

ANALYSIS OF THE THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE SITUATIONAL TEST FOR MEASURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF BASIC EMPLOYABILITY COMPETENCES: THE WORKERS' PERSPECTIVE¹

ANÁLISIS DEL MODELO TEÓRICO DEL TEST SITUACIONAL DE DESARROLLO DE COMPETENCIAS BÁSICAS DE EMPLEABILIDAD: LA PERSPECTIVA DE LOS TRABAJADORES

ANÁLISE DO MODELO TEÓRICO DO TESTE SITUACIONAL DE DESENVOLVIMENTO DAS COMPETÊNCIAS BÁSICAS DE EMPREGABILIDADE: A PERSPECTIVA DOS TRABALHADORES

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to analyse, from the workers' perspective, the employability model developed by the research group IARS linked to the Situational Test for measuring the Development of Basic Employability Competences (Test Situacional de Desarrollo de las Competencias Básicas de Empleabilidad). The hypothesis was that basic employability competences proposed by this model are necessary to attain, remain and be promoted within the labour market regardless of the economic sector, sex, age and work experience. A questionnaire was completed by 255 workers from different professional sectors. They evaluated the need for eight basic employability competences proposed in the model to obtain and retain their position and also to be promoted: self-organization; training-career plan; decision-making; teamwork; communication; flexibility; perseverance; responsibility/co-responsibility. The competences were perceived to be very necessary to attain, maintain and to be promoted within the position, although the competences were considered progressively more relevant as workers' progress along their professional career. All competences were assessed as

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	<p>necessary for different jobs independently of the professional sector, sex, age, and difficulties accessing the labour market after being unemployed. Only some nuances with small size effect were detected. To initially obtain their first job, flexibility is the competence most valued by women and young people, whereas for workers aged 25 to 54, it is the construction of a training-career plan. With regards to maintaining a position, perseverance is most valued by workers who have experienced more difficulties accessing the labour market or have been unemployed. Regarding promotion, teamwork is seen as key by those who have remained at the same company for the longest time. The results endorse the validity of the model and allow for advances to be made in constructing psychoeducational instruments for developing the employability basic competences from an early age.</p>
<p>PALABRAS CLAVE: orientación profesional; competencias de empleabilidad; empleabilidad; mercado laboral; intervención socioeducativa</p>	<p>RESUMEN: El objetivo de este estudio es analizar desde la perspectiva de los trabajadores el modelo de empleabilidad del grupo de investigación IARS vinculado al Test Situacional de Desarrollo de las competencias Básicas de empleabilidad. Las hipótesis de partida son que las competencias básicas de empleabilidad propuestas por el modelo son necesarias para lograr, mantener y promocionar en el mercado laboral independientemente del sector económico, el sexo, la edad y experiencia laboral. Se administró un cuestionario a un total de 255 trabajadores de diferentes sectores profesionales. Estos evaluaban la necesidad de las ocho competencias básicas de empleabilidad propuestas en el modelo para obtener y mantener un puesto de trabajo y promocionarse: auto-organización, proyecto formativo-profesional, toma de decisiones, trabajo en equipo, comunicación, flexibilidad, perseverancia y responsabilidad-corresponsabilidad. Los trabajadores valoraron todas las competencias como muy necesarias en el acceso, mantenimiento y promoción en el puesto de trabajo, considerándolas progresivamente más relevantes a medida que se avanza en él. Todas las competencias fueron evaluadas como muy necesarias para los diferentes trabajos independientemente del sector profesional, el sexo, la edad y las dificultades en el acceso al mercado laboral después del desempleo. Solo se detectaron matices con tamaños de efecto pequeños. Para lograr el primer empleo, la flexibilidad es la competencia más valorada por mujeres y jóvenes; mientras que la construcción del proyecto formativo-profesional es la más valorada por los trabajadores de 25 a 54 años. En el mantenimiento del trabajo la perseverancia es más valorada por los trabajadores con más dificultades para acceder al mercado laboral o han estado en el paro. Para la promoción, el trabajo en equipo es una competencia clave para los que más tiempo permanecen en la misma empresa. Los resultados avalan la validez del modelo, y permiten avanzar en la construcción de instrumentos psicoeducativos necesarios para la intervención socioeducativa orientada a desarrollar las competencias básicas de empleabilidad desde edades tempranas.</p>
<p>PALAVRAS-CHAVE: orientação profissional; competências de empregabilidade; empregabilidade; mercado de trabalho; intervenção socioeducativa</p>	<p>RESUMO: O objetivo deste estudo é analisar sob a ótica dos trabalhadores o modelo de empregabilidade do grupo de investigação IARS vinculado ao Teste Situacional para o Desenvolvimento de Competências Básicas de Empregabilidade. As hipóteses de partida são que as competências básicas de empregabilidade propostas pelo modelo são necessárias para alcançar, manter e promover no mercado de trabalho, independentemente do setor econômico, sexo, idade e experiência de trabalho. Um questionário foi aplicado a um total de 255 trabalhadores de diferentes setores profissionais. Avaliaram a necessidade das oito competências básicas de empregabilidade propostas no modelo para obter e manter um emprego e promover-se: auto-organização, projeto-formação profissional, tomada de decisão, trabalho em equipe, comunicação, flexibilidade, perseverança e responsabilidade-coresponsabilidade. Os trabalhadores valorizaram todas as competências como muito necessárias no acesso, manutenção e promoção no emprego, considerando-as progressivamente mais relevantes à medida que nele progredirem. Todas as competências foram avaliadas como muito necessárias para os diferentes empregos, independentemente do setor profissional, sexo, idade e dificuldades de acesso ao mercado de trabalho após o desemprego. Apenas nuances com tamanhos de efeito pequenos foram detetados. Para conseguir o primeiro emprego, a flexibilidade é a habilidade mais valorizada por mulheres e jovens; enquanto a construção do projeto profissional é a mais valorizada pelos trabalhadores de 25 a 54 anos. Na manutenção do emprego, a perseverança é mais valorizada pelos trabalhadores com mais dificuldades de acesso ao mercado de trabalho ou que estiveram desempregados. Para a promoção, o trabalho em equipe é uma competência chave para quem fica na mesma empresa por mais tempo. Os resultados obtidos suportam a validade do modelo e permitem avançar na construção dos instrumentos psico-educacionais necessários para à intervenção socioeducativa orientada ao desenvolvimento de competências básicas de empregabilidade desde a infância.</p>

1. Introduction

With an employment rate of 67%, Spain is at the tail end of the list of European Union countries, with only six countries below it. To this we must

add unequal access to employment, with women and young people suffering the highest unemployment rates (Eurostat, 2019).

