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**STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AS A SOURCE OF
EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: PERCEPTIONS AND OPINIONS
OF MEMBERS OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND
RECRUITERS IN ESTONIA**

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ABSTRACT

Student organizations have shown to be beneficial in complementing the university years. Current study adds to the literature by expanding the knowledge about the benefits of student organizations specific to Estonia. The aim of this study was to determine the transferable employability skills that have been developed in Estonian student organizations and are useful when applying to an entry level job position after graduation. The participants included 180 members of student organizations and 88 recruiters who filled in a web-based survey about seven employability skills. Based on previous research, six hypotheses were formed, five of which found partial or full support while one was not supported. The results showed that all the employability skills included in the survey have been developed in student organizations, with recruiters evaluating the extent of development significantly higher for most skills than students themselves. While students reported the highest development score for Teamwork skills, recruiters did the same for Personal Management skills. In addition, the study explored differences between male and female students, non-academic and academic organizations as well as students with different tenure. Experiences that most exceeded students' expectations included gaining self-confidence, expanding their social network and developing interpersonal skills. Suggestions for implementing the results for the benefit of students and student organizations as well as universities and companies are discussed.

Keywords: employability, skill, student, organization, recruiter

1. INTRODUCTION

The world of work is constantly going through changes. Young people today are not dreaming of a life-long career in one prestigious company, but are more interested in gathering experiences from many different fields of life. The focus is more on their own life satisfaction than the company's advancement. Through these characteristics has Hall (2004, p. 2) described the protean career which has also become popular among recently graduated students. It is not uncommon that a person has over seven different employers during their careers (Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2010, p. 4) which means that people are managing the progress of their careers themselves instead of counting on their employer. Job security is therefore replaced by uncertainty as both employees and employers need to cope with changes in the labour market (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008, p. 504).

The turbulence that careers today possess forces students to focus on their versatility and be ready to adapt in different job positions. In other words, they need to maintain high employability. While a couple of decades ago, having a university degree gave good chances of getting employed in Estonia, it is not so simple anymore. In other countries as well, university graduates have been accepting jobs that they are overqualified for (Li, Gervais & Duval, 2006, p. 6). There are certainly many different reasons for that, one being the lack of skills that employers are looking for in a suitable candidate (McKinsey & Company, 2012, p. 4). It seems that the educational path that universities provide, may not be entirely sufficient for guaranteeing success in the labour market.

Fortunately, students have started to reach the same conclusion. They are aware that in addition to attending classes and receiving a diploma at the end of the studies, they are expected to have skills that make them employable (Refae, Belarbi, Elkhatib & Rashed, 2016, p. 90). To achieve that, some students have discovered the benefits of volunteering which are a source of experience and skills development (Holdsworth, 2010, p. 428). Extra-curricular activities – student clubs, organizations and sororities – where students participate on a voluntary basis, are also widely used as a means of distinguishing themselves from other graduates (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013, p. 26). It is important not to disregard the possibility of gaining actual job experience to enrich the studies, but unfortunately the reality is that usually students are not employed to their chosen occupations until the end of the studies.

Shortage of skilled labour has also been one of the most popular topics in Estonian media during the past couple of years. Some of the actions that have been taken to alleviate this situation include

popularising certain curriculums and providing additional self-development courses. While these seem to be helping some sectors, it is not a sustainable solution. A bigger effect could be reached with students who take care of their versatility and employability skills which give them better chances and success in the labour market.

Student communities have proven to be useful sources of skills for students in Estonia but so far there has been no research into what this experience gives in terms of preparing students for the labour market. There have been success stories travelling through the word of mouth about student organization experience giving advantages in job hunting. Now is a good chance to gain more insight into the matter and potentially provide additional research topics for the future. According to the last Eurobarometer survey (The Gallup Organisation, 2010, p. 9) about graduate employability, Estonia is the top country in Europe in hiring graduates and planning to do so also in the future. Student organizations are therefore a useful resource which should be used, especially now when employers are experiencing employee shortages and are not satisfied with the level of transferable skills they portray. Estonian employers mostly report being “rather satisfied” with important employability skills, but the proportion of employers being “very satisfied” ranges from 25% for both teamwork and communication skills, 19% for both the ability to adapt and solve problems and 18% for decision making skills (The Gallup Organisation, 2010, p. 28). Comparing to the results from the rest of the European Union, the situation in Estonian labour market could be better.

