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The US experience of management programs curriculum design: The recommendations for improving management curricula in Ukraine

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Abstract

Introduction. The paper analyzes the issue of curriculum design of management programs in Ukraine. Taking into account the employers' dissatisfaction with the skills of management graduates in Ukraine, the author studies the features of curriculum design of undergraduate management programs in Ukraine comparing them with the US ones.

Purpose. The purpose of the study was to compare the curriculum design of American and Ukrainian management programs to find out the differences and similarities in order to develop recommendations for making Ukrainian management curricula more relevant to the needs of Ukrainian business community.

Methods. The study analyzes the curriculum design of three American and three Ukrainian management programs in higher education. The comparative analysis of American and Ukrainian management curricula included three lines: the analysis of required and elective courses, program contents, and the number of credits.

Results. The comparative data received allow to define the five trends in curriculum design of Ukrainian management programs. Firstly, American management programs contain less credits in comparison with Ukrainian ones (3.85 vs. 5 credits per course; required courses: 122.3 vs. 240 credits; elective courses: 76 vs. 30 credits). Secondly, American management programs offer less subjects comparing with Ukrainian analogs – 24 vs 33 subjects per program. The comparative analysis reveals that this variety of disciplines is due to the double subjects in Ukrainian management curricula. Thirdly, the curricula of American management programs provide more subjects related to the development of soft skills, whereas their Ukrainian analogs still more focus on theoretical foundations of management. Fourthly, both types of curriculum assume studying economic theory and organizational behavior theory in-depth, but lack the courses related to the sustainable development issues. Finally, American management programs are more universal and globally focused, whereas Ukrainian management curricula contain a lot of locally-oriented types of courses.

Conclusion. The paper allows to conclude that Ukrainian management programs are too overloaded with the same type subjects, credits, and theoretical knowledge. Based on the comparative analysis provided, it is recommended to decrease the number of credits and double subjects, but implement the disciplines related to the development of soft skills and global competencies of Ukrainian future managers.

Keywords: management curriculum; management training; bachelor degree in management; management programs; MBA.

Curriculum design is one of the most important elements to ensure the relevance of knowledge and skills acquired while learning in higher education. In Ukraine, undergraduate management degrees are offered by 263 Universities (Osvita.ua, 2020). So, the field is increasingly competitive. However, labor market experts highlight that employers rather prefer to hire managers for their companies by promotion of their current employees than recruit business and management graduates from Ukrainian universities ([Pashkina, 2017](#)). Thus, curriculum design of undergraduate management degrees relevant to the needs of Ukrainian business presents a significant challenge for higher education in Ukraine. By contrast, Corporate Recruiters Survey ([Graduate Management Admission Council, 2019](#)) reveals that the US employers mostly agree that business and management school graduates are trained enough to work at their companies. That is why the purpose of this research is to compare the curriculum design of American and Ukrainian management programs to find out the differences and similarities in order to develop some recommendations for making Ukrainian management curricula more relevant to the needs of Ukrainian business community. According to the QS World Universities Ranking ([2019](#)), among TOP-20 best higher educational institutions, which provide business and management studies for undergraduates, the US higher educational institutions constitute a half of the ranking. So, the US experience in the field can be considered as the most useful to develop recommendations for the improvement of the curriculum design of management programs in Ukraine.

The issue of management graduates unpreparedness for the workplace is not unique for Ukraine. Erasmus and Loedolff ([2005](#)) based on the employers' survey offer to focus the curriculum design of management programs on such disciplines as general management, marketing management, financial management, risk management, human resource management and entrepreneurship, which have been indicated as the most preferable fields by employers. At the same time, McMurray, Dutton, McQuaid, & Richard ([2016](#)) analyze the issue in the UK, highlighting that management programs are criticized by employers for being too detached from business, more concerned with theory and theoretical academic research than practice, and affected by the limited experience of lecturers in the private sector. However, when management programs response to business and their requirements only, students become unable to meet long-term needs of both industry and society, lose their academic integrity and high ethical standards ([McMurray et al., 2016](#)). Hoidn ([2017](#)) points out that curriculum design of management programs needs more research courses that link management research and practice, teach both quantitative and qualitative research approaches, provide continuous and tailored support and feedback when applying a student-centered teaching approach to research methods.

