

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STAFF – COMPETENCES, PREFERENCES, MOTIVATION AND BARRIERS

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## Abstract

Continuous education, development and learning of staff should be considered in every institution and organization as a natural (often reciprocal) investment that will bring competitive advantages in the future. Institutional support for staff learning in the human resources development model, ideally in the modification of management by competencies, is also a necessary prerequisite for the functioning of organizations in the field of higher education. From a general point of view, it is important to pay attention to the professional, expert and personal development of all human resources within the entire university. Not only academic, scientific-research, but also technical and economic professions and activities are important for the functioning of the university, and therefore it is appropriate to adequately support all job positions. Among other things, it is appropriate to implement these issues in the development plans and activities of employees, or to value them within the framework of human resources management. The aim of the paper is to present partial results of a survey focused on the analysis of educational needs among employees of a selected public university in the Czech Republic.

Keywords: professional development, further education, competences, public university

## Abstrakt

### PROFESNÍ ROZVOJ PRACOVNÍKŮ VEŘEJNÉ VYSOKÉ ŠKOLY – KOMPETENCE, PREFERENCE, MOTIVACE A PŘEKÁŽKY

Kontinuální vzdělávání, rozvoj a učení pracovníků by mělo být v každé instituci a organizaci vnímáno jako samozřejmá (mnohdy oboustranná) investice, která v budoucnu přinese konkurenční výhody. Institucionální podpora učení pracovníků v modelu rozvoje lidských zdrojů, ideálně v modifikaci řízení podle kompetencí, je nezbytným předpokladem také pro fungování organizací v oblasti vysokého školství. Z obecného hlediska je důležité dbát na profesní, odborný i osobnostní rozvoj všech lidských zdrojů v rámci celé vysoké školy. Nejen akademické, vědecko-výzkumné, ale i technickohospodářské profese a činnosti jsou pro chod vysoké školy důležité, a proto je vhodné přiměřeně podporovat všechny pracovní pozice. Tyto záležitosti je mimo jiné vhodné implementovat do

plánů rozvoje a činnosti zaměstnanců, případně je oceňovat v rámci řízení lidských zdrojů. Cílem příspěvku je sdělit dílčí výsledky z průzkumu zaměřeného na analýzu vzdělávacích potřeb mezi pracovníky vybrané veřejné vysoké školy v České republice.

Klíčová slova: profesní rozvoj, další vzdělávání, kompetence, veřejná vysoká škola

## 1. LIFELONG LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is relatively closely linked to lifelong learning and education. These terms were used at a UNESCO conference in 1970 and subsequently settled in policy documents and found their place in science, especially in the sciences focused on education and learning (Jarvis, 2004). One of the best-known documents on this topic is the UNESCO report *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors, 1996), which links lifelong learning to human personality development. The OECD (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) also subsequently included the concept of lifelong learning in the general debate on economic, social and other contexts. Lifelong learning, and especially adult learning, has already become an integral part of our lives in the 21st century. We must constantly keep up with the times and acquire the latest, up-to-date knowledge in order to be competitive in the labour market. According to Rabušic & Rabušicová (2008) we are the so-called society of permanently learning individuals – learning societies. Leading Czech teachers Průcha, Walterová & Mareš (2013) also assume that the idea of lifelong learning has a long-term perspective. Human development is at the heart of the whole concept of lifelong learning. In this case, however, it is not only a question of learning throughout one's whole life, but a question of being constantly ready to learn. The concept of lifelong learning therefore emphasizes the importance of one's own activities, which may not have the character of organized education.

Many people change jobs or professions over the course of their lives and are forced to update their education level, knowledge or skills - generally to acquire new competences, often different from those they acquired in initial education. Further education is therefore undoubtedly a factor that affects productivity and competitiveness. Further education is generally divided into professional, non-formal and civic. In this paper, we primarily deal with professional education.

Průcha & Veteška (2012) define professional education as all vocational education during an active working life after the end of education and

vocational training within initial - formal education. It aims to develop the attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviour necessary for the labour market. At the same time, the creation and maintaining consistency between subjective qualifications (real competence of an individual) and objective qualifications (requirements for the performance of a specific profession) is its essence. For example, in the Czech Republic we can register several systems of further professional education. Each of this educational system is specific in its own way and there is a relevant legislation and terminology. The best known systems include:

- further training of educational staff;
- re-qualification training;
- training of public administration officials;
- training of health professionals;
- education of social services professionals (Mužík, 2012).