In the coming years, a new industrial revolution is anticipated, the so-called Industry 4.0,

which could lead to massive job losses (Frey & Osborne, 2017) and the need for highly skilled professionals (Bonekamp & Sure, 2015). Doubts exist as to whether higher education institutions are prepared for this (Flynn, Dance & Schaefer, 2017). Given this scenario, the European Union (2018) has proclaimed that labour and employability competences will be key for the working population to adapt to the rapid and profound changes it will face. Soft competences, such as employability competences, are recognized as being essential to successfully obtain a job and to make progress within the labour market (Cimatti, 2016).

In a previous study, Sala *et al.* (2009), identified that care experienced young people with good employability and social competences were more likely to find work. Those competences were better predictors of a successful integration into the labour market over their educational achievements. Therefore, improving and developing these relevant employability competences, regardless of the level of the formal qualifications obtained, seem to be especially valuable for young and vulnerable populations (Nickson *et al.*, 2012).

Despite the necessity to measure and improve the employability competences, especially with young people at social risk, there are few proposals of what the basic-employability competences that could be adapted to this collective should be and the tests to measure them are very scarce. For this reason, the IARS research group (Arnau *et al.*, 2014), after analyzing the conceptual framework of employability and based on specialists assessments, proposed a model that included 8 basic employability competences necessary to obtain and maintain a job, regardless of the type of work position and professional field. Furthermore, these 8 competences could be trained from a very early age. This is the model that is taken as a reference in this article. We believe that it could be used as a baseline to develop the Situational Test for measuring the Development of the Basic Employability Competences (Test Situacional de Desarrollo de las Competencias Básicas de Empleabilidad -DCBE). The model would provide not only a conceptual framework for professionals and social educators to help young people to improve their employability competences but it could also be used as a baseline for developing a measurement instrument to be used during the socio-educational intervention.

The IARS Model (Arnau *et al.*, 2014), which was previously validated theoretically by a group of academics and experts, proposes 8 basic competences which are transversal to all professional sectors and relevant to obtain, maintain and to be promoted within a workplace: self-organization,

decision making and problem solving, teamwork, communication, perseverance, professional project development, flexibility and responsibility. Nevertheless, it seems important to further validate the IARS Model by including the perspective of the labour market in order to confirm that those 8 competences from the IARS Model are also meaningful for the workers and could be used to develop the Situational Test for measuring the Development of the Basic Employability Competences (Test Situacional de Desarrollo de las Competencias Básicas de empleabilidad -DCBE).

The aim of this study is to analyse the IARS employability model (Arnau *et al.*, 2014), that will be used to design the Situational Test for measuring the Development of the Basic Employability Competences (Test Situacional de Desarrollo de las Competencias Básicas de empleabilidad -DCBE), from the workers' perspective. Therefore, this article aims to explore the relevance of the eight competences for all professional sectors, but also if their relevance increases along the professional career.

The term employability competences refers to the theoretical and practical competences necessary for exercising a specific occupation that are acquired through training and professional experience (Véliz, Jorna & Berra, 2016). Mastering them allows individuals to act efficiently (Alonso-Martín, 2010; Jornet, González, Suárez y Perales, 2011) and effectively (Riesco González, 2008) in professional situations and resolve problems (Villa & Poblete, 2011), this being translated into achievements and results (Ribes, 2011).

However, the modern-day labour market is a changing environment that constantly demands new knowledge and competences (European Commission, 2008; Martínez-Agut & Ramos Hernandez, 2014; Suárez, 2016). The latter are known by various different names, including cross-disciplinary, generic, key, and employability competences. We have opted for the final term on that list. Employability competences are those that will allow individuals to attain a position, remain in it and win promotion (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). They are learned and accumulated throughout life (Arnau *et al.*, 2014), constitute a determining factor in an individual's professional career (Martínez-Clares, Martínez-Juárez & Muñoz-Cantero, 2008) and are necessary to respond to new social realities and demands (Llanes, Figuera & Torrado, 2017). They are also essential for improving employability and lifelong learning, as they allow workers to adapt to the needs of the labour market (Mayorga-Fernández, Madrid-Vivar & Padiál-Díaz, 2016; Pineda-Herrero, Agud-Morell & Ciraso-Calí, 2016), which, in turn, makes them relevant for employers

in personnel selection processes (López, Pais & Freire, 2016; Fahimirad, Nair, Kotamjani, Mahdinezhad y Feng, 2019).

Various studies have been carried out with the aim of analysing and classifying employability competences in order to fit them within different theoretical models. This has resulted in a list of 57 such competences (see Table 1). Some models incorporate only basic employability competences from a labour market perspective (ISFOL, 1995; SCANS, 1992), although these require ongoing revision since the labour market is extremely

dynamic. Others incorporate competences that are not required by all jobs, in our opinion. In addition, they draw on different perspectives: from post-compulsory training (Institut Català de les Qualificacions Professionals, 2015; Martínez Clares & González Morgia, 2018; Martínez Clares, González Lorente & Rebollo Quintela, 2019; Key-START2Work, s.f.), to the design of higher degree courses (Tunning, 2003; ANECA, 2005) to the needs of vulnerable populations (Olmos-Rueda & Mas-Torelló, 2017).