The aim of this research was to determine the perceived transferable employability skills that have been developed in Estonian student organizations and are useful when applying to an entry level job position after graduation. In order to do that, qualitative data from both Estonian students and recruiters was collected and compared. The following chapters of the study provide an overview of employability, important employability skills and student organizations. In the second part, hypotheses, study procedure and participants are described, followed by the data analysis and results. Lastly, outcomes, limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

1.1. Definition and history of employability

Employability is a concept that does not yet have one conclusive definition. Researchers have approached it from different angles, while all agreeing that it is about one’s ability to get or maintain a job. According to Hillage and Pollard (1998, p. 2), employability is “the capability to

move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment”. Forrier and Sels (2003, p. 106) define employability as “an individual’s chance of a job in the internal and/or external labour market”. Similarly, Rothwell and Arnold (2007, p. 25) defined it as “the ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires”. Others have broadened the definition of employability to include personal attributes. Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004, p. 15) have said that employability is a psycho-social construct and the employees themselves have the responsibility to gain the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) that are valued by employees. Concentrating on employability among students, Yorke (2006, p. 8) has defined it as “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”.

Based on these various definitions, it can be concluded that employability refers to one’s personal characteristics that enable one to find a suitable place in the labour market and, through realising one’s potential, to be successful – either by keeping the position or finding a new one. It must be noted though that employability does not reflect the act of getting a job itself but the potential of getting one (Yorke, 2006, p. 7). Employability is a concept about the skills and knowledge that facilitate, but do not guarantee getting employed. As it is such a complex concept with several complementing definitions, it is worth exploring its history.

The concept of employability has been studied for almost a century, with its antecedents tracing back to the beginning of the 20th century (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005, p. 200). Gazier (1998, 2001, as cited by McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005, p. 200) has distinguished between several versions of employability, first of which emerged in the UK and the US as dichotomized employability, where people were thought of as either ‘employable’ or ‘unemployable’. The most recent wave which has spread internationally since the end of the 1980s is a mix of three Gazier’s employability formulations: labour market performance employability, initiative employability and interactive employability. Altogether this means that the focus has been on labour market outcomes, individual characteristics in career development and how individual employability interacts with others’. According to the author, this has brought on “the targeting of long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups by policy-makers, and the resulting focus of many Western governments on activation policies which seek to intervene to prevent long-term unemployment and labour market disadvantage” (p. 201).

Forrier and Sells (2003, p. 104) have also focused on researching the history of employability and have concluded that since the 1970s the focus has been shifting from employee's knowledge and skills to flexibility of organizations in the 1980s and to employability in general being an instrument used in the labour market in the 1990s. When in the beginning, the main aim of employability was to distinguish between people who were employed or unemployed, it now serves a wider purpose. Together with the changes in understanding, it has started to determine, describe and enhance one's job security.

1.2. Employability frameworks and relationship with the labour market

While there is no consensus on one definition of employability, researchers have studied it with the aim of making this concept clearer. One notion is that employability is being used on all three levels of the labour market: macro, meso and micro levels (Berntson & Marklund, 2007, p. 280) which also means that there are as many approaches to researching it. The macro level focuses on research of the whole society which includes the government policies aiming to enhance the local employment rates. The second level is used to describe the employability of organizations. It is in the interest of every organization to have and maintain an employable workforce that is willing to come along with changes that may occur (Buchelt, 2015, p. 85). The micro level focuses on the individual's employability – the ability to get and maintain a job in the labour market (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 106). Researchers working on this level are identifying the attributes that make up a person's employability (Buchelt, 2015, p. 85).

From reading the relevant literature, it can be concluded that most of the research done on employability focuses on its individual side. For example, it can be seen from the definitions where the emphasis is on an employee and his/her abilities (e.g. Fugate et al., 2004, p. 15; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, p. 25). In addition to seeing employability as a new form of job security it has also been thought of as proactive career management (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 25). Employees are taking care of their own development and flexibility which enable them to get a new job at a suitable point in their career. As Hillage and Pollard (1998, p. 2) have said, employability is about the ability to gain employment, maintain it and move between roles in the same organization and obtain a new job in a new organisation, should it be necessary. This also illustrates the changes that have taken place with the whole concept of careers. People are not spending their whole lives

working for just one company and therefore constantly need to be attractive to potential employers by keeping their employability high (Busch, 2009, p. 431; Fugate et al., 2004, p. 15).

