Development Association.

The professional Standards of the Bulgarian Human Resources Management and Development Association (BHRMDA) follow the model for professional standards of human resources management, developed and applied in Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) members. They are based on professional competencies and a corresponding system for qualification.

The official European acknowledgement of BHRMDA standards (by the CIPD and/or by the European Standardization Committee EQIS in Brussels) is a long-term vision. When it is accomplished, the qualification of Bulgarian HR specialists may be recognized and accepted throughout Europe. Based on the best European practices, at the same time the standards reflect the requirements of the profession in Bulgaria. They are relevant to the Bulgarian business environment, national specificity and legal framework. The structure of the UK standards was preserved, but some adaptation of its different parts to Bulgarian legal and cultural context took place. Some standards, like “Employment law” and “Health and safety working conditions” are written by Bulgarian authors. The standards set out clear requirements to the candidate in terms of:

- a) operational indicators or what a practitioner must be able to do;
- b) knowledge indicators or what a practitioner must understand and be able to explain.

The common certificate elements are integrated in the indicative content, detailed purposes of every standard are developed and explained. The general structural framework includes two main levels:

First level: Certificate for specialist - Support level standards;

Second level: Professional certificate for HR managers and Professional diploma for advanced HRM - Practitioner level standards.

The Standard's elaboration was carried out by BHRMDA Standard's committee, composed by academic representatives, researchers, university professors, practitioners in multinational and Bulgarian organizations, trade union members and state administration employees. Highly-qualified CIPD members consulted the work of the Committee. The pilot certification has been carried out under the close supervision of specialists from the London Competence Center.

The creation and introduction of Professional standards is considered to be a new stage in the development of Bulgarian HRMD professional advance. They aim at:

- Increasing and stable recognition of the profession's importance and prestige;
- Application of new European HRMD concepts;
- Improvement of the quality of professional work in HRMD area up to EU country level;
- Obtaining EU acknowledged HR qualification.

The application of the standards serves to:

- Define the level of professional qualification;
- Guarantee availability of professional knowledge and skills;
- Ease the elaboration and updating of job specifications and competency profiles;
- Define the assessment criteria;
- Design training programs;
- Develop career plans.

Training employees and HRM professionals in Europe and in Bulgaria

By the beginning of the New Millennium European economies were experiencing growing pressure caused by globalization, increased competition and fast technological changes. The advanced countries responded to these forces by creating a new socio-economic environment – that of knowledge-based economy. This fostered the efforts to improve the standards and performance of the educational system (Horton, 2002), which was seen as an important instrument to meet the changing needs of the labour market for more flexible and adaptable workforce.

Growing efforts to improve the level of training at the workplace also came in answer of the new demands..

The British and Irish practice to develop a system for setting standards across all industrial sectors resulted in introducing the National Vocational Qualification System. It includes units of competence that can be completed and certified one by one. Professional standards for HR specialists have been introduced. They benchmarked precise criteria on the knowledge and skills, required to do HR jobs to appropriate levels and introduced competence-based assessment procedures for people to meet the standards.

Knowledge-based economy calls for new functions of the HR manager as a person governing the organizational knowledge. This new function deserved special attention if we share the understanding that “the greatest competitive advantage of the contemporary company is its ability to learn faster”. A hypothesis could be launched, that HR managers’ involvement in corporate training increases. This assumption is supported by the results of the three last Cranet surveys, which show (Table 1 and Table 2) that the primary responsibility of the HR management department for training and development major policy decisions increases. This process suggests a relevant decrease in the line manager’s accountability for this function.

Table. 1 Percentage of organisations by the primary responsibility for major policy decisions

Primary responsibility for Training and development policy decisions	Bulgaria			EU+ *) extremes 1998-1999		EU+ average
	1996	1999	2003 (preliminary data)	Maxim.	Minim.	