Table 1. Components of employability included in the models

Level of consensus	Components of employability
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifelong learning [1,2,3,4,5,7,8]. • Communication [1,2,3,4,5,7,8] • Teamwork [1,2,3,4,5,6,8] • Adaptability, flexibility [1,2,3,4,5,6,8] • Planning, organizing work and time management [1,2,3,4,5,6,8] • Initiative, autonomy [1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8]
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving [3,2,4,8,1] • Decision making [1, 4, 5, 6] • Interpersonal relations-skills [1, 3, 9, 6, 8] • Information and knowledge management [1, 4, 6, 8,9] • Leadership [1, 2, 4, 8] • Technological mastery [1, 6, 7, 8, 9] • Analytical, summarization and critical skills [1, 5, 8] • Communicating in a foreign language [1, 6, 8] • Ethical and social commitment [1, 6, 8] • Negotiation [2, 3, 4] • Knowledge, recognition and management of diversity and multiculturalism [1, 2, 8] • Success orientation [2, 5, 8]
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competences related to emotions: Empathy [2, 4]; Emotional control [2, 5], Tolerating frustration [2]; Social, physical, emotional and mental well-being competences [7]. • Competences linked to managing one's career: Self-knowledge [2, 3]; Creativity [1, 8]; Perseverance [5]; Proactivity [2]; Developing a professional and life plan [5]; Self-motivation [2]. • Competences related to working with people: People orientation [5]; Listening [2]; Conflict management [2]; Influence [2]; Service orientation [2]; Social and civic competences [7]. • Competences for adapting to workplace realities and environment: Situating oneself in the work context [4]; Commitment to the organization [5]; Organizational understanding [2]; Reliability [2]; Versatility [2]; Basic knowledge of the profession [8]; Ability to apply knowledge in practice [8]; Project design and management [8]; Resource management [2, 9]. • Competences related to diligence: Responsibility [3, 5]; Concern for quality [1, 8]; Motivation [5]; Concentration [2]; Workplace competences [7]; Innovation [2]. • Competences linked to very specific jobs: Investigative competence [6, 8]; Ability to work in an international context [1, 8]; Mathematical competence [7]; Competences for interacting with the physical and natural environment [7]; Conceptual understanding based on the applicable knowledge of global and cultural perspectives [4]; Systemic understanding [9]; Basic general knowledge [8]; Sensitivity towards issues of social, economic and environmental realities [1].
<p>Note. Models in which said competence has been mentioned: [1] ANECA, 2005; [2] Catalan Institute of Professional Qualifications, 2015; [3] ISFOL, 1995; [4] KeySTART2Work, s.f.); [5] Martínez Clares et al., 2019; [6] Martínez Clares and González Morgia, 2018; [7] Olmos-Rueda and Mas-Torelló, 2017; [8] Tunning, 2003; [9] SCANS, 1992</p>	

According to Llinares (2020) there is no consensus on which the basic employability competences are. Considering the models as a whole, a reduced number of competences can be

extracted that appear in 50% or more of them (lifelong learning, communication, teamwork, flexibility/adaptation to change, organizing work and time management, problem solving, decision

making, the ability to relate to other people, initiative, managing information and knowledge).

Some of these competences cannot be considered basic, that is, necessary in all jobs, nor is it possible to learn them from an early age. For this reason, Arnau *et al.* (2014) state that basic employability competences are learned in the

family and school environment from early childhood onwards. Based on this, they propose the IARS Model, which includes eight basic employability competences that summarize and integrate the fundamental and more recursive competences in the reviewed models, and that can already be measured in early adolescence (Table 2).

TABLE 2. The IARS Model for developing basic employability competences

Description of the competence	Definition
Self-organization	Preparing, managing, and executing a task taking into account its aims and taking care of all the details.
Construction of the training-career plan	Identifying and analysing the training and professional experience necessary to attain the job one wants, keep it and win promotion, acting proactively.
Decision making and problem solving	Being able to take decisions, identify problems and solve them effectively and constructively, evaluating possible options and their viability.
Teamwork	Maintaining positive relationships with others in order to achieve a common goal.
Communication	Knowing how to communicate in different contexts (personal, social and work) and using different media (written and oral).
Flexibility	Adapting behaviour, ideas and emotions when situations require it.
Perseverance	Striving continuously to achieve goals and/or tasks, despite any difficulties.
Responsibility and Joint responsibility	Accepting one's own obligations and those shared with other people, and being consistent.
Source: author's own data	

This model presents some substantial advantages for developing instruments aimed at both evaluation and educational intervention, since it can be used at both working and pre-working ages. In addition to facilitating employability, these basic competences are also transferable to multiple contexts: personal, social, academic and family. However, the model has not yet been validated. Therefore, in this study we propose to do this based on the experience of workers in different occupations and professional sectors and with differing levels of qualification and professional experience.

2. Justification and hypothesis

after analyzing the conceptual framework of employability, the IARS group created a model of basic employability competences that was validated by specialists in order to develop a copyleft psychoeducational test for it to be used in programs aimed at vulnerable youth. However, it was necessary to test its validity with the experience

of working people. Therefore, 3 hypotheses were raised.

Our first working hypothesis was that the basic employability competences proposed by Arnau *et al.* (2014) are necessary for attaining a job, remaining in the job market and winning promotion. Our second hypothesis was that they are all necessary for any job, regardless of economic sector. The third hypothesis considers that there are few or no differences in the workers' perspective on the employability competences based on their work experience, sex and age.

3. Method

To analyse the IARS Model from the workers' perspective, a correlational quantitative study was designed. Through the survey methodology, workers from different sectors of the labour market, occupations and levels of qualification assessed the usefulness of the competences for attaining and retaining their job and winning promotion in the labour market.