There are some theoretical frameworks that have been used to analyse and explain the concept of employability. For example, Acikgoz, Sumer and Sumer (2016, p. 667) have used the conservation of resources theory which proposes that when at some point people do not have enough resources anymore, it leads to stress. Therefore, it is useful to obtain new skills and abilities or keep them regularly updated in case a person needs to find new employment. In addition, researchers have used the human capital theory which suggests that variables of human capital, like knowledge, skills and experience relate to career outcomes, including employability (Wittekind, Raeder & Grote, 2010, p. 568). Human capital includes also social connections which can be of help when looking for new employment opportunities.

Some authors have worked on composing models which could give us an understanding of the main variables that make up employability. For one, McQuaid and Lindsay (2005, p. 208) proposed a broad employability framework which has three components: individual factors, personal circumstances and external factors. According to their research, they all have an influence on a person's employability with each of the factors weighing more importance in different situations. Individual factors stand for demographics, skills and other attributes, personal circumstances include social and household factors, and external factors describe the labour market situation and outside support. Alvarez-Gonzalez, Lopez-Miguens and Caballero (2017, p. 293) later built on their research and constructed a validated model for explaining perceived employability of students. It differentiates between personal and contextual factors, among which self-confidence and generic skills were the most important variables in predicting students' perceived employability.

1.3. Different types of employability

In the literature research, several types of employability came up as research subjects. In addition to sustainable employability which emphasizes that the way in which we work should be sustainable in the long run (Abma et al., 2016, p. 35), the main emphasis has been on objective and perceived or subjective employability. Bargsted (2017, p. 117) composed an employability model for the basis of her research that differentiated objective employability from perceived employability. Objective employability would be explained by the market value of professions,

social capital and the demographics, whereas perceived employability would be affected by personal characteristics such as proactivity, locus of control, self-efficacy and career identity.

As the name itself says, objective employability is something that can be objectively measured and evaluated. For example, Bargsted (2017, p. 119) used the person's income, the job's position in the hierarchical level of the organization and the stability of the position to measure objective employability in her study. Perceived employability, however, has been described as a person's subjective perception about his/her characteristics and possibilities of getting and maintaining employment (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 26), in other words, how easy it would be to get a new job in the future (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, p. 26; Kirves, 2014, p. 10). Perceptions have been frequently used in overall psychology research as they have been a useful tool in predicting human behaviour. As antecedents to perceived employability, Kirves (2014, p. 12) brings out the person's human and social capital, competences and dispositions.

Additionally, on an organizational level employability can be divided into internal and external. Internal employability describes the employee's ability to stay on one position and adapt inside the organization if necessary, whereas external employability describes the employee's ability to find a new job in a different company (Hofaidhllaoui, 2013, p. 26). Both types are important for diverse development of one's career. Perceived employability itself has also internal and external components. Internal refer to the "perceptions of abilities, ambition, career attributes and skills" which can be developed by the person, but external components, like demographics and labour market situation, are not under the influence of people themselves (Batistic & Tymon, 2017, p. 377).

As mentioned previously, graduates have also been in the focus of some employability studies, making graduate employability a popular research topic. One way of approaching graduate employability is taking it as a result of higher education in which at the end of the studies the graduates have developed the skills and knowledge necessary for gaining employment in the labour market (Kinash, Crane, Judd & Knight, 2016, p. 952). This approach, however, assumes that higher education is the key to finding employment after graduation and everything should be set after getting a diploma. A more lifelike definition comes from Yorke (2006, p. 8), who has said that graduate employability is a set of skills that "makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations". This way employability is something that boosts the chances of getting a job and the graduate is given more responsibility over his/her own future

success. To explore graduate self-perceived employability, researchers have composed measures designed specifically for this construct (e.g. Rothwell, Herbert & Rothwell, 2008).

In this contemporary research, the focus is on perceived employability as seen through the conservation of resources and the human capital theory. More specifically, the research concentrates on individual level graduate employability, as the aim is to explore the employability skills of Estonian students. In the literature there have been several approaches to studying perceived employability: competence-based and dispositional approach. The first concentrates on the skills and abilities of employees (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999, p. 101), the second on the person's attitudes and adaptive behaviours towards work (Fugate, 2006, as cited by Fugate & Kinicki, 2008, p. 504). Here the competence-based approach is adopted for carrying out this research.