Line management (LM)	40	27	22	41 (N)	3 (I)	15
LM in consultancy with HRD	27	37	29	53 (CH)	22 (P)	36
HRD in consultancy with LM	15	16	28	55 (F)	9 (N)	35
HR department (HRD)	9	12	16	27 (I)	3 (S)	10

*) N- Norway, CH –Switzerland, F –France, I – Italy, P – Portugal, S -Sweden

Table 2. Change in responsibility of line management in the last 3 years (training and development)

BULGARIA		
Year	1996	1999
Increased	39.8	37.2
Decreased	51.8	54.7
Same	8.4	8.0

During the last 10 years the idea that training and development is one of the most important competitive advantage has been gaining ground in all countries in transition. There has been a tendency to increase investment in training, to develop new personnel qualification methods and techniques and improve the efficiency of these activities. The effectiveness of training and development is closely evaluated in all the countries studied by the Cranet survey. This is reflected in the increased systematic training needs analysis as well as in measuring training outcomes. The last three Cranet surveys show, that more money and time is invested in corporate training in spite of the still relatively low investment capacity of Bulgarian business during the 14 transitional years, compared to other European countries (Table 3).

Table 3 Gross revenue of the observed companies over the past three years, %

Level of revenue	1996	1999	2003 (preliminary data)
Well in excess of costs	15	14	19,1
Sufficient to make a small profit	22	37,4	22,3
Enough to break even	22	17,3	18,5

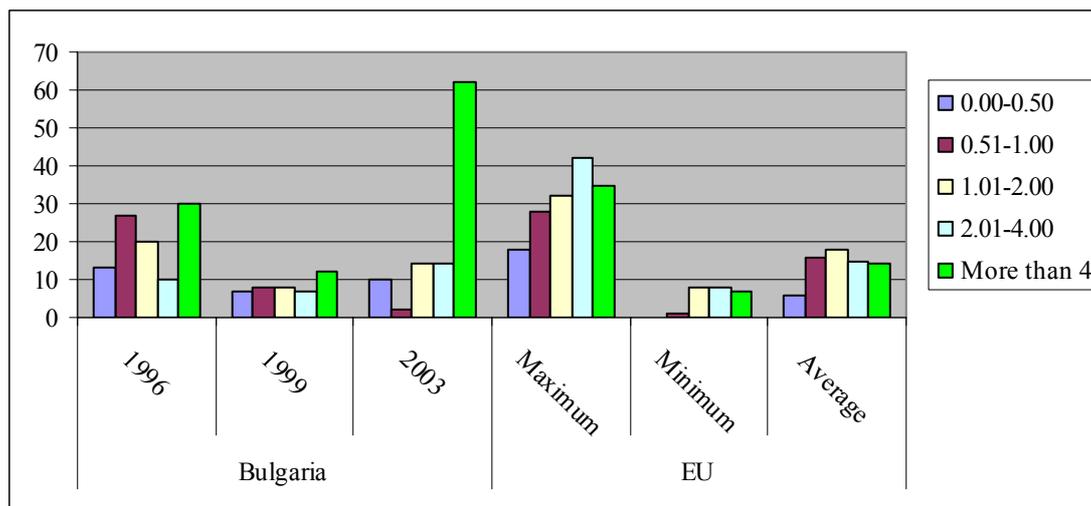
Insufficient to cover costs	30	12,7	1,3
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Correspondingly, the requirements for more effective use of these investments are decisively pronounced. The share of companies measuring the effectiveness of training increased from 53% in 1996 to 60% in 1999. Another positive fact is that more companies started to observe systematically the training needs - their number increased by 2 points for the same period.

This typically convergent tendency could be explained by a number of reasons – the increase of investment in training, enhanced requirements for personnel professionals where international collaboration is demanded by the management of multinational companies and the sudden reduction of the modern professions lifecycle.

