

EXPECTED COMPETENCES IN STARTUPS: PERCEPTIONS OF ENTREPRENEURS

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Abstract

Based on theoretical models, such as those proposed in the studies of McClelland and Spencer and Spencer over the last forty years, this study identifies entrepreneurs' perception of the impact of the required skills of a job applicant in startups. It uses the snowball sampling technique and direct observation in incubators and accelerators to conduct a qualitative analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the founders and managers of different impact ventures. From the analysis and discussion of this research, some of the skills required in startups are empathy, principles, ethical values, and other attributes of human nature. This study will be of practical value to job seekers, recruiters, and scholars as it suggests the skills that are required in the high-impact market, helping to develop better recruitment and training programs to their business.

Keywords: human entrepreneurship, high-impact entrepreneurs, startups skills.

Introduction

Currently, the theme of competence has been recurring in academic debate and in the business environment. Designing, training, and managing competence are linked to different aspects of organizational, individual, and social behaviors. The common understanding of the term competence is an individual's ability to do something. Webster and Aurélio dictionaries associate competence with a state where an individual possesses knowledge and skills to perform a task correctly. It is related to qualities, such as aptitude, skill, judgment, and suitability.

In a situation where organizations are focusing on developing competence as a determining factor of ideal performance, the profile required of employees, both personally and professionally, are new qualifications, timing, realism, creativity, innovativeness, keeping up with the advancement in science and technology, and showing concern for the welfare of others. The literature emphasizes that the organizational framework for developing competence involves combining the required knowledge, skills, and attitude.

Besides these findings, many studies have discussed the future of employment. The role of employees and the skills that are required of them were discussed in the study of Zarifian (2008); he warned that the trend of labor is becoming a direct reflection of

the competence of employees. Thus, competence is essential in executing a task, and it plays a decisive role in recruiting employees.

Based on this framework and employability in the new and less conventional field of work performed in the working environment, especially in those that operate in the so-called high-impact businesses, this study contributes to the discussion on the process of selecting and hiring employees in startups. It examines the differences in the perception of competence between recruitment in startups and the perception inferred from the theoretical model presented in the study of Spencer and Spencer (1973), which are based on the traditional model. Comparing these perceptions will contribute to the literature by helping startups to improve their recruitment processes to benefit entrepreneurs, recruiters, and job seekers.

This study explains competence from its technical, behavioral, and social dimensions from the perspective of startups. Thus, it answers the following question: what skills do startup entrepreneurs require of potential employees? The empirical analysis will highlight the differences and similarities between the theoretical model of this study and the perceptions of startup entrepreneurs.

This study briefly reviews the theoretical debate in the relevant literature on the competence's jurisdiction, the characteristics of startups, and aspects of human entrepreneurship. Although it was not included in the scope of this research, human entrepreneurship was briefly discussed to theoretically support why the respondents revealed the importance of human nature in entrepreneurship. Thus, future research can concentrate on this perception, which would make it possible to fill the gap in the literature regarding the importance of the human component in startup entrepreneurs.

Objectives

By improving the selection procedure of the survey on the perception of startup entrepreneurs about competence, this research aims to find what competence these entrepreneurs require of job seekers.

To achieve the proposed objective, this study conducts a qualitative analysis of the data on the technical, social, and behavioral skills, so that these measures can reveal attributes of greater or lesser importance in the competence framework of startups.

Method

Based on a qualitative methodological approach, this study uses the snowball sampling technique, suitable for a small, restricted, and heterogeneous sample; it also uses direct observation (Gill, 2008; Goldenberg, 2004; Lacey, 1999; Vieira and Zouain, 2004). Therefore, the on-site observation took place with founding entrepreneurs of high-impact technological ventures in The City of São Paulo, Brazil, accelerated by the INOVABRA institution of Banco Bradesco and by the accelerator OXIGÊNIO maintained by Grupo Porto Seguro.

Opened in mid-2018, INOVABRA, occupying a central building with a privileged location and operating as an extension of the innovation concept that Bradesco has been working on in the last decade, is focused on innovation and creating high-impact businesses. The project's initial objective was to connect startups with businesses that serve the digital transformation needs of banks. The project subsequently broadened its scope, taking on the broader purpose of “encouraging high-impact innovation and generating value for companies and society through collaboration among startups, large companies, consultants and mentors, investors and tech partners” (www.inovabra.com.br).