1.4. Employability skills

Before talking about employability skills that are important in the labour market, we must first look at the employability models and the components they embody. According to Clarke (2008, p. 262), employability components are the person's skills and abilities, attitudes and behaviours, individual characteristics as well as the labour market as an external component. Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin and Zehner (2013, p. 683) proposed five categories that influence employability: 1) soft-skills; 2) problem-solving skills; 3) job-specific functional skills; 4) pre-graduate experience; and 5) academic reputation. Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006, p. 453) used another five-factor model of employability which included the following dimensions: 1) occupational expertise; 2) anticipation and optimization; 3) personal flexibility; 4) corporate sense; and 5) balance. As can be seen from the previous overview, almost every author has their own approach to employability components. What is similar, though, is the fact that all of the classifications include internal personal qualities as well as job and organization-related factors.

From a different point of view, some authors have put more emphasis on a person's individual attributes. For example, Fugate et al. (2004, p. 18) suggest that employability is composed of three dimensions – 1) career identity; 2) personal adaptability; 3) social and human capital – which are all synergistically combined and should only be considered collectively. Career identity gives an answer to the person's question “who am I” in the job context. Personal adaptability characterises the person's ability to change as needed in relation to the labour market situation. Social and human

capital refer to the social network that the person has built for him-/herself as well as individual characteristics that help with advancements in the labour market. Transferable or portable skills are also part of the human capital as they enable the person to adapt to various positions. Similarly, McQuaid and Lindsay (2005, p. 208) built a three-factor framework for employability: 1) individual factors; 2) personal circumstances; and 3) external factors, which was more broadly explained in one of the previous chapters. From these two theories, we can see that whether it is the demographics, the ability to adapt when needed or skills that can be transferred to any occupation, the responsibility for being employable is largely in the hands of the people themselves. This supports Yorke and Harvey's (2005, p. 50) notion that personal qualities "weigh heavily in construing employability".

In addition to proposing components for employability, authors have used different classifications to organize the employability skills. One way of dividing them is separating basic (or cognitive) skills from applied (or behavioural) skills (The Conference Board, 2006, p. 9). Others have preferred to divide the employability skills into three groups. Dench (1997, p. 191) divided employability skills into personal attributes and attitudes, personal skills and technical skills. Pitcher and Purcell (1998, p. 186) used categories like traditional academic skills, personal development and enterprise skills. Abas and Imam (2016, p. 120) used a categorisation of fundamental, personal management and teamwork skills. While 20 years ago one category was dedicated to technical and/or academic skills, the current approach puts more emphasis on universal skills that help with adapting in a continuously changing world of work.

Employability skills, in general, make a person more employable, hence refer to personal characteristics that make a person more likely to get a job and succeed in the labour market. The literature review showed that in addition to occupation-specific knowledge that helps a person succeed in the labour market, most research concentrates on skills that can be transferred from one position to another. Authors call these transferable, generic or core skills, which are also most valued by current employers (Bennett, 2002, p. 457; Billing, 2003, p. 335; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005, p. 214; Finch et al., 2013, p. 695). Although there is no agreement on a definite list of employability skills, the closest one is Employability Skills 2000+ developed by members of the Conference Board of Canada (2000) which lists 56 employability skills important for today's labour market. It encompasses, among others, communication, problem solving, responsibility, adaptability, continuous learning and teamwork skills. Here is also an overview of the most popular employability skills that came up during the literature review done for this study:

- Communication (Pitcher & Purcell, 1998, p. 189; Bennett, 2002, p. 465; Billing, 2003, p. 341; Ehiyazaryan & Barraclough, 2009, p. 302; Finch et al., 2013, p. 695)
- Decision making (Billing, 2003, p. 346; Buchelt, 2015, p. 92)
- Leadership (Bennett, 2002, p. 465; Billing, 2003, p. 346; Finch et al., 2013, p. 695)
- Problem solving (Billing, 2003, p. 346; Finch et al., 2013, p. 695)
- Self-confidence (Pitcher & Purcell, 1998, p. 189; Billing, 2003, p. 346; Ehiyazaryan & Barraclough, 2009, p. 305; Alvarez-Gonzalez et al., 2017, p. 294)
- Self-efficacy (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 32; Yorke & Harvey, 2005, p. 48; Bargsted, 2017, p. 120)
- Teamwork (Bennett, 2002, p. 465; Billing, 2003, p. 341)