Awaysheh and Bonfiglio (2017) add that the most relevant direction of curriculum design of management programs is to integrate social entrepreneurship through experiential learning to the programs. The sustainability issues are emphasized in many relevant studies (Sulaiman & Mohezar, 2008; Sroufe & Ramos, 2011). In particular, Sroufe and Ramos (2011) also offer a model for incorporating live sustainability consulting projects in an MBA curriculum to nurture cross-functional faculty collaboration while offering students proving ground for solving contemporary challenges related to ethical management of all forms of capital.

The problems are relevant for Ukrainian milieu as well. In particular, Havran and Havran (2012), comparing the features of Polish and Ukrainian management curricula of bachelor's degree in private higher educational institutions, find out that the main differences are that Polish students have more freedom to take elective subjects by their choice, study foreign languages more in-depth, and take more subjects in the field of psychology and professional trainings. By contrast, Ukrainian students have to take more subjects and study longer (4 years instead of 3.5). In addition, they are obliged to take humanities subjects as the required, not elective courses. As a result, Ukrainian students are overloaded with theoretical knowledge in the fields not related to their future profession. Elbrekht (2012) also highlights these features of management curricula in Ukraine and points out that Ukrainian universities should review the contents of traditional managerial disciplines, implement more relevant subjects, balance the traditional and new disciplines, make non-core courses more relevant to the professional requirements, guarantee interdisciplinary approach, and develop integrative courses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The curriculum design of three American (Benedictine College, Arkansas Tech University, Ashworth College) and three Ukrainian (Uzhhorod National University, Kremenchuk Mykhailo Ostrohradskyi National University, Odesa National Economic University) management programs in higher education were applied in the study. The higher educational institutions were randomly selected to present different regions of the countries. The comparative analysis of American and Ukrainian management curricula included three lines: the analysis of required and elective courses, contents, and credits. The results are presented in the tabular form. The received comparative data has been processed using Microsoft Office Excel.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Firstly, it should be noticed that, according to the National Qualification Framework of Ukraine, bachelor degree in Ukraine corresponds the 6th level and the 1st cycle of higher education. National Qualification Framework

of Ukraine is based on the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. By contrast, there is no mandatory national qualification framework for higher education in the US, but there are several optional ones. American higher educational institutions have more freedom to design programs. Universities are significantly more independent and decentralized. At the same time, American bachelor degree is also considered as the first cycle of higher education usually followed by getting high school diploma. It takes 120 credits and 4 years to pursue a bachelor degree in the US comparing with 180-240 credits and 3 years within the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Taking this into account, the curriculums design of the US and Ukrainian management programs can be compared. The analysis of Ukrainian curricula of management programs in higher education presented in the [Table 1](#) reveals that the management curricula in all three cases vary significantly. The required courses mainly have 5 credits per course that constitutes standard 240 credits per program. The number of the courses required is nearly 33 subjects per management program. The curricula include a significant number of humanities subjects as the required courses. The elective courses cover circa 76 credits per program.

Table 1. Curriculum design of management programs in Ukraine

Course name	Uzhhorod National University	Kremenchuk Mykhailo Ostrohradskyi National University Credits	Odesa National Economic University
Philosophy	3	1,5	6
History of Ukraine	4		
Business Ukrainian	3		
Higher Mathematics	4	3	
Probability Theory and Mathematical Statistics	5		3
Computers and Economic Calculations	4		
Economic and Mathematical Methods and Models	4		4
Foundations of Entrepreneurship and the Market Economy	4	6	
Regional Economy and Spatial Development	4	6	
Macroeconomics	3	3	4
Microeconomics	3	3	4
Foreign Language	13	12	4
Legal Regulation of Public Relations in Ukraine		1,5	
Ukrainian Studies		3	
Physical Education		6	6