Conceived as an innovation ecosystem, INOVABRA was created to stimulate innovation in the institution, both internally and externally. It was formed with eight complementary programs with innovation as their common principle; the mission of the various stakeholders is to serve a continuously transforming world. The programs have distinct and complementary rules and functions. Brief descriptions of the programs are as follows. First, habitat: it occupies a physical space of 22,000m², and it serves as an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Second, venture capital fund: it has a capital of U.S. \$100 million for new business investment. Third, lab: it occupies a space of 1700 m² with 16 high-tech laboratories for developing prototyping, and an artificial intelligence center of excellence, with a team that is focused on developing this technology. Fourth, poles: it is Bradesco's internal innovation program that was founded to encourage intrapreneurship in different business areas of banks. Fifth, international: it was formed in a collaborative environment based in New York, the United States of America. Sixth, hub: it is a digital platform that connects INOVABRA entrepreneurs to other entrepreneurs in the Entrepreneur and Innovative Ecosystem of Brazil. Finally, startups:

it is a startup program that fosters open innovation, which allows Banco Bradesco to collaborate with startups in their early stages (www.inovabra.com.br, p.3).

The Oxygen Accelerator encourages startups that have innovative solutions and collaborates with the Porto Seguro Group's business roster to create business opportunities. The accelerator offers selected startups growth and legal consultancy, free space on servers (AWS, Google, and IBM), and development and other business partnerships. Moreover, it promotes meetings between startups and other partner companies and clients of the Porto Seguro Group to create new business opportunities. Currently, its program is "equity-free," that is, startups do not have to sell part of their equity interest to be accelerated, which allows startups to participate in different stages of growth. The current management of Oxygen Accelerator is made up of League Ventures' experts in corporate acceleration programs (www.liga.ventures.com and www.oxigenioaceleradora.com.br).

Based on the knowledge of one of the leaders of the INOVABRA-OXYGEN ecosystem, the "snowball" type sample was used for this study. For each of the business segments operating in the ecosystem to be represented, initial respondents ("seeds") were selected for successive identification, thus keeping the chain of references active until the point of saturation, as recommended in the studies of Bailey (1994) and Bickman and Rog (1997).

With this initial identification, it was possible to legitimize and ensure the neutrality of the researchers in selecting and categorizing the respondents, as proposed in the studies of Guest et al. (2006) and Aguinis and Solarino (2019). Since 11 founders and managers of different impact ventures were housed in the incubators, the data collected and presented were sufficient for the research. Moreover, new interviews will not contribute significantly to the analysis and discussion of the study, as recommended in the study of Minayo (2010).

First, the organization indicated the first entrepreneur to be interviewed, and this, in turn, indicated others, and so on. The interviewers were careful with things such as on-the-spot interviewing and recording of notes, as recommended in the study of Aguinis and Solarino (2019). The interviews were guided by a semi-structured script that applies to the enterprises in accelerators. This opportunity of direct observation in the

natural environment introduced other variables that were not part of the categories of the adopted theoretical model (Merriam, 1998; Denzin, 1978; Creswell, 2010).

The weighted scoring model was used to analyze the data; this can be used when defining or evaluating a list of subjective factors relevant to a given explanation. The situation in which each factor is judged to assign a weight, which in turn is multiplied with a score reflecting the reality of that factor. The sum of these multiplications gives the final score. (Ballou, 2006; Slack et al., 2009).

The weighting matrix used was based on the recommendations of the authors mentioned above. The steps are as follows: (i) identifying the factors or using validated theoretical categories to survey competence; (ii) attributing the relative relevance of each factor (weighing from 0 to 6); (iii) assigning grades (weighing from 0 to 6) for the experience in factor; (iv) multiplying each score to determine its weight and calculating the total.

The authors affirm that this model is in the literature and is useful in considering the characteristics of a problem by considering any attribute that the respondent considers essential in the analysis.

Competence

The definitions of competence in dictionaries associate the term with the ability to accomplish some task, function or a legal assignment. The literature on organizations often indicates the relationship between the concepts of skill and competence. Practicing the theories learned is a skill, whereas a broader set of knowledge, skill, and attitude (CHA) constitute competence.