The Analysis of the data on investment in training (Fig.1) shows a positive tendency. In Bulgaria the number of organizations allocating less than 1% of the salary and wage bill to training and development has fallen sharply during the period 1996-2003. In the same period the share of organizations spending from 5 to 9.9% for the same purposes has increased. In Bulgaria the greatest increase in investment in training was achieved by the group of companies allocating more than 10% - their share increases by 23 points. Thus in 1999 the proportion of Bulgarian companies having similar (relatively) training budgets approached that of Portugal, which recorded the highest value for this indicator, and exceeded the average European level. This positive trend is observed in the results of the last survey. In 2003 the group of companies, which annual training budgets exceeded 4% increased more than two times, compared to 1996.

Fig 1 Percentage of organizations currently spending a proportion of their annual salary and wage bill on training



Most Bulgarian organizations recognize the importance of training and development for their successful business, but they face problems in funding these activities. Managers often set other investment priorities (e.g. new technology) rather than investing in people. There is still a belief that it is the employee's responsibility to achieve, and subsequently improve, their competence. Employers often overestimate the role of university and college education in providing completely relevant qualifications for their graduates and meeting specific corporate expectations. This standpoint holds back the rapid modernization of corporate training and development systems and partially explains the comparatively low level of investment in these activities compared to the average for EU countries. Here the level of investments is assessed as "low" if we consider it in absolute figures, not as a share of the annual payroll costs, because currently the remuneration level in Bulgaria is quite low – the average monthly pay in 2003 was 137,5 EUR.

The level of investment in training and development is in line with the cost involved. Some inexpensive but successful ways of developing employees are used. It is clear that the pressure to find cost-effective approaches has had a positive impact on corporate training practices.

The picture of corporate training and development in Bulgaria could be enhanced by analyzing the number of training days per year and per employee.

Table 4 Percentage of organizations by average number of training days per year and by staff category (valid %)

Category	Bulgaria		EU *) extremes 1998-1999		EU average
	1996	1999	Max.	Min.	
Managerial	7,4	8,4	8,5 (E)	4,2 (I)	5,7
Professional/technical	9,6	8,5	9,9 (E)	5,1 (IR)	5,9
Clerical	3,5	6,3	7,0 (E)	3,0 (IR)	4,0
Manual	6,9	5,0	6,2 (E)	2,3 (D)	5,5

*) D – Germany, E – Spain, I – Italy, IR – Ireland.

The values of these two indicators are rather higher in Bulgarian organizations than the EU average values. Managerial and clerical staff in Bulgaria received more training in 1999, which corresponds with the need to improve the qualification of these staff categories and to meet current European criteria. But organizations spent more days on training managerial and professional or technical staff than the EU average. As far as clerical and manual staff is concerned, Bulgaria spent much more time on their training than EU countries on average. It seems that Bulgarian organizations emphasize on the training and development of managers and specialists as the key people, and they in turn become informal trainers of other categories of employees. As seen in Table 4 there is a remarkable change in the dissemination of clerical staff training which is quite reasonable under the pressure of new information technologies and the sharp need of increasing the administrative capacity of Bulgarian employees in all industries. Lower training indicators on manual staff could be probably explained by the high level of availability of this personnel category on the labor market.

The hypothesis about the recognition of the pivotal role of employee training in a successful transition to a more effective HR management could be supported by the data about the proportion of organizations systematically analyzing employee training needs. During the period 1996-1999 the share of Bulgarian organizations performing such analysis changed from 42% only to 44 %. Thus the level of this indicator still remains significantly lower than the minimum identified in EU countries. There was a remarkable increase in the percentage of organizations monitoring the effectiveness of their training. The last survey, for 1999, showed that for Bulgaria this indicator reached the EU average. Quite understandably, with

inadequate financial resources, Bulgarian organizations are particularly concerned about the effective allocation and utilization of their training and development investments.

The Cranet survey systematically studies the dynamics of training areas, considered by HR managers as a major issue in a future three - year period. Compared to the previous two studies, where computers and new technologies, marketing and people management retained the top three position, the last survey shows an obvious move towards professional and/or vocational skills development (7%), information technology (6, 4%) and team work building (5,1%). After the ten – year transitional period to market economy the primary challenges to the personnel function, ranked by HR managers categorically reorients the focus of the attention from restructuring (4,7%) and staff reduction (3,3%) in 1999 to competence development (5,9%) in 2003. This data prove once again the concept about their key role as a competitive accelerator.