This analysis, based on the productive sector, will provide more evidence of validity of the model and will allow us to have a tool that is suitable for designing targeted career guidance and retraining plans that should improve workers' employability potential.

3.1. Sample

The population under study were people of working age in Catalonia. A combined non-probabilistic sampling was developed, which was carried out using different network contacts. Specifically, a stratified purposeful sampling was used. Firstly, the strata (productive sectors) were identified and secondly, the inclusion criteria of the analysis units were defined: being of working age and having worked at some time. An effort was made to maintain the same percentage of the population for each of the strata.

The sample consisted of 255 workers from the Catalan territory, of whom 62.8% were women and 37.2% men. Ages covered the entire working life spectrum: thus, 37.7% were aged between 16 and 24, 55.9% between 25 and 54, and 6.4% were 55 or older. The interviewees worked in the service sector (69.7%), industry (13.9%), agriculture, livestock and fishing (9.4%), and construction (7%).

3.2. Procedure and instruments

An *ad hoc* questionnaire was developed asking participants to assess how necessary the eight basic employability competences of the IARS Model had been in attaining their job, staying in the job market and winning promotion: self-organization; training-career plan; decision-making; teamwork; communication; flexibility; perseverance; responsibility/co-responsibility. Each of the competences was specified in units of competence that also had to be assessed (Arnaú *et al.* 2014).

This assessment was based on a Likert scale from 0 to 4, whereby 0 identified the competences and the units of competence as being unnecessary and 4 as absolutely essential. Likewise, participants were asked for their age, sex, job, and other data regarding work experience. The questionnaire was validated by six experts from the field of career guidance and labour market integration.

The instrument was administered by collaborators of the research team following the agreed upon protocol. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, participants were informed of the objective of the study and their voluntary collaboration was requested. The data was collected

anonymously, and at no time was there any identifying information requested.

Descriptive analysis and variance analysis was done using Stata statistical package.

4. Results

We will now present the scores that the surveyed workers awarded to the need for each of the eight competences included in the model for the processes of attaining and retaining a job and winning promotion. Differences in scores are also described according to the variables of age, sex, professional sector, time in attaining first job and length of time at a company.

4.1. Participants' work experience

The participants reported diverse levels of work experience. Some had worked in just one company and others in several, with a maximum of 25 ($M = 4.6$, $SD = 3.2$). Most of the participants reported that they had not had any difficulty finding their first job and had done so in less than half a year (91.5%). However, some had needed more than half a year to find it (8.5%). The length of stay at these companies was also varied, with durations of less than one year (46.4%), between one and three (25.2%) and more than three (28.4%).

The positions held by the different participants throughout their working lives were also diverse: director or manager (3.2%); scientific or intellectual professional (9.5%); office, accounting or administrative employee (28.8%); catering or salesperson (9%); agricultural, fishing or livestock worker (18.9%); craftsperson or industry or construction worker (12.6%); installation or machine operator (2.7%); elementary occupation (3.6%); military (0.9%).

The participants had also experienced periods of unemployment; however, the majority had been unemployed for less than a year or had not yet been unemployed (77.4%), while a smaller group had been for between one and two years (10%), or more than two years (12.7%).

4.2. Assessment of the usefulness of basic employability competences

As Figure 1 shows, all of the competences were highly valued. They all obtained an average score of more than 3 (on a scale of 0 to 4), except for teamwork, which obtained an average of 2.89 for the first phase of accessing a job, although this score rose to an average of 3.4 for maintaining a position and being promoted. Therefore, the working hypothesis 1 of this study - that basic

employability competences are necessary for attaining a job, remaining in the job market and winning promotion - was confirmed. In overall, the most valued competences were responsibility, followed by communication, perseverance, and self-organization ($p < .001$).

Figure 1, shows that globally the participants perceived these competences as more valuable to progress in their career inside the company, and overall, they assign increasing scores to get the job, maintain the position, and promote within the labour market ($p < .001$). Polynomic contrast shows that the score assignment follow a linear function in all competences ($p < .001$), except in the training-career plan and communication that follow a quadratic function ($p < .01$).

Some nuances are observed in the scores depending on which of the three phases they relate to. For accessing employment, the least valued competence was teamwork ($M = 2.89$; $p < .001$) and the most valued communication ($M = 3.43$, $p < .001$) and responsibility ($M = 3.36$, $p < .001$), followed by perseverance ($M = 3.28$, $p < .05$). As for retaining a job, the least valued was making a training-career plan ($M = 3.13$, $p < .001$) and the most valued responsibility and joint responsibility ($M = 3.55$, $p < .001$), self-organization ($M = 3.44$; $p < .05$) and perseverance ($M = 3.44$; $p < .05$). When it comes to promotion, all of the competences were highly valued, although responsibility ($M = 3.64$; $p < .01$) and communication ($M = 3.58$; $p = .05$) stood out.