Institutions established by state administration or self-government bodies most often implement the following education, for example, for the above-mentioned groups:

- education of school staff according to Act. No. 561/2004 Coll., on Pres-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education (School Act);
- education of officials of territorial self-governing units pursuant to Act No. 312/2002 Coll., on officials of territorial self-governing units and on the amendment of certain acts;
- education of workers in social services according to Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services, as amended, such as vocational training for employees of contributory organizations established by the region;
- normative education regulated by legislation (cf. Veteška, 2016, p. 110).

The characteristics of the target group in education is therefore focused on the level, possibilities and the educational needs of a group of people who associate some similar work activities or their level in the organization, social status or the same interests. The target group is formed on the basis of the identical educational needs. If necessary, the description of a target group contains

also the prerequisites for educational activities. In general, the target groups are not static, but they change dynamically. For these reasons, it is necessary to examine not only the current, already identified target groups, but we need to focus also on new target groups that have been unnoticed so far, but whose needs are evident. For example, a group of university staff is not yet specified as a target group suitable for further professional education or there are not yet any possible legislative anchoring of this issue.

Today, the traditional psychological contract, which only offered job security, is no longer sufficient. Today, in addition to job security, organizations must also offer employees opportunities to develop their potential (cf. Novotný, 2009; Kirovová, 2005). It is quite understandable that companies and enterprises expect their employees, in exchange for supporting them in developing their competences and creating the conditions, that they will be flexible, creative and develop their organizations. It is evident that adult vocational training is a very broad area and in terms of solving any issues or problems it is necessary to approach them interdisciplinary. The answers can most often be found in the fields that reflect practice, such as andragogy, economics of education or human resource development. These fields provide sufficiently broad basis for mutual cooperation and interaction.

## **2. MOTIVATION OF EMPLOYEES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

An important focus area in adult education is their motivation. An interesting view of this topic is, for example, presented by Knowles (1973), who looks at the problem from the perspective of education implementers and distinguishes four categories: (1) the perspective of policy makers, monitoring the adequacy of solutions – from goals through implementation to learning outcomes; (2) the perspective of the administrator associated with issues of consistency of the method of implementation and goals of education; (3) the perspective of the educational professional focused on the methods and forms of education; (4) the perspective of the consultant focused on the promotion of a suitable concept as the basis of all education.

The motivation for education of adults is mostly utilitarian. According to Starý (2008), this means that an adult must receive a specific benefit, such as retraining, qualification or knowledge or information needed to better perform the profession. Adults differ from primary and

secondary school pupils mainly in terms of having stronger internal motivation and long-term internal goals. The author team of Rabušicová, Rabušic & Šedová (2008) state in the results of their research that professionally oriented motivation to participate in adult education is associated primarily with employment or maintaining a position in the workplace, or with promotion or extension of employment in general. Beneš (2008, p. 83) states that in the process of decision-making about education there is usually a whole complex of motives that develop and change and that cannot be clearly hierarchized. He also notes that “Motives also always have a social background, the motivation of people from different social classes is not the same. The crucial fact is that adult learning takes place not mainly for the purpose of satisfying cognitive interests, but as a result of the need to solve specific problems.”

The motives of individual target groups differ and their participation in education is influenced by a number of external factors - social challenges, environment, life situation, previous education, personality characteristics, etc. An empirical study of educational needs in relation to participation in adult education, which is described by the authors Šedová & Novotný (2006), brought interesting results in connection with the motivation for education. For example, no significant differences were found between men and women in the research group; on the contrary, in relation to the economic position of the respondents, higher values were found for employees than for other respondents. The authors state that these are probably the educational needs related to the scope of work performed, where the pressure role of the employer is likely to be significant. The fact that higher education generates higher educational needs and is more motivating for participation in further education has also been confirmed.

## **3. HUMAN CAPITAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY**

The theory of human capital developed mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. Schultz, Becker and Mincer have made a major contribution to this theory development, emphasizing the crucial role of education and investment in human capital. Nowadays, Becker's definition is generally accepted (1963 in Dudová, 2015) stating that human capital “is the abilities, skills and corresponding motivation to apply these abilities and skills.” The main premise on which this theory

is based is that education increases an individual's productivity. Investment in education is an indispensable prerequisite for economic, social and technological development and helps to valorise human capital. Education and vocational training are currently seen as an investment for the state, business and the individual. Human resources need to have the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt quickly to changes and new labour market needs. In addition to the theory of human capital, economists have also begun to emphasize the role of education as a signalling and screening tool (Dudová, 2013).