Why is a new revolutionary approach to HRMD vocational training needed?

As in other European countries, the labour market in Bulgaria is characterised by a constantly increasing gap between the structure of labour force demand and supply, especially on the primary level. The analysis shows, that on the one hand the educational level of the population increases, thus providing more favourable conditions for knowledge-based economy. On the other hand, the quality of labour force lags behind the needs of business. This could be partially explained by the current state of the national education system - reduced state investments, low rate of modernization of the system, slow-changing ownership structure. Having identified this long-term imbalance, companies were pressed to focus their efforts on corporate training and a higher level of competencies of the HR managers. A survey on Bulgarian companies reports that small businesses (Table 5) with comparatively highly restricted internal human training capacity are predominant..

Table 5. Staff of Bulgarian companies in 2002

Number of the personnel	Staff of the companies
1-19	207 776
20-99	7 369
100-499	1 926

Over 500	314
Overall (officially registered)	217 385
Over 200 (for Cranet survey purposes)	1 567

Although the problem has been identified and serious efforts have been made to prepare the relevant qualified personnel, the gap at the labour market is still expanding. Additional pressure to improve the competence of HRMD specialists is exerted by the increased staff number of multinational companies strongly requiring adequate HRMD competence (in case they do not find suitable local specialists, they have already started inviting expatriates).

Social networks and new information technologies in competence based HRM training

The comparison of the state and development of Bulgarian human resource management and development on the basis of Cranet surveys for the period 1996 - 2003 shows important areas of keeping up with the EU countries. Two of the most significant ones - the low popularity and the unstable position of the HRM department as well as the low strategic orientation of Bulgarian companies are under the process of a considerable change. In 2003 the number of Bulgarian companies with an HRM department increased from 71 to 82%; the participation of the HR heads in the managerial bodies altered from 22 to 29%. For the same period the share of companies with written corporate strategies attained 62% compared to 31% in 1999 (preliminary data). There are enough reasons to state, that the Bulgarian HRM is on its way to converge with the positive European trends and it really needs a qualitatively new type of training support. A principally new approach has to be found, which will allow adequate, effective, relatively cheap, quick and strongly purpose oriented HRMD training and development to approach the best European practices and facilitate the process of labour integration of Bulgarian companies. This could be done only by using maximal synergy of the combined efforts of various subjects, overcoming their institutional boundaries and utilising the advantages of information technologies. The joint efforts of educational and research institutions, businesses, civil society organizations and the state administration could contribute to fill in the gap between modern-day requirements to the HR profession and its present capacity.

Estimating highly the importance of this task, BHRMDA initiated the establishment of an informal (for the moment) National Social Network for Vocational Training in the Field of HRMD. All the training activities are based on BHRMDA standards for professional competence. The Association operates as its intermediary, integrator and main sponsor.

The establishment of this Network explores the main principles of:

- Network organization of work
- Virtual organization
- Learning organization

The network organization is one of the essential changes that shape the character of the contemporary HRMD systems and help overcome national boundaries and differences. It is accomplished through construction and integration of informal, flexible, open nets, including partners from different territories, types of organizations, performing various activities, which can contribute to the improvement of professional competence in the field of HRM. This dynamic network reflects the new social relationships between professional organizations, groups and individual professionals. Every partner impacts his/her distinguished competencies so, that if successfully constructed the network could increase the level of specialization, market adaptation and flexibility of all participants. The dynamic network is an extremely flexible structure, capable of combining high complexity and maximal specialized competency. The network process is not managed by one organization, since the network can survive only if it constantly alters and modifies the relationships between partners. But it could be performed within the frame of one organization as a process, parallel to its official structure.