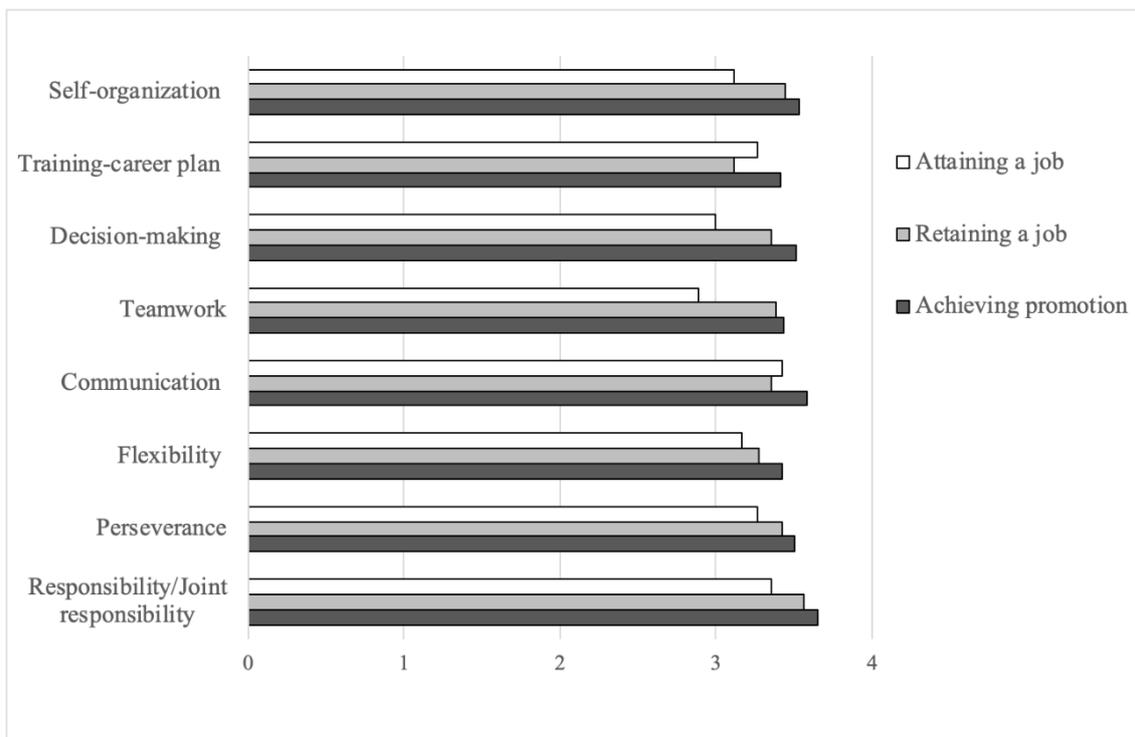


Figure 1. Evaluation of the need for the eight basic employability competences in attaining and keeping a job and winning promotion.

4.3. Usefulness of basic employability competences by professional sector

The data obtained also corroborated our second hypothesis, that all eight competences are necessary for any job, regardless of economic sector; so, there were no big differences in the scores assigned by workers from different professional sectors.

An analysis of scores based on the variable “professional sector” did not reveal statistically significant differences in the importance awarded

to the eight competences with regard to entering, remaining and promoting within the labour market. Workers in all four professional sectors gave scores of between 2.7 and 3.7 out of 4 for the eight competences. Only small differences between agriculture sector and the other sectors arise in the analysis: People who works in agriculture provide lower scores to self-organization competences to access the job ($p < .05$; $\text{cohen}'d = .10$), to communication to retain the job ($p < .001$; $\text{cohen}'d = .62$) and to and teamwork to retain or promotion in the job ($p < .05$; $\text{cohen}'d = .26$ and $.35$, respectively) (Table 3).

Tabla 3: Scores by professional sector

	PROFESSIONAL SECTOR				
	agriculture, livestock and fishing	industry	building	services	Sig.
ATTAINING A JOB					
Self-organization	3.0(.9)	3(1.1)	3.1(.9)	3.2(1)	$p < .05$
Training-career plan	3.1(.8)	2.9(1)	3(1)	3(1)	n.s.
Decision-making	3.1(1)	3.4(.8)	3.1(1.1)	3.5(.8)	n.s.
Teamwork	3.4(.6)	3.3(1)	3.4(.9)	3.3(.9)	n.s.
Communication	3.2(.7)	3.4(.6)	3(1)	3.3(1)	n.s.
Flexibility	2.7(1)	2.8(1.2)	2.9(1)	2.9(1.1)	n.s.
Perseverance	3(.8)	3(.9)	3(1.2)	3.2(.9)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsability	3.4(.8)	3.2(1.1)	3.1(1)	3.4(.8)	n.s.
RETAINING A JOB					
Self-organization	3.1(.7)	3.5(.8)	3.2(.8)	3.5(.7)	n.s.
Training-career plan	3.2(.8)	3.3(.9)	3.4(.7)	3.4(.7)	n.s.
Decision-making	2.7(.9)	3.3(.8)	3.3(.8)	3.5(.7)	$p < .001$
Teamwork	3.4(.7)	3.5(.6)	3.5(.6)	3.4(.7)	n.s.
Communication	3.1(.7)	3(.8)	2.9(1.1)	3.2(.9)	n.s.
Flexibility	3(.9)	3.3(.8)	3.4(.7)	3.5(.7)	$p < .05$
Perseverance	2.9(.8)	3.3(.7)	3.3(.6)	3.3(.8)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsability	3.6(.6)	3.5(.8)	3.3(.8)	3.6(.6)	n.s.
ACHIEVING PROMOTION					
Self-organization	3.2(.9)	3.6(.7)	3.5(.6)	3.6(.8)	n.s.
Training-career plan	3.3(.8)	3.6(.7)	3.7(.5)	3.5(.7)	n.s.
Decision-making	3.2(.9)	3.7(.5)	3.5(.8)	3.6(.7)	n.s.
Teamwork	3.6(.7)	3.6(.6)	3.5(.5)	3.5(.8)	n.s.
Communication	3.2(.7)	3.6(.6)	3(1.1)	3.4(.9)	n.s.
Flexibility	2.9(1.1)	3.5(.7)	3.2(.8)	3.5(.8)	$p < .05$
Perseverance	3(1)	3.5(.7)	3.4(.6)	3.4(.8)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsability	3.7(.6)	3.7(.7)	3.3(.9)	3.6(.7)	n.s.
NOTE. Mean (SD) and Anova's significance.					

4.4. Influence of age, sex and work experience as variables

With regards to hypothesis 3, the analysis revealed that all participants consider the eight competences as necessary to attain, maintain and

to be promoted. A few nuances were observed in the scores depending on the age, sex and work experience of the worker.