At present, the assessment of human capital development is carried out very intensively by the OECD, which publishes an annual study on the state and development of human capital called *Education at a Glance* (e.g. OECD, 2021). In this context, this organization has defined the concept of human capital as the knowledge, skills, abilities and characteristics of an individual that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being (Mazouch & Fischer, 2011). Human resource management is to some extent close to human resources and management. Employee development is rather linked to adult or business education. Human resource development involves focusing on three basic issues – learning, performance and change, both at the individual and organizational levels (Yang, 2004).

Recently, in the field of adult education, the concept of orientation to competencies, resp. competency models, is currently being enforced. Today, understanding competencies is not linked to a specific qualification, but goes beyond it. The general structure of competencies consists of knowledge and understanding, character traits, attitudes, skills, experience, and possibly specific types of competencies such as social, technical, professional and others. Competency itself includes a set of abilities, knowledge, skills, experiences and attitudes. In agreement with Beneš (2002 in Veteška & Tureckiová, 2008, p. 31) we can state that

“The concept of competency is increasingly part of the professional, political and public discussion. However, this clear and universally acceptable definition causes problems. Competences are subject to research in various disciplines. At the same time, their development is the goal of educational, social and economic policy and the development of human resources in organizations.”

Competencies have also found a significant space in the area of requirements for managers, their education and development. Today, competencies are also part of strategic and conceptual curricular documents. Not only vocational workplaces and institutes work with them, but also specific educational subjects and specific people: teachers,

Table I: *Academic and research staff and other employees of public universities in the Czech Republic in total in 2018 (average recalculated numbers)*

The Czech Republic		Total	%	of which women	%
Academic staff	Professors	2 112,6	11,5%	314,8	14,9%
	Associate professors	3 968,0	21,5%	1 024,8	25,8%
	Assistant professors	9 483,8	51,5%	3 717,7	39,2%
	Assistant lecturers	1 177,7	6,4%	594,7	50,5%
	Lecturers	792,9	4,3%	461,5	58,2%
	Scientific, research and development staff involved in the educational activities	891,3	4,8%	322,1	36, %
	Total academic staff	18 426,3	43,3%	6 435,5	34,9%
Research staff	Postdoctoral students	592,1	11,6%	210	35,5%
	Research staff not falling into other categories	2 477,1	48,4%	690,8	27,9%
	Other scientific, research and development staff	2 047,6	40,0%	885	43,2%
	Total research staff	5 116,8	12,0%	1 785,8	34,9%
Others	Other employees	19 032,9	44,7%	12 459,7	65,5%
Total	Employees in total	42 576,1	100,0%	20 681,0	100,0%

Source: MŠMT ČR (2020)

school principals, education specialists, managers, personnel specialists, lecturers, university teachers and students of higher vocational and higher education institutions – especially humanities (Veteška and Tureckiová, 2008).

Table I above shows summary data from individual annual activity reports sent by universities in the given year, specifically for the year 2018. Current data is not yet available on the website of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. The recalculated number as of 31 December means the number of employees as of 31 December recalculated to full-time employment. In this case, a researcher is a person who is not an academic according to Section 70 of Act No. 111/1998 Coll., On Higher Education Institutions. Other staff means all other staff who are not directly involved in training and research. These are mainly administrative, technical and other employees.

The employer always considers the effectiveness and return on investment in education. External training in particular can be a very costly educational event, so it is important to plan education systematically and with balance. It is not always necessary to strictly define and divide the methods and forms of training, it is rather appropriate to create a suitable training model for each employee. The aim is to achieve the necessary qualifications of employees and increase their competencies and motivation to work (Palán et al., 2007). To some extent, one could say, by analogy with Lindr (2017), that the goal is to find an optimal form of staff education that balances the professional and social science components in a way that contributes to the cultivation and humanization of the university environment.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The aim of the paper is to communicate partial conclusions and results from a survey focused on the analysis of educational needs of selected public university employees in the Czech Republic, which was implemented as part of the sub-project of the Institutional Plan for 2019–2020. Partial results presented in this paper aim to answer the following questions:

- 1) What preferences do public university employees have in connection with their

professional development (i.e. further education)?