This “CHA” ideogram was proposed in the study of Parry (1996), “The quest for competencies” to explain the concept of competence. The “C” denotes knowledge on a chosen topic; this means that the person has definite know-how about something valuable to him and the company. The “H” denotes the ability to do something with the available knowledge, that is, the know-how. It is about the individual’s ability to practically apply the knowledge they have, producing something effectively. The “A” denotes attitude with positive and proactive initiative. It is the individual’s ability not to wait for events or someone to give orders and to do what must be done by the individual’s initiative; the individual demonstrates that he wants to do it.

American scholar Richard Bolles speaks of “professional competence,” as exercising of competence in the organizational context and the working environment, that is, the profile that shows the aptitude of a person to perform the tasks required in that environment. He added that in the current competitive and globalized environment, the concept of competence encompasses the idea of obtaining results. With this approach, new attributes are added to the meaning of competence, expanding the concept to include values (V), emotion (E), enthusiasm, energy, and surroundings, representing the ideogram with the acronym KEY.

The underlying understanding is that the values underlying an individual’s decisions determine the quality of their achievements. It is hoped that a competent professional’s performance will be marked by ethics and respect for sound principles.

Attributes indicated by the Letter “E” provide the context for expressing competence. Emotional competence is highly required, especially in leadership roles, which depend on a good relationship to develop the team. Regarding enthusiasm, the same author comments on the importance of enthusiasm for work, justifying that enthusiasm invigorates the mind and spirit (Bolles, 2006).

Competence is formed by using values, beliefs, and experiences accumulated in the culture that the company uses to obtain competitive advantages. Therefore, at the individual level, the company expects the individual to reinforce their cultural trait. When Fleury (2000) was characterizing competence, he partly adopted the concept behind the “CHA” ideogram when describing “knowing” and included in its meaning the idea of the person arranging resources to add value to the organization and achieve personal satisfaction.

In his work “Developing Consistent Competencies,” Paul C. Green presented two categories of competencies, individual and organizational. At the individual level, people accumulate experience and knowledge in their professional trajectory, establishing a standard of competence, which is integrated with other unique forms of organizational competence that he refers to as core competencies. The author clarifies that the primary purpose of an organization is centered on a particular way of doing things and various technical know-how.

Prahalad and Hamel (1990), pioneers in the approach to essential competencies, published an article in the Harvard Business Review titled “Core Competence.”

According to them, only a small part of essential competencies enables the organization to offer a distinct benefit to its customers, thus establishing a lasting competitive advantage. Therefore, it is apparent that the competitive performance of the organization depends on the routine decisions taken based on the competence of its employees. Thus, management by competence is an alternative to achieving this performance. This is what can be extracted from the understanding of Prahalad and Hamel (2005).

Although several definitions and types of competencies have been presented according to the varied perspectives of researchers, they are all referring to orientation for work, and they have some aspects in common. Competencies are classified into two categories, individual and organizational. The studies of Prahalad and Hamel (1990) and Green (2000) explained that the distinctive character of competence adds to the value perceived by the consumer, giving the company a competitive advantage.

Another common thing among the different concepts of individual competence is that the various authors consider habits, attitudes, and knowledge as characteristics of competence. Two types of competencies were presented by these authors: behavioral competence and technical competence. Behavioral competence is about a person's attitude, whereas technical competence is about a person's skill and knowledge in fulfilling a specific function.

According to McClelland (1990) and Prahalad and Hamel (1990), creeds and values are solidified, forming the individual's convictions. These beliefs offer a vision to their identity and determine what they can achieve and their operating model in the working environment. It is assumed that these beliefs influence their motivation to work.

According to these authors, competence becomes noticeable through the peculiar way of exercising a skill. Thus, identifying individuals and their self-esteem demarcate the limits of their competence, ability, and knowledge. Competence includes other behavioral aspects that reveal the identity of the individual; these elements are in the attitudinal dimension of competence.

In another approach to competence, Le Boterf (2003) emphasized the relationship between competing with the notion of professionalism and a broader array of a person's ability to coordinate efforts, rather than an isolated action. Table 1 summarizes the various concepts of competence.