Medium age (25-54 y.o.) and young (16-24 y.o.) workers perceived that the training-career plan ($p < .01$; $R^2 = .02$) and flexibility ($p < .05$; $R^2 = .03$) were

more important to obtain a job than older workers (55 or more years). Moreover, women assigned higher scores than men to flexibility with regards to obtaining and maintaining a job. They also gave

higher scores to the training-career plan ($p < .05$; $\text{cohen}'d = .33$; $.27$ and $.33$, respectively) in order to retain a job (Table 4).

Table 4: Scores based on sex and age

	SEX			AGE			
	Men	Women	Sig.	16-24	25-54	55 -	Sig.
ATTAINING A JOB							
Self-organization	3.1 (1)	3.1(0.9)	n.s.	3.1(0.9)	3.1(1.0)	3.3(1.0)	n.s.
Training-career plan	3.1(1.1)	3.4(.9)	n.s.	3.3(1.0)	3.3(0.8)	2.5(1.0)	$p < 0.01$
Decision-making	3(1.1)	3(.9)	n.s.	3.0(0.9)	2.9(1.1)	3.1(0.9)	n.s.
Teamwork	2.8(1.1)	2.9(1.1)	n.s.	2.9(1.1)	2.8(1.1)	2.9(1.0)	n.s.
Communication	3.4(.9)	3.5(.8)	n.s.	3.5(0.8)	3.4(0.9)	3.1(1.1)	
Flexibility	3 (1.1)	3.3(1.1)	$p < 0.05$	3.4(0.8)	3.1(0.9)	2.9(0.9)	$p < 0.05$
Perseverance	3.3(1)	3.3(.8)	n.s.	3.2(0.8)	3.4(0.9)	3.1(0.9)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsability	3.3(1)	3.4(.8)	n.s.	3.4(0.7)	3.3(0.9)	3.3(0.9)	n.s.
RETAINING A JOB							
Self-organization	3.4(.7)	3.4(.7)	n.s.	3.5(0.7)	3.4(0.7)	3.3(0.8)	n.s.
Training-career plan	2.9(1)	3.2(.8)	$p < 0.05$	3.1(0.9)	3.1(0.9)	2.9(0.7)	n.s.
Decision-making	3.3(.8)	3.4(.7)	n.s.	3.4(0.6)	3.3(0.8)	3.2(0.9)	n.s.
Teamwork	3.3(.8)	3.5(.7)	n.s.	3.5(0.7)	3.4(0.8)	3.0(0.7)	n.s.
Communication	3.2(.9)	3.4(.7)	n.s.	3.4(0.8)	3.3(0.9)	3.3(0.8)	n.s.
Flexibility	3.1(.8)	3.5(.7)	$p < 0.05$	3.4(0.7)	3.2(0.8)	3.1(0.8)	n.s.
Perseverance	3.4(.8)	3.4(.7)	n.s.	3.5(0.6)	3.4(0.7)	3.5(0.8)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsability	3.5(.7)	3.6(.6)	n.s.	3.6(0.7)	3.5(0.7)	3.6(0.7)	n.s.
ACHIEVING PROMOTION							
Self-organization	3.5(.9)	3.6(.8)	n.s.	3.6(0.6)	3.5(0.8)	3.3(0.7)	n.s.
Training-career plan	3.3(.9)	3.4(.9)	n.s.	3.4(0.9)	3.5(0.8)	3.1(0.8)	n.s.
Decision-making	3.6(.7)	3.5(.7)	n.s.	3.5(0.6)	3.6(0.7)	3.2(0.9)	$p < .05$
Teamwork	3.5(.7)	3.4(.9)	n.s.	3.5(0.9)	3.5(0.8)	3.0(0.7)	n.s.
Communication	3.2(.6)	3.4(.7)	n.s.	3.6(0.7)	3.6(0.7)	3.3(0.8)	n.s.
Flexibility	3.3(.7)	3.4(.7)	n.s.	3.4(0.8)	3.4(0.8)	3.4(0.7)	n.s.
Perseverance	3.6(.8)	3.5(.8)	n.s.	3.5(0.7)	3.5(0.7)	3.5(0.8)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsability	3.6(.7)	3.7(.7)	n.s.	3.7(0.6)	3.6(0.7)	3.8(0.7)	n.s.
NOTE. Mean (SD) and significance							

All participants reported that these competences were necessary in each of the three moments of the professional life independently of the time they got their first job, the amount of time they had been unemployed or the maximum time working at the same company. There were only

two exceptions to it. On the one hand, workers that needed more than 6 months to find the first job perceived that teamwork was necessary to obtain a job ($p < .05$, $d \text{ cohen} = .5$) and perseverance to retain it ($p < .5$, $d \text{ cohen} = .7$) (Table 5). Whereas on the other hand, people that had been at the same

company more than three years assigned higher scores to teamwork in order to be promoted in the workplace than the other participants ($p < .5$,

$R^2 = .026$). No significant differences were observed based on the amount of time unemployed.

Table 5: Scores based on work experience: time finding the first job, time unemployed and maximum permanence in the same company.