- 2) What motivates public university employees the most for professional development (i.e. further education)?
- 3) What obstacles do public university employees perceive in their professional development (i.e. further education)?

A standardized questionnaire was used to address the issue, which was programmed into the web environment. Data collection was performed using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) method and potential respondents were contacted by bulk e-mail. After the elimination of duplicate questionnaires, a sample of 456 respondents was statistically processed. Due to the use of the quantitative method, the respondents' answers were evaluated using software for mass analysis of SPSS statistical data. Respondents' free answers were categorized. The presented paper describes and interprets the partial results in such a way that takes into account its determination.

Among the respondents, 40% were women. Almost half of the respondents had more than 16 years of university experience. One third of the respondents was technical and economic staff, one third academic staff up to the level of Ph.D. and 13% associate professors or professors. The overall structure of the selected public university staff is shown in Table II below. Data from the university's annual report for 2018 (Výroční, 2019) is also used for relevant comparisons with national figures (see Table I).

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1 Preferences

Using a battery of 16 criteria, it was detected what is most important for respondents when deciding whether to enrol in some type of educational activities. The respondents answered on a six-point scale<sup>1</sup>. The results of the analyses showed that the content of the course (95.7%) and the usability of the acquired knowledge in practice (82.5%) are most important for the majority of respondents. The date of the course (67.4%), a quality and well-known lecturer (55.9%), a good reference to the course, e.g. from colleagues (51.2%) and the price of the course (49.4%) are also important

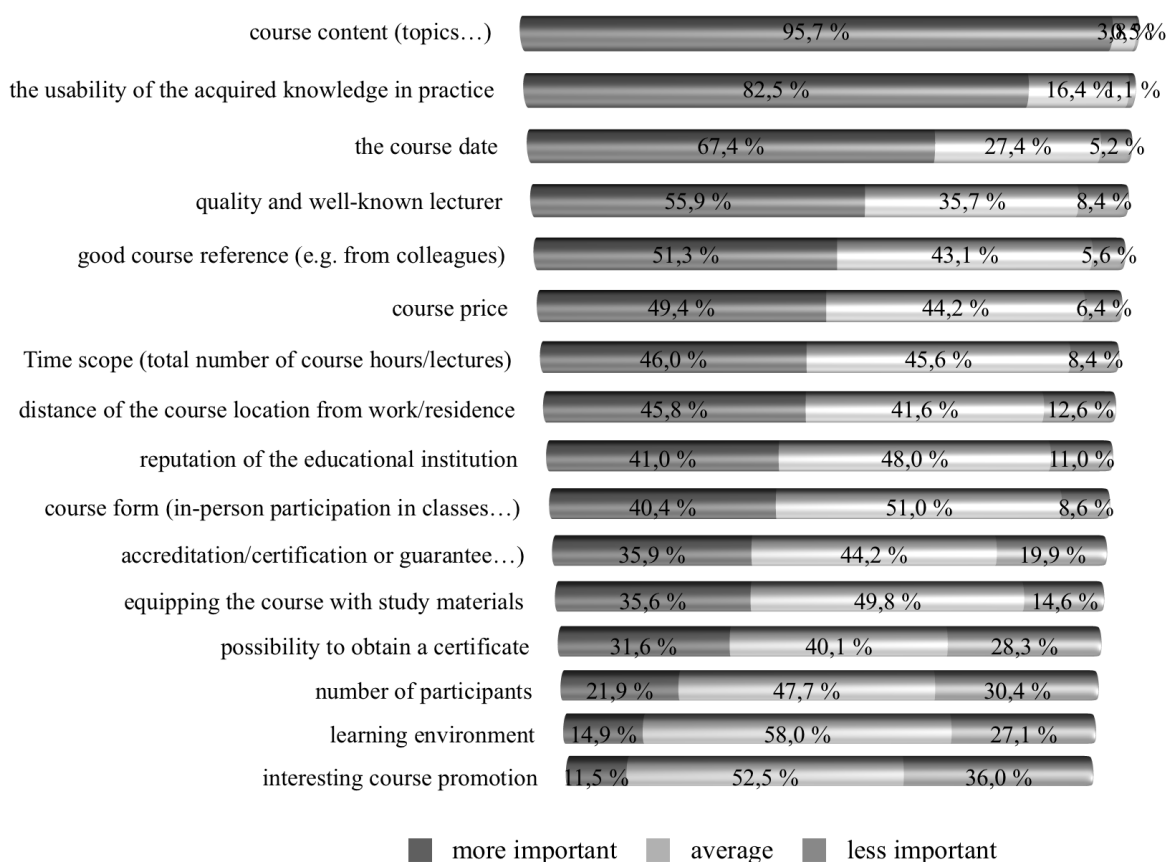
1 Respondents answered on a scale from 1 – least important to 6 – most important. For interpretation purposes, answers 1 and 2 were grouped into the “less important” category, answers 3 and 4 into the “average” category and answers 5 and 6 into the “more important” category.