Course name	Uzhhorod National University	Kremenchuk Mykhailo Ostrohradskyi National University Credits	Odesa National Economic University
Life Safety, Civil Defense		3	3
Informatics		6	3
Management	8,5	6,5	12
Entry to the Profession of Management	4		4
Economic Analysis	5	7	5
Methods of Management and Administration	4		
Marketing	4	6,5	5
International Economic Relations	4	6	
Public and Regional Administration	3	6	
Foreign Economic Activity Management	4		5
Enterprise Economics	8	6	5
Tax System	4		
Organization Theory	4		4
Accounting	4	6	4
Finance	4	7	4
Business Management Software	4		
Decision-Making Methods	3		5
Project Management	4		
Operational Management	6	12	
Financial Management	4		
Logistics	4	6	
HR	4	7	4
Risk Management	4		
Administrative Management	4		
Financial Analysis	3,5		
Innovation Management	3	6	5
Self-Management	3		4
Strategic Management	3	6	5
History of Economic Thought		3	4
Commercial Activities		6	
Communications		6	5
Marketing Research		7	
Team Building			4
Leadership and Organizational Behavior			4
Managerial Psychology			4
Business Outcome Management			4
Overall required courses	162	164	165

Course name	Uzhhorod National University	Kremenchuk Mykhailo Ostrohradskyi National University Credits	Odesa National Economic University
Elective courses	78	76	75
Overall	240	240	240

The analysis of American curricula of management programs in higher education presented in the [Table 2](#) reveals more similarities between the curricula in comparison with Ukrainian programs. The subjects required mainly have 3 credits per course that constitutes 122.3 credits per program in average. The number of the required courses is nearly 24 subjects per management program. The curricula more focus on professional disciplines. The elective courses constitute circa 30 credits per program.

Table 2. Curriculum design of management programs in the US

Course name	Benedictine College	Arkansas Tech University Credits	Ashworth College
Achieving Academic Excellence			3
Introduction to Computers			3
English Composition	3	6	6
Social Impact of Technology			3
Principles of Management	3		3
Business Communication		3	3
Business Ethics	4	3	6
Introduction to Accounting		3	3
Principles of Marketing		3	3
Principles of Finance	6	3	3
Microeconomics	3		3
College Algebra		3	3
Principles of Public Speaking		3	3
Legal Environment of Business	3	3	3
Statistical Analysis	3	3	3
Marketing Management	3		3
Accounting for Managers	3	6	3
Sales Management and Practices			3
Management Information Systems	3	6	3
Managerial Finance			3
HR Management	3		3
eBusiness Strategy			3
Project Management		3	3
Strategic Management	3		3
International Management	3		
Philosophy	18		
Quantitative Methods for Business	3	3	

Course name	Benedictine College	Arkansas Tech University Credits	Ashworth College
Nat. World History	8		
Organizational Behavior and Theory	3	3	
Principles of Macroeconomics	3	3	
Aesthetic	6		
Foreign language	8		
Operations & Logistics Management	3	3	
Managerial Economic and Pricing Theory	3		
Economics		6	
Science		7	
Business Problem Solving		3	
Fine Arts & Humanities		6	
Money and Banking		3	
Business Policy		3	
Other	4	1	
Overall required	108	90	79
Elective	21	30	39
Overall	129	120	118

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Analyzing the data gathered, the following trends have been revealed.