	TIME FINDING FIRST JOB			TIME UNEMPLOYED				MAXIMUM PERMANENCE IN THE SAME COMPANY			
	0-6 months	More than 6 months	Sig.	0 to 1 year	1-2 years	More than 1 year	Sig.	0 to 1 year	1-3 years	More than 3 years	Sig.
ATTAINING A JOB											
Self-organization	3,1(1,0)	3,1(1,1)	n.s.	3,2(1,0)	3,0(0,9)	2,8(1,0)	n.s.	3,01(0,95)	2,96(1,17)	3,27(0,94)	n.s.
Decision-making	3,2(1,0)	3,6(0,6)	n.s.	3,2(1,0)	3,3(1,0)	3,4(0,8)	n.s.	3,32(0,91)	3,39(0,89)	3,03(1,02)	n.s.
Communication	3,0(1,0)	3,0(1,3)	n.s.	3,0(1,0)	3,1(1,0)	2,9(1,4)	n.s.	3,03(0,99)	3,04(1,08)	2,86(1,06)	n.s.
Perseverance	2,9(1,1)	2,3(1,2)	$p < 0.05$	2,9(1,1)	3,0(1,2)	2,5(1,4)	n.s.	2,8(1,16)	2,94(1,11)	2,92(1,04)	n.s.
Training-career plan	3,4(0,8)	3,4(1,0)	n.s.	3,5(0,8)	3,4(0,7)	3,2(1,1)	n.s.	3,54(0,8)	3,39(0,95)	3,25(0,84)	n.s.
Teamwork	3,2(0,9)	2,9(1,2)	n.s.	3,2(0,9)	3,3(0,9)	2,9(1,2)	n.s.	3,2(0,9)	3,2(0,98)	3,12(0,89)	n.s.
Flexibility	3,3(0,9)	3,5(0,7)	n.s.	3,3(0,9)	3,4(0,8)	3,2(1,0)	n.s.	3,44(0,81)	3,14(1,04)	3,17(0,93)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsability	3,4(0,9)	3,1(0,9)	n.s.	3,3(0,9)	3,3(0,7)	3,3(1,0)	n.s.	3,41(0,81)	3,22(0,96)	3,32(0,86)	n.s.
RETAINING A JOB											
Self-organization	3,5(0,7)	3,5(0,6)	n.s.	3,5(0,7)	3,4(0,7)	3,2(0,9)	n.s.	3,48(0,69)	3,49(0,68)	3,34(0,73)	n.s.
Decision-making	3,1(0,9)	3,4(0,7)	n.s.	3,1(0,9)	3,2(0,9)	3,3(1,0)	n.s.	3,06(0,84)	3,2(1,06)	3,14(0,82)	n.s.
Communication	3,4(0,7)	3,4(0,7)	n.s.	3,3(0,7)	3,5(0,6)	3,5(0,9)	n.s.	3,43(0,67)	3,31(0,74)	3,27(0,81)	n.s.
Perseverance	3,4(0,7)	3,3(0,9)	n.s.	3,4(0,7)	3,6(0,5)	3,4(1,1)	n.s.	3,51(0,6)	3,27(0,95)	3,37(0,79)	n.s.
Training-career plan	3,3(0,8)	3,4(0,9)	n.s.	3,4(0,8)	3,2(0,7)	3,2(1,1)	n.s.	3,41(0,77)	3,18(1,01)	3,36(0,69)	n.s.
Teamwork	3,3(0,8)	3,2(0,8)	n.s.	3,3(0,7)	3,5(0,6)	3,0(1,1)	n.s.	3,28(0,74)	3,22(0,92)	3,32(0,63)	n.s.
Flexibility	3,4(0,6)	3,8(0,6)	$p < 0.05$	3,4(0,7)	3,5(0,6)	3,3(0,7)	n.s.	3,49(0,65)	3,43(0,65)	3,37(0,67)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsability	3,6(0,7)	3,5(0,7)	n.s.	3,6(0,6)	3,4(0,7)	3,5(0,8)	n.s.	3,56(0,68)	3,59(0,54)	3,53(0,7)	n.s.
ACHIEVING PROMOTION											
Self-organization	3,5(0,8)	3,8(0,4)	n.s.	3,5(0,8)	3,5(0,9)	3,4(0,9)	n.s.	3,51(0,89)	3,55(0,82)	3,49(0,73)	n.s.
Decision-making	3,4(0,9)	3,7(0,5)	n.s.	3,4(0,8)	3,3(1,0)	3,6(0,8)	n.s.	3,31(0,9)	3,61(0,86)	3,44(0,79)	n.s.
Communication	3,5(0,7)	3,6(0,5)	n.s.	3,5(0,7)	3,6(0,7)	3,7(0,7)	n.s.	3,56(0,68)	3,49(0,82)	3,46(0,73)	n.s.
Perseverance	3,4(0,9)	3,5(0,9)	n.s.	3,5(0,8)	3,4(0,7)	3,2(1,1)	n.s.	3,58(0,68)	3,18(1,07)	3,34(0,92)	$p < 0.05$

	TIME FINDING FIRST JOB			TIME UNEMPLOYED				MAXIMUM PERMANENCE IN THE SAME COMPANY			
	0-6 months	More than 6 months	Sig.	0 to 1 year	1-2 years	More than 1 year	Sig.	0 to 1 year	1-3 years	More than 3 years	Sig.
Training-career plan	3,6(0,7)	3,6(0,8)	n.s.	3,6(0,7)	3,5(0,7)	3,4(0,9)	n.s.	3,65(0,64)	3,47(0,92)	3,61(0,62)	n.s.
Teamwork	3,4(0,8)	3,5(0,8)	n.s.	3,4(0,8)	3,4(0,7)	3,2(1,0)	n.s.	3,38(0,82)	3,33(0,94)	3,51(0,7)	n.s.
Flexibility	3,5(0,7)	3,8(0,4)	n.s.	3,5(0,7)	3,4(0,8)	3,4(0,7)	n.s.	3,51(0,72)	3,39(0,86)	3,64(0,58)	n.s.
Responsibility and co-responsibility	3,6(0,7)	3,8(0,6)	n.s.	3,7(0,7)	3,5(0,5)	3,6(0,8)	n.s.	3,63(0,73)	3,57(0,74)	3,68(0,68)	n.s.

NOTE. Mean (SD) and significance.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In summary, the data corroborate our three working hypotheses. The eight competences included in the model were valued by all workers as being highly necessary for attaining and retaining a job and winning promotion regardless of sex, age, professional sector, the time it took to attain a first job, and length of time at the company or unemployed. In fact, employers also value these generic employability competences above specific competences (Michavilla, Martínez, Martín-González, García-Peñalvo and Cruz-Benito, 2018), as they are the aspects that companies attach most value to in their job offers, and therefore increase candidates' chances of attaining a job.