Table II: Total academic and research staff and other public university staff (average recalculated numbers) in 2018

Selected public university		Total	%	of which women	%
Academic staff	Professors	54,4	10,5%	6,2	11,4%
	Associate professors	120,8	23,4%	35,9	29,7%
	Assistant professors	266,6	51, %	92,0	34,5%
	Assistant lecturers	47,8	9,2%	26,9	56,3%
	Lecturers	0	0,0%	0,00	0,0%
	Scientific, research and development staff involved in the educational activities	27,4	5,3%	6,1	22,3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>31,8%</b>	<b>167,1</b>	<b>32,3%</b>
Research staff	Postdoctoral students	14,3	5,9%	4,1	28,7%
	Research staff not falling into other categories	192,9	79,2%	92,3	47,8%
	Other scientific, research and development staff	36,4	14,9%	19,00	52,2%
	<b>Total research staff</b>	<b>243,6</b>	<b>15,0%</b>	<b>115,4</b>	<b>47,4%</b>
Others	Other employees	866,3	53,2%	498,8	57,6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Employees in total</b>	<b>1 626,9</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>781,3</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

Source: Výroční zpráva (2019)



Graph 1: To what extent are the following criteria important for deciding whether to enrol in any educational course?

Source: Authors' own work

to a large extent. On the other hand, the promotion of the course is least important for respondents when making decisions whether to enrol in some educational activities. Graph 1 below documents the results in greater detail.

Regarding the scope of the training course, almost two-fifths of the respondents preferred single one-day events (38.5%), a quarter of the respondents preferred regular courses (e.g. 2 hours per week) (26.7%) and a seventh of the respondents preferred one-day multi-day events (13.7%). One-fifth of the respondents did not have any preferences in terms of the time scope of the training course (21.1%).

In terms of the form of professional education, most respondents preferred the full-time form (personal participation in classes) (80.2%). Other forms were also often mentioned (workplace rotation, workshops, briefings, etc.) (41.4%). In contrast, the least preferred was the distance form (e-learning) (21.1%)<sup>2</sup>

To develop their profession, the respondents would most likely take courses in their area of expertise (84.6%) and language courses (69.3%). They showed the least interest in coaching courses (16.4%)<sup>3</sup>. Detailed results are documented in the following Graph 2.

The respondents had also the possibility to indicate their own preferred or desired area or topic of the course. The answers were very diverse, most often with the following topics: economic

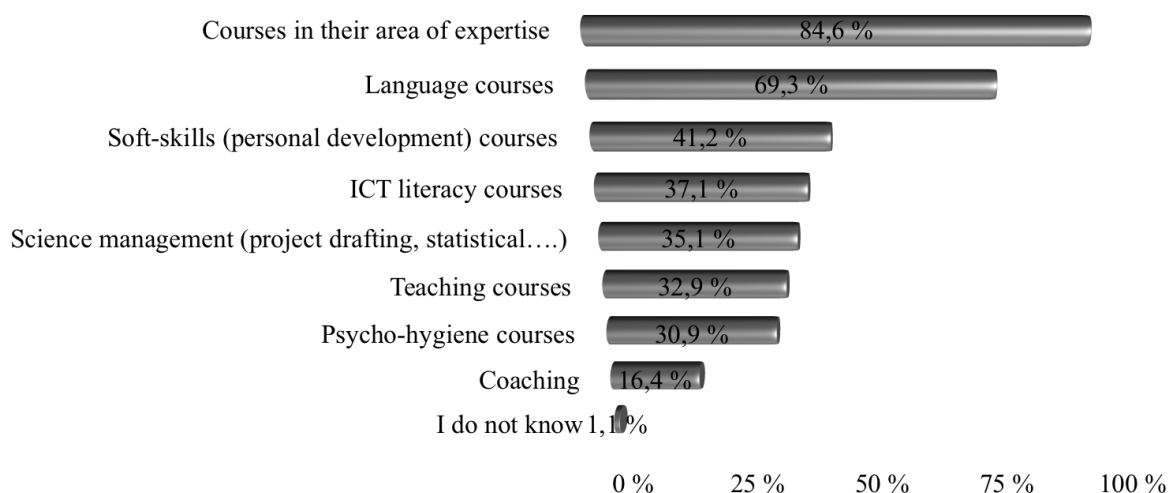
area, financial literacy; geo-information systems and graphics etc.