Table 1. Conceptual competency approaches.

APPROACH	AUTHOR
Focusing on action, achievement, and professional context, it defined competence as an effective arrangement of knowledge and action, accumulated experience, and attitudinal posture when facing situations.	Zarifian, 2008
It highlights the competence of an individual, the importance of the individual.	Le Boterf, 2003
Emphasizing the attitudinal aspect, instruction, and performance at work, it defined competence as the knowledge, skill, and attitude (“CHA”) that determine the individual’s performance.	Becker e outros, 2001
Highlighting the act of execution, the result, and a more comprehensive concept that involves communication, it concluded that competence reflects the knowledge, skill, and integration in the working environment.	Davis, 2000
It recognizes the interdependence of the elements of CHA as a determinant for achieving objectives.	Durand, 1998
It concludes that the behavioral aspect of competence is a factor that distinguishes competent people.	Levy-Leboyer, 1997
It describes competence as the result of the notion of work and not just developing characteristics such as skill and knowledge.	Sandberg, 1996
It emphasizes the importance of instruction in developing competence and the possibility of measuring it by a	Parry, 1996

predetermined standard.	
It highlights that competence depends on cognitive characteristics and acquiring the capacity to perform tasks through experience.	Moscovici, 1994
It positions competence at the center of business strategy, and its relevance in achieving superior performance and career development.	Sparrow e Bognanno, 1994
Emphasizing a natural ability to influence, to perform a task, and the training that a person has, it described competence as an individual's characteristics that place the person in an advantageous position for performing tasks at work.	Spencer e Spencer, 1993
Highlighting a certain natural tendency, values, and instruction, it defined competence as the distinguishing feature of someone who evaluates and solves problems and who can do things because he has a skill, responsibility, and aptitude.	Boog, 1991
Emphasizing the act of execution and the result obtained, it defined competence as an implicit aspect of an individual in relation to a good performance in implementing a task or the result of his performance in a specific situation.	McClelland, 1973

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 1 indicates that in the literature, there are various conceptual approaches that are not always consistent in defining competence. On the one hand, it is approached as an achievement (result), and on the other hand, it approached as a process. Thus, it

presents several facets, which makes it challenging to arrive at a definition or assess competence.

Despite this challenge, defining competence as a concept that involves CHA (knowledge, skill, and attitude), as presented in the study of McClelland (1973) and followed by Spencer and Spencer (1983), is popular in the literature. In this approach, individual attributes are related to the high performance of functional activities.

Based on this theory, the study of Spencer and Spencer (1993) presented a set of scales of competencies they extracted from various categories and their influence in the working environment and their results in an organization. According to the Spencer model presented in the Dictionary of Competencies published in 1993, competence can be defined based on the six groups described in Table 2, which presents an analysis and discussion of the data used in this study.

The Spencers' study, which is based on the study of McClelland (1973), presented the article "Testing for Competence Rather Intelligence" in a seminal. McClelland was an advisor to the Spencers in their study published in a psychology journal that highly applied competency-based tests in identifying and selecting the processes that are related to human resources.

Recent studies published in 2020 in the Report of the World Economic Forum highlights that in a professional profile, future flexibility is as an indispensable attribute. The ability to solve problems with multiple interdependencies, analytical reasoning, and creativity are fundamental competencies. Human aspects, emotional intelligence, and skill in leadership are also essential attributes.

Startup

Economy 4.0 is a concept that emerged from the postulates of Klaus Schwab, one of the founders of The World Economic Forum. In his view, which is explored in his book "The Fourth Industrial Revolution," the world is experiencing a new model of life, a situation that transcends the technological issue.

Schwab argues that in this fourth stage, the technological apparatus with its digital structure can support a fully automated industry by combining machine and process. This new world highlights fields of knowledge, such as nano, bio, and neurotechnology,

the construction of robots, the accumulation of energy, artificial intelligence, and the internet of things. New ways of working and new skills have been replacing traditional practices (Schwab, 2018). Under these current conditions, the startup business model will survive. Its concept is polysemic, having a variety of settings. Colloquially, it has been characterized as a high technology company. In an attempt to conceptualize this type of company, the study of Luger and Koo (2005) ended up adhering to the popular definition: businesses that are new, active, and independent.