1. The curricula of management programs of the US higher educational institutions present less credits in comparison with Ukrainian ones. The US curricula assume 3.85 credit per course in average, whereas Ukrainian management curricula envisage 5 credit per course. US programs offer nearly 122.3 credits for the required courses, whereas all Ukrainian management curricula propose twice as more – 240 credits for every course, which is governmentally regulated. Mockler ([2018](#)) points out that “curriculum work is a complex process involving prioritization, translation and transformation of knowledge into appropriate conditions for learning, with reference to context” ([p. 132](#)). The author explains that curriculum should be flexible, creative, productive, and take into account learners’ needs. From this point of view, Ukrainian management programs are more oriented on the syllabus than the curriculum design. UNESCO ([2004](#)) defines curriculum as what is learned and what is taught, how it is delivered, how it is assessed, and the resources used ([p. 13](#)). Thus, curriculum is a significantly broader definition than just a list of topics to study.

2. US management programs offer less subjects comparing with Ukrainian analogs – 24 vs. 33 subjects per program. At the same time, such variety of disciplines is due to the double subjects in Ukrainian management curricula, like Economic Analysis, Financial Analysis, and

Economic-Mathematical Methods and Models; Decision-Making Methods and Administrative Management; Foreign Economic Activity Management and International Economic Relations, which are offered by the same management program. Dewey defines two important factors that provide educative experience such as “continuity and interaction between the learner and what is learned” ([Dewey, 1938, p. 4](#)). It is doubtful that duplication of disciplines can foster the development of knowledge and skills gained by taking almost the similar courses, because no new experience is acquired.

3. The US management programs provides more subjects related to the development of soft skills. Such courses as Introduction to Computers, Social Impact of Technology, Management Information Systems, eBusiness strategy, etc. are more relevant for the 21st century, as well as the courses aimed to develop student communication and collaboration skills, such as Business Communication, Business Ethics, and Principles of Public Speaking. Boix-Mansilla and Jackson ([2013](#)) define four global competencies crucial for students of 21st century such as the abilities to “investigate the world beyond their immediate environment”, “recognize perspectives, others’ and their own”, “communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences”, and “take action to improve conditions” ([p. 2](#)). At the same time, Ukrainian management programs still more focus on gaining hard skills – the significant amount of theoretical knowledge in the field.

4. The programs have also many similarities. Both types of curricula assume studying economic theory and organizational behavior theory in-depth. At the same time, both programs lack courses related to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which are really relevant for future managers. Martins, Mata, and Costa ([2006](#)) point out that education for sustainable development (ESD) assumes that students should develop the skills “to observe, analyze and make decisions by themselves concerning the environment” ([p. 33](#)). Both the US and Ukrainian management programs obviously underestimate the role of ESD in the development of global competencies for future managers.

5. Nonetheless, it seems that the US management programs are more universal and globally focused in comparison with Ukrainian ones. American management curricula do not contain locally-oriented types of courses, whereas Ukrainian students have to study History of Ukraine, Business Ukrainian, Ukrainian Studies, Legal Regulation of Public Relations in Ukraine, etc. Eisner ([2012](#)) points out that “the really important dependent variables in education are not located in classrooms, they are located outside schools” ([p. 302](#)). That means management curricula should provide more connection with community business, however, theoretical knowledge is not really helpful in the field.

The comparison of the US and Ukrainian cases of management curricula allows the author to conclude that Ukrainian management programs are too overloaded with the same type subjects, credits, and theoretical knowledge. At the same time, they lack corresponding disciplines related to the development of soft skills, like communication with diverse audiences, collaboration, the abilities to investigate and take action. Making Ukrainian curricula of management programs more globally oriented, Ukrainian universities will be able to foster the development of global competencies of their students. Being a manager assumes open-mindedness, flexibility, and the development of the global mindset. More subjects and more credits are hardly able to help Ukrainian students develop the corresponding skills. Taking into account the research finding, it is recommended to 1) reassess the curriculum of management programs, eliminating the courses that provide almost the same contents; 2) shorten the numbers of credits to 180 as it is allowed by the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area; 3) implement more subjects related to the development of soft skills; 4) redesign the curriculum making it more focused on the development of student global competencies and their ability to take actions to achieve the SDGs.

The perspectives for further studies are related to the directions of curriculum design to implement the disciplines concerning the management of sustainable development issues.

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