## 5.2 Motivation

The most frequently mentioned motivation for professional education for the respondents was the deepening of professional knowledge and skills (80.4%) and the updating of professional knowledge and skills (70.8%). Among other significant motivation incentives appeared also the opportunity to meet colleagues and exchange experiences (43.5%) and the opportunity to discuss practice issues with experts (39.6%). The least frequently respondents' answers stated that they have been continuing their vocational training due to considerations of a change of profession (9.7%). Only a thirteen respondents do not participate in any educational activities at all (3.3%). The results are shown in detail in Graph 3.

## 5.3 Obstacles

According to two thirds of the respondents, the biggest obstacle to participation in educational courses is their workload (68.7%). Furthermore, it is also the high price of the courses, which was indicated by two-fifths of the respondents (42.7%). On the contrary, the least significant obstacle for the respondents is age (2.7%). Graph 4 documents the results in detail.



Graph 2: For development in your profession, you would like to attend courses in the following areas.

Source: Authors' own work

<sup>2</sup> Respondents could mark more than one answer variant, so the sum of individual relative frequencies is greater than 100%.

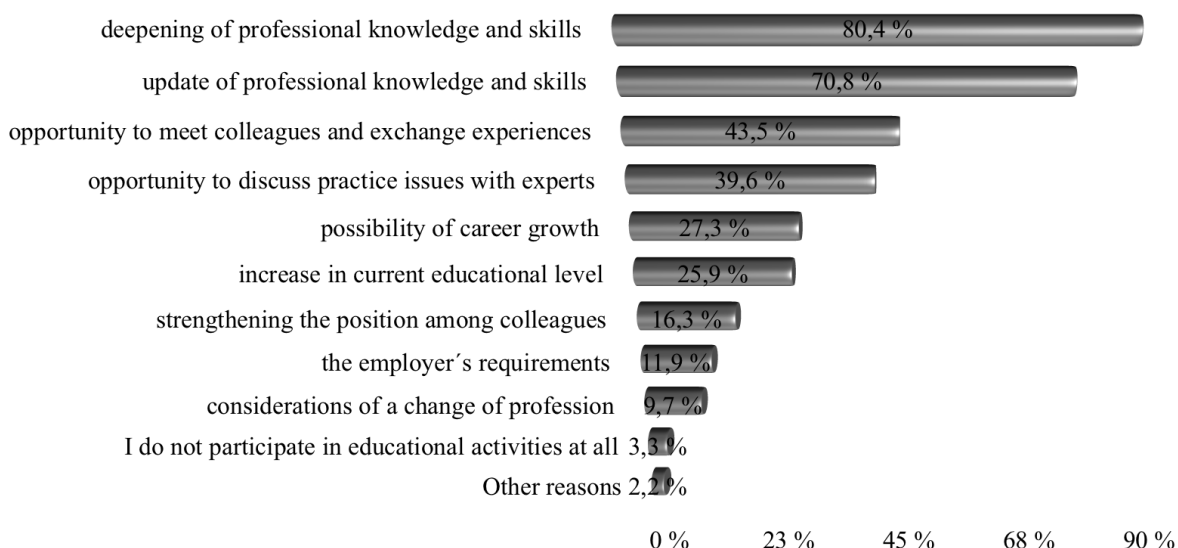
<sup>3</sup> Respondents could mark more than one answer variant, so the sum of individual relative frequencies is greater than 100%.

Regarding the possibility of mentioning “other” obstacles, the respondents mentioned, for example, reluctance to travel, long distance, quality of the courses or lecturers or insufficient offer of professional development and educational activities in their field.