A study suggested that companies should be innovative for societies to achieve the desired economic development (Schumpeter, 1934 and 1984). In this sense, startups play an essential role in the entrepreneurial ecosystem of a country, since their ideas constitute a significant source of various innovations (Hunt, 2013; Gruber et al., 2008; Acs and Audretsch, 1988).

In some startup definitions, two conditions are highlighted. One refers to it as a new venture; others are concerned about the limited technical and financial resources. Blank (2010) defines a startup as “a type of organization linked to a repeatable and scalable business format.” This type of business is required to demonstrate qualities such as novelty and exiguity and therefore, has difficulties in accessing adequate resources (Freeman et al., 1983; Hannan and Freeman, 1989). The scarcity of resources forces startups to look for external partners during different stages of their development and in commercializing their ideas, products, or services (Teece, 2010; Esteve-Pérez and Rodríguez, 2013).

Smith and Miner (1983) associated the startup entrepreneur with a craftsman that is capable of providing an idea or motivation. They argued that the craftsman has the knowledge and technical skill. His training is related to the technical aspect of his work and leads to innovation, but he is limited in market evaluation and business management. However, this limitation is offset by systematically adopting managerial practices that are appropriate for startup entrepreneurs seeking to increase the performance of an existing product or service and exploit the potential of its performance.

The OECD (2010) defines startups as high-growth companies characterized by a considerable growth in size (usually measured by the increase in employees) in an intense way during the analyzed period. This definition is highly accepted by the

academic community. Thus, startups are new, active, and independent companies, with few resources and high growth in a short period.

Human entrepreneurship

In the current complex market that is full of new challenges since the world is focusing on sustainability, the elements that underlie the way companies operate, including selecting and hiring its employees, are related to people's well-being.

Due to these challenges, micro and small businesses are responding to sustainability by adopting business models that transcend the pursuit of heritage growth and by prioritizing the social and environmental aspects of their business, such as generating high-quality jobs. It is due to this concept and knowledge that humane entrepreneurship emerged; it appeared in the arguments presented in the studies of Parente, ElTarabishy, Vesce, and Botti, (2018).

To clarify the human entrepreneurship (HumEnt) model Kim et al. (2018) recalls that in this view, leadership, resource management, and entrepreneurship are intrinsically interrelated, which ensures the human dimension of entrepreneurship.

Kim et al. (2018) and Carmeli, Schaubroeck, and Tishler (2011) argued that integrating these three components can generate valuable and quality jobs; thus, the employees will be committed to organizational performance. This new concept should mark entrepreneurship in this century, that is, being concerned not only about the patrimonial and financial aspects of growth but also about the well-being of people, ecological sustainability, and satisfying human resources (Elkington, 1997). In the study of Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996), they suggested that HumEnt emphasizes how people demonstrate attributes, such as empathy, exemption, and empowerment. These are some of the principles of human resources management (HRM) from the perspective of HumEnt, as presented in the study of Parente et al. (2018). They argued that in this concept, entrepreneurs and managers have a broad view of their domains, making their care transcend the question of competitiveness to achieving social protection, environmental responsibility supported opinion by Engle et al. (2017), respect for people and thus ensuring the sustainability of their business.

On the contrary, Armstrong and Taylor (2014) presented a traditional view of HRM, emphasizing organizational aspects, when they stated that the objectives of HRM are

supporting the company in achieving its objectives, developing and implementing human resources strategies that integrate with the company's business strategy, contributing to the development of an organizational culture of high performance, recruiting talents and qualified personnel for the organization, and fostering a positive employment relationship in the organization. The study of Bratton and Gold (2017) supported this view and emphasized capacity building for competition.