Although all of the competences were highly valued by the different participants, some differences were observed according to profile or work experiences. In relation to attaining a job, flexibility is the competence most valued by women and the young. Reasons for the differences observed between men and women may be related to the different determining factors that women encounter when it comes to accessing employment and retaining their job (Cebrián and Moreno, 2015), as well as possible problems combining family and working life (Aragón, 2018). History confirms that women's integration, consolidation and progress in the labour market differs from that experienced by men, the former encountering far more barriers than the latter.

For their part, young workers awarded greater relevance to making a training-career plan than the medium aged ones. Age is a conditioning factor in accessing a job (Piqueras, Izquierdo and Rodríguez, 2018), and differences are therefore found in this respect, as well as in retaining a job. The youth unemployment rate has always been very high in Spain, and young people are often forced to accept temporary jobs and constant

changes in occupation. The need to compete so fiercely for jobs may mean that workers assign greater value to having a training-career plan at the beginning of adult life, while people over 45 years of age see the length of their time unemployed increase, which affects their attitude, as stated by Piqueras *et al.* (2018).

When it comes to staying in the job market, perseverance is found to be more valued by workers who have taken longer to attain a first job. Unemployment can lead to multiple emotional problems (Lee, Jones, Yoon, Hackman, Yoo & Kosterman, 2019), which is probably why those workers who have experienced the most difficulties in this respect assign a high value to perseverance. The agriculture, livestock and fishing sector places less value on self-organization and communication when it comes to retaining a job, although scores were still high. Agricultural work is very family-based in Spain (González & Benito, 2018), and the participants in this study were from Catalonia, a community characterized by small farms, so a considerable proportion of the workers who participated in this sector would be owners of their own business and mostly work alone.

With regard to winning promotion, workers who stay longer at a company value teamwork more, and workers who have been unemployed longer award more value to making a training-career plan and self-organization. Although these workers value all of the competences highly, they perhaps award more value to those they feel they have had to rely more on to achieve promotion. For their part, workers in the agriculture, livestock and fishing sectors are those who least value teamwork, although as commented previously, this may be explained by the fact that they are workers on a family farm where only one member of the family performs the main tasks.

The results of our study coincide with the premises posited by experts on the subject,

namely, that individuals with these competences have improved possibilities of finding a job, retaining it over time and winning promotion (Mayorga-Fernández *et al.*, 2016 and Pineda-Herrero *et al.*, 2016).

Although many of the classifications discussed in the Introduction include highly complex employability competences (initiative, creativity, teaching others, leadership, entrepreneurship, etc.), IARS Model does not include them because it focuses on those basic competences that every worker will need in any work situation. In this sense, we agree with Llinares, Córdoba and Zacarés (2012) that including competences such as initiative or autonomy in the employability model would be unrealistic because they are competences that are fundamentally required for professions with high professional qualifications and this would exclude more universal competences from the model that the more vulnerable groups in the labour market do possess.

Focusing on basic employability competences means placing the emphasis on competences that are more cross-disciplinary and applicable to any sector and professional level. The data obtained in this study show that the eight analysed competences were valued highly regardless of the professional sector. Despite each sector having its own characteristics, as Cerrato, Argueta and Zavala (2018) have stated, these eight competences included in the IARS Model can be transferred from one job to another. Therefore, these eight competences need to be considered and included in the design of the Situational Test for measuring the Development of the Basic Employability Competences (Test Situacional de Desarrollo de las Competencias Básicas de empleabilidad -DCBE).

We consider the construction, evaluation and adaptation of the training-career plan to be very important. As Mateos (2014) proposed, the current work scenario of uncertainty and constant changes forces workers to increase their employability by linking it to their professional career and integrating it within their life plans, with the help of companies and society. We are in a context of accelerated change in the productive world. New generations of workers will experience the disappearance of different types of jobs and the creation of new ones throughout their lifetimes. Only individuals with the ability to make their profile compatible with these changes through training and career guidance will remain in work. Furthermore, as Álvarez and López (2012) stated, accessing and staying in the labour market contribute to the stability of professional and life plans, and therefore to personal fulfilment and socio-emotional well-being.

Developing young people's ability to analyse and improve their basic employability competences is essential in the current labour market. As Foncubierta, Perea and González (2016) stated, we must not forget that employability competences constitute a determining factor in companies' selection processes. Individuals who know how to assess their competence level and acquire these basic employability competences will have more and better opportunities than those who do not.

If, as López *et al.* (2016) stated, employers value generic employability competences over specific ones, then designing actions that help individuals assess their competence level and guide their development in this respect increase their chances of attaining and retaining a job, and even of promotion, in a labour market characterized by high competitiveness, instability and change. The intervention oriented to the development of employability competences could help young people to plan and make decisions regarding their training and professional projects (Terzaroli and Oyekunle, 2019). This learning process should be developed all throughout life (Llinares, 2020).

5.1. Limitations

This study has some limitations that must be taken into consideration. First of all, it was based on the workers' perceptions and experiences, but it's necessary to contrast this vision to the employer's experience. Secondly, it would be necessary in the future to measure these competences and analyse if those workers who have higher levels in these competences are also the ones who have a better laboral insertion and promotion.

5.2. Implications for practice

This study shows that these basic employability competences that are developed from a preadolescent stage are relevant for the labour market insertion and consolidation. Therefore, it is necessary that these competences are included in early education and within career plans.

Having high technical competences does not guarantee job retention and promotion without these basic employability competences. Furthermore, it could be argued that it may be easier for a worker with general training and good basic employability competences to easily learn the specific competences of the position, than a worker with specific qualified competences to learn basic employability competences and to adapt to the general requirements of the job place. For this reason, it is important that professionals such as employment advisors, social educators, and other

professionals of the Social Pedagogy include basic employability competences in their educational intervention and use tests and instruments to measure them in order to improve young people's development and increase their chances of being employed, regardless of the professional sector.

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