## 6. SUMMARY

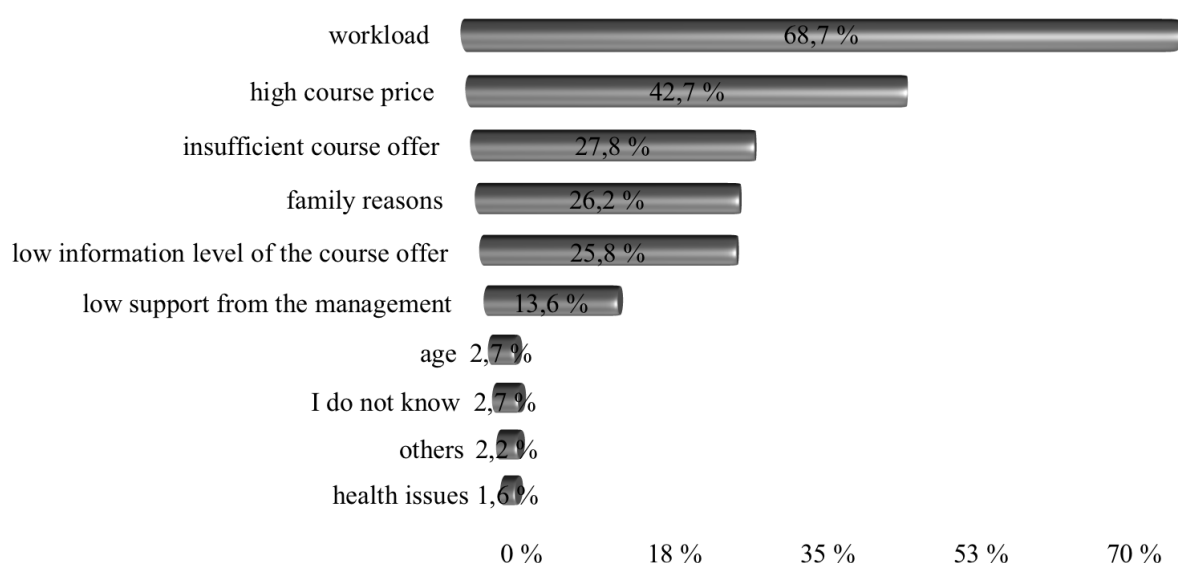
The aim of the presented survey was to determine the current educational needs of adults,

which are related to the profession of people working in a specific environment. The target group consisted of the employees of a selected public university in the Czech Republic. The results of the analyses showed that respondents were willing to continue their professional education. The results also proved that the content of the course (95.7%) and the usability of the acquired knowledge in practice (82.5%) are most important for the majority of the respondents. According to the respondents, the best time to attend vocational



Graph 3: What is the main reason that motivates you to continue in your professional education?

Source: Authors' own work



Graph 4: What is the biggest obstacle for you to participate in the educational courses?

Source: Authors' own work



training courses is in the morning (61.9%). Regarding the scope of the training course, almost two-fifths of the respondents preferred one-day events (38.5%). In terms of the form of vocational training, most respondents preferred the full-time form (personal participation in classes) (80.2%). Other forms have often been mentioned as well. In addition to the above-mentioned partial results, it is also possible to state, for example, that almost three-fifths of the respondents (58.2%) prefer such educational events at which they can be more

active than passive. To develop their profession, the respondents would most likely attend courses in their area of expertise (84.6%). The most frequently mentioned motivation incentives for professional education for the survey participants was the deepening of professional knowledge and skills (80.4%) and the updating of professional knowledge and skills (70.8%). According to two thirds of respondents, the biggest obstacle to participation in educational courses was their workload (68.7%).

## CONCLUSION

It is very important for university management to be constantly aware of the fact that managing and leading people is a very important activity. Universities have long been faced with the important issue of professionalization of all activities that are associated with planning, selection and recruitment. Equally important is the care of all types of employees, which includes not only regular evaluation or remuneration, but also the offer of opportunities for training and further development or the creation of relevant working conditions and good working relationships. At universities in the Czech Republic, this area is receiving an increasing attention, for example in connection with the possibility to obtain the prestigious HR Award (full name *HR Excellence in Research Award*), which is awarded by the European Commission for excellence in human resources in the scientific environment.

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