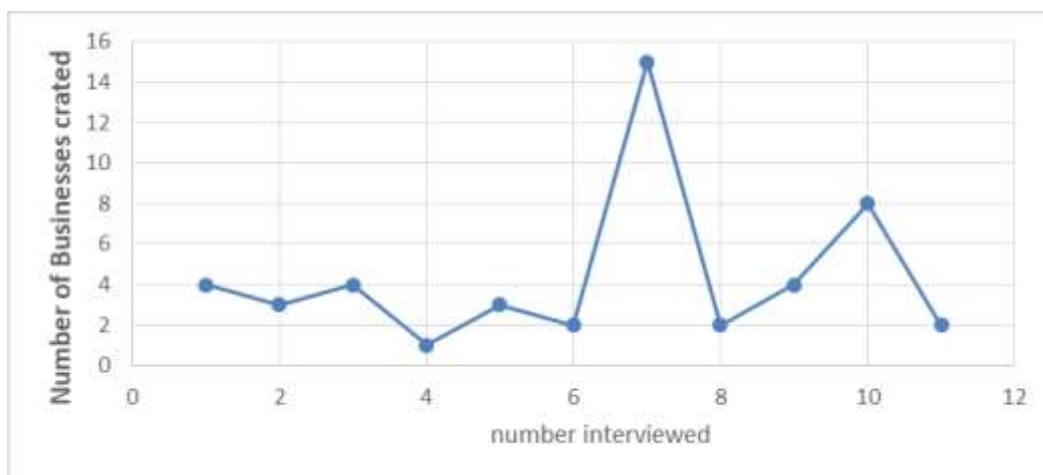
Analysis and discussion

Statistical description of the respondents profile

Although it is not the main aim of this study, an overview of the profile of the sampled entrepreneurs is presented for a contextualized view of the main elements of competence that were considered when recruiting candidates in a startup.

Among the aspects revealed in the tabulated data (the detailed calculation is with the authors), it can be highlighted that 64% of the respondents are young people, between 30 and 40 years old, and have essential experiences in their field of work. An analysis of the age group of high-impact entrepreneurs in Brazil and most of the countries under Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM,2018) shows that the largest concentration of entrepreneurs is between 45 and 54 years old. Moreover, 73% of them come from families whose parents have higher education, and 55% have between 10 and 20 employees. Figure 1 presents other information about the sampled entrepreneurs.

Figure 1. Number of businesses already created by the entrepreneur.

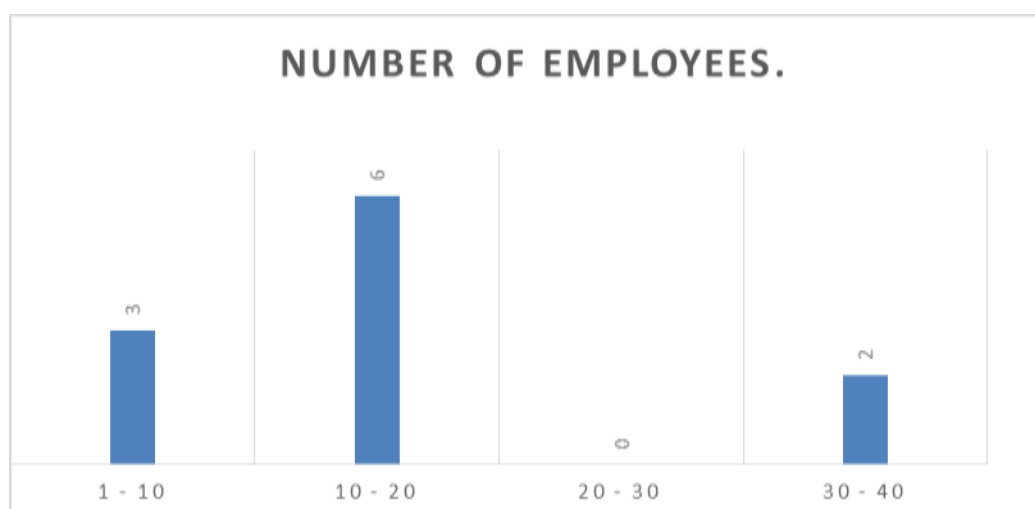


Source: Author's elaboration.

Entrepreneurs who have previous experience in conventional business models, often started in the family, as was the case of five of the respondents (45.5%). This experience, according to the respondents, contributed to developing a high-impact business model, such as the startup.

Regarding, the potential for job creation, the study revealed that more than half (55%) offered between 10 and 20 jobs.