The virtual organization is a model of the future, which assumes a constant unification process of small organizations and people, administering more than just their own resources, sharing their costs, relying on internal and external collaboration between the partners. A wide range of temporary contracts is explored to utilize the specific opportunities of its member's competence portfolios.

The learning organization, defined by Thurblin as “skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights” enhances the learning process when it:

- Comprises a change in the organizational knowledge base
- Happens in an interplay of individual and organization
- Takes place through the interaction with the internal and/or external environment

- Leads to an adaptation of the system to the environment
- Helps in gaining a higher level of problem solving capacity

Taking into account the above mentioned concepts and principles, translating them into practice, the Bulgarian network is being constructed as an open system, with the following main participants: BHRMDA and its professional clubs, the Institute of Certified HRMD Professionals, the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce, New Bulgarian University (NBU), Bulgarian Business Leaders Forum (BBLF), TechnoLogika (core members), attracting on temporary basis universities, consultancy companies, high schools and other institutions (flexible partners).

The first activities which have already been launched are the following:

- dissemination and promotion of BHRMDA professional standards (through the whole network);
- assistance to HR managers and their preparation to cover the standards (BHRMDA and the Institute for Certified Professionals (ICP) ;
- composing and publishing handbooks, self-evaluation testing batteries, manuals and other materials (through the whole network);
- coordinating the university syllabuses in HRMD (BHRMDA club of university lecturers on HRMD);
- launching the first Bulgarian HRMD MBA program (the School of Management, New Bulgarian University in a close cooperation with BHRMDA)
- organizing “HRMD Master’s class” for university graduates (BHRMDA, BBLF, NBU, University for National and World Economy (UNWE), Aims Human Capital, TechnoloGica)
- organizing students internships on HRMD (BHRMDA, business organizations);
- training of young HR managers (BHRMDA club of the young manager);
- specialized HRM training for operating HR Mangers (BHRMDA Academy).

Two other new initiatives are going to be launched – self-testing of university graduates on knowledge indicators of the Standards and a web-based HRM competence testing. It will be managed by BHRMDA and ICP using the network of Bulgarian distance learning centres, located in different regions. In 1994 a National Center for Distance Education was founded in Bulgaria, comprising twenty Bulgarian universities and companies, representing foreign universities. The initial idea for the establishment of this center came

from the implementation of a PHARE program for development of distance training and education in the Central and East European (CEE) countries. Its purpose is to facilitate and make more effective the transfer of West European know-how in distance learning for the purposes of meeting the requirements of the global business environment to CEE professionals.

The first two steps towards making the HRMD network internationally oriented are two international projects:

1. “WEB-based program for vocational training of young practitioners in the field of HRMD”. The project idea is to establish European vocational training standards in the area of HR and to increase the access of young practitioners to continuous professional training. A web-based training program is to be developed, consisting of separate modules, which cover different aspects (standards) of HRMD. The long-term successful experience of UK and Ireland in the field of HRMD certification is considered. The establishment and implementation of BHRMDA professional standards, based on CIPD standards was the other useful practice to help the process. Partners from UK, Ireland, Cyprus, Slovenia, Estonia and Bulgaria agreed to carry out the following activities: development of methodological modules for web-based vocational training in the field of HRMD; creation of the software product, linguistic and cultural adaptation of the web-based program, pilot implementation, evaluation and validation of the results, preparation of a guide for the web-based program, promotion and full implementation of all activities.

2. “HR WEB COMPASS” (WEB- enabled COMpetence - Based ASSessment of HR specialists). The main idea of the web-based compass is to help the preparation of HR specialists from different European countries to certification. Partners in this project are Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Italy and UK. The project investigates the following concepts: web-based methodology, using mix of methods, student centred and easily accessible. The main expected outcomes include: HRMD competencies to be valued, all parts of the EU to recognise the “value”, people to be able to compete on equal terms with native candidates. Both can serve as useful ideas to develop international networks, supporting competence-based training of HRM professionals.

The future development of this network will be based on the philosophy of virtual organization and its further theoretical and practical improvement.

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