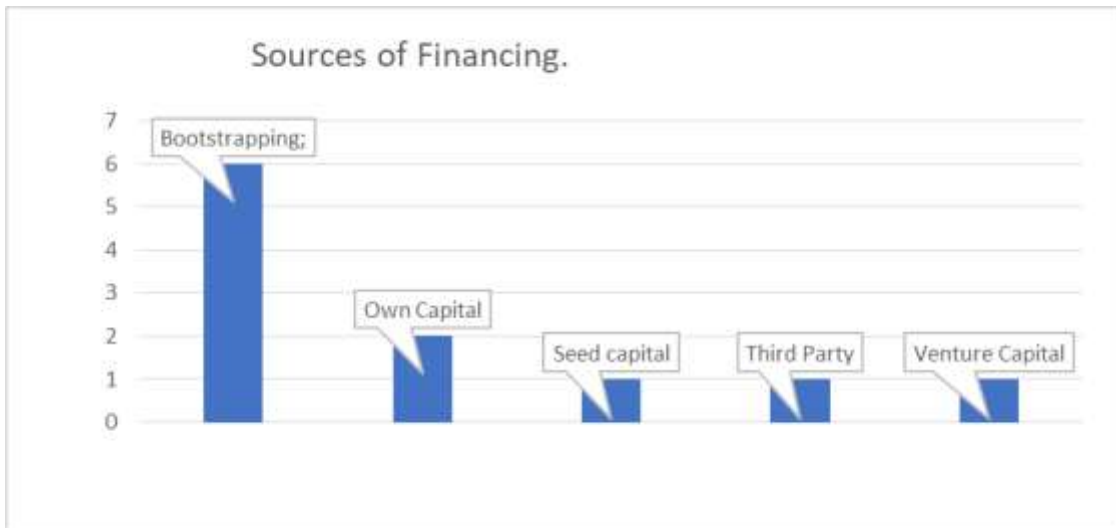
Figure 2. Number of employees.



Source: Author’s elaboration.

Another aspect is the sources of financing for the business, evidencing that 55% of them used their resources. Although their resources were limited, using their resources to finance the starts prevented involving investors in the early phase of the company. This, in the view of the respondents, can prevent the risk of “burning” the business before it takes shape.

Figure 3. Sources of financing.



Source: Author’s elaboration.

Qualitative reflections of competence categories

Consistent with the purpose of this study and based on the categories of competence proposed in the study of Spencer and Spencer (1993), Table 2 presents a summary of the main points of this study. The summary presents the main categories of skills expected by startup entrepreneurs when recruiting a candidate.

Table 2. Qualitative weighting attributed by respondents to Spencer & Spencer Competence Components.

Model of generic skills of Spencer & Spencer			
Categories	Components	Score medium * (of the 11 respondent s)	Score Category *

(1) Conquest and action Group	Result Orientation	22,55	21,52
	Concern about quality and the safety of others	24,09	
	Initiative	19,82	
	Information search	19,64	
(2) Help and service Group	understanding Interpersonal	20,18	22,45
	Customer service Orientation	24,73	
(3) Impact and influence Group	Impact and Influence	21,36	20,60
	Organizational awareness	23,00	
	Relationship and forming contacts	17,45	
(4) Managerial skills Group	Third party development	18,27	21,75
	Assertiveness	21,00	
	Teamwork and cooperation	26,91	
	Team leadership	20,82	
(5) Cognitive skills Group	Analytical thinking	19,64	19,31
	Conceptual thinking	19,55	
	Technical or professional and managerial experience	18,73	
(6) Personal effectiveness Group	Self-control	19,91	21,98
	Self confidence	21,73	
	Flexibility	23,18	

	Organizational commitment	23,09	
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(*) Weight attributed by the respondents × Value of the component in its reality = average specific score of each element. (**); Average of specific scores = Category score

Source: Author’s elaboration. Based on the Spencer Competency Dictionary and Spencer (1993).

The results of the survey reveal a homogenous perception of respondents about the high weights assigned to the categories of competence. This regularity demonstrates the applicability of the theoretical model used to identify and assess competence from a startup perspective.

The concern of the managers interviewed is to improve the harmony between the theoretical groups in the interview and their efforts to improve their teams.

Regarding the components under help and service (Group 2), all the respondents attributed significant importance (high weight), and three of them referred to fidelity, supporting the above model. In the words of one of them: “loyalty is everything in this business.”

Although it was an unexpected question, the respondents consistently and spontaneously revealed how it is essential for a job seeker in a startup to demonstrate his human values. Some of the valued virtues the respondents mentioned are solidarity, compassion, and empathy. A respondent said, “If the individual demonstrates having principles, he inspires confidence, which is essential for the good climate in teamwork.” As recommended in the study of Michael (2014), although this statement is not supported by evidence, it represents the view of almost 40% of the respondents. Their responses were not insightful enough to clarify how the statement is related to the theoretical categories of competence that is being studied. This may be included in a future study to fill the gap.

An analysis of the interview results about cognitive competence (Group 5) shows that they are also highly valued, which means that such attributes of competence are essential to the respondents. However, the evaluation of this category was hindered by

the value attributed to its components based on what the respondents have experienced. This observation is a contribution of this study to alert entrepreneurs and job seekers in startups of these skills that are lacking.

In general, the values that were attributed to the components of competence that are being explored were lower than the weights attributed to these same components by the respondents; this is due to what they have experienced. Since the respondents associated this information with the content of the arguments used in the interview, it suggests that they perceive that there is a gap between the degree of competence available in their organization and their expectation of an ideal degree of competence.

As a rule, a job seeker in a startup appears by indication, but the respondents recognize the need to develop skills in technical-managerial and attitudinal fields. This was evident in the respondents' statements, especially when they raised concerns about the precariousness of job seekers about management mechanisms and when they emphasized the importance of inspiring virtues, such as trust and fidelity.

It is also necessary to comment on the concern shown by the respondents about the increased pressure on acquiring skills that go beyond technical and attitudinal dimensions but also in managerial and human dimensions. Such pressures come from sponsors (financiers), accelerators, and other stakeholders who are attracted to the startup.

Conclusions

First, the theoretical reference of this study allows us to verify the occurrence of a diversity of theoretical concept about competence, which, to some extent, is challenging to identify and evaluate. However, after the earlier studies on competence, many researchers agree with the definition of competence expressed through the acronym "KEY," representing knowledge, skill, attitude, values, and emotion, which is related to the principles of the so-called human entrepreneurship. This convergence harmonizes the various concepts to mitigate eventual divergences and to reconcile the evaluation models.

Thus, since the importance of identifying, developing, and evaluating skills has been growing steadily in organizations, it is essential to introduce valuable measurement

instruments, such as constructs, categories, and scales, that reflect the degree of competence and its impact on an organization's performance.

Therefore, this study tests the model proposed in the study of Spencer and Spencer (1993) with a sample that reflects a typical startup, highlighting the feasibility of applying the model in this situation. Although there was a narrow range of variation, the stability of the scores of the components of competence confirms the finding in the study of Spencer and Spencer (1993).

Another deduction is about recognizing that attitudinal and human attributes substantially influences recruiting a candidate for a job in a startup. Although discreet, the high score in Group 2 of the tested model, associated with the placements freely manifested in the empirical exercise conducted, they encourage this statement and led this study to incorporate a brief survey on the theme of HumEnt to explain these issues. That would be another useful finding for recruiters and job seekers at a startup.

Based on the score in Group 5, which deals with cognitive skills, this study infers the precariousness with which startup entrepreneurs deal with management skills, analytical capacity, and the theoretical domain of their potential employees.

The clear challenge of startups is to deal with these weaknesses, absorbing, more and more, typical mechanisms of business management. Based on the spontaneous answers of some of the respondents, among the relevant provisions, this should be one of the measures emphasized and encouraged by the accelerator.

Another consideration to highlight is about the validity of the theoretical and empirical assumptions of competence. The limitations of this study are direct observation and the limited sample size used. Although it is not possible to generalize the findings of this study due to these limitations, it may apply to some specific situations.

Future studies could offset the limitations of this study by expanding its scope to allow for generalization. Moreover, future studies can examine the adequacy of the semantic of the theoretical model of this study in relation to the language used by startup professionals.

The various perspectives that can be adopted to observe and analyze the challenges of these competence skills require further in-depth investigations into its diverse facets to accurately evaluate the complex task of examining the phenomenon of competence required in startups.

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