1.5. Employability skills nowadays valued by employers and ways to develop them

Based on several studies, there is a long list of qualities that employers are looking for in their candidates, but the tendency is that employers are more interested in seeing transferable and/or soft skills in their candidates than specific technical skills (Billing, 2003, p. 335; Pritchard, 2013; AQU Catalunya, 2015, p. 17). Already in the 1980s, graduates were expected to have people-oriented skills as the most important ones in the job market (Greenwood et al., 1987, as cited by Bennett, 2002, p. 459). More recently, an analysis of 1,000 job advertisements in the UK by Bennett (2002, p. 465) revealed that the most sought-after skills are communication, IT, organisation, teamwork and interpersonal skills. Similar results were published by The Gallup Organisation (2010, p. 12) where teamwork, sector-specific, communication, computer, reading, writing, analytical and problem-solving skills as well as the ability to adapt were rated as the most important skills in the European Union when recruiting recent graduates. Another study exploring the UK employers' perceptions of the importance of different employability skills emphasized teamwork, problem solving, self-management, leadership, interpersonal and communication skills as well as information and communication technology (ICT) knowledge as valuable skills to have (Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011, p. 12). Billing (2003, p. 346) concluded based on his work that communication appeared as the most looked-for competence in new hires among different countries. Besides the rise of importance of ICT related skills during the last 30 years (Yorke & Harvey, 2005, p. 42), employers still want employees who know how to communicate, act as a

member of a team, are good at finding solutions and demonstrate leadership abilities. Adding to the decreasing importance of technical skills is the fact that most specialized knowledge will be obsolete in a couple of years after learning it (Busch, 2009, p. 430) because of technological advances and innovation.

Based on the previous paragraph, students have a number of skills to master and many “hoops to jump through” if they want to be successful in today’s labour market. It is important to figure out, how these skills are best developed and what role does the university have in this process. Mostly it is expected that universities and other educational institutions are responsible for developing the employability skills of their students, especially when students need to invest money in their education (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011, p. 5). However, there often seems to be a misunderstanding between what is taught at school and what employers expect from a graduate entering the labour market because of insufficient cooperation between all stakeholders (Rateau & Kaufman, 2009, as cited by Rateau, 2011, p. 1). Busch (2009, p. 429) has said, that “while both groups tend to agree that more needs to be done to make students more employable, they frequently disagree in defining what that ‘more’ actually is”. Something needs to be changed because the literature shows that employers are not satisfied with the level of skills that graduates possess. Employers have had experiences with numbers of graduates applying for a job who display a lack of workforce readiness skills suitable for today’s organisations (The Conference Board, 2009; McKinsey & Company, 2012, p. 23)

There are many ways how universities can take the feedback into account and make their contribution to enhancing graduate employability. An overall assumption is that universities can undertake measures for improving their curriculums and staff functions which in turn promote the likelihood of graduates getting employed (Holmes, 2013, p. 541). Educators should take a wider scope in sharing knowledge and teaching skills that can be used not only in the academic world but also put into practice in other fields of work (Mutwarasibo, Ruterana & Andersson, 2014, p. 969). What is needed, is practice of transferable as well as technical skills directed at a specific position. Other useful methods are organizing activities that help students get ready for the world of work: training for job interviews, guidelines on how to write motivation letters or compose CVs as well as first contacts with future prospective employers, for example for landing an internship (Caballero et al., 2014, as cited by Alvarez-Gonzalez et al, 2017, p. 285). The biggest challenge for the university and the teachers might be staying up-to-date on latest practices as the world is constantly changing (Rateau, 2011, p. 65)

Providing internships is also one of the main ways of how employers can get engaged in the process, cooperate with the university faculties and give valuable insight. Real-world experiences are important for students (Alvarez-Gonzalez et al., 2017, p. 295) in that they prepare them for the life that comes after graduating and entering an organization. A survey conducted in Catalonia (AQU Catalunya, 2015, p. 72) suggested three main ways for cooperation between universities and companies: 1) providing internships and work experience; 2) informing university career centres of job opportunities; and 3) taking part in designing the university curriculums. By engaging in these activities, companies can make sure that their opinion about important workforce skills is heard and students can get relevant hands-on experience before entering a full-time job. As Yorke and Harvey (2005, p. 41) have said, “Having a degree is just the start, and employers nowadays seek a range of qualities and other achievements.”

1.6. Description and classification of student organizations

However, a university is not an only source of employability skills relevant to students’ diverse development. There are several ways students can develop themselves during their studies. It is possible to take on extra courses at the university to enrich the curriculum or it is possible to try and find a job in their field. However, more often students in Estonia take on part-time jobs in customer service, either in cafés and restaurants or department stores and nightclubs, because there they employ students with minimal experience. But there is also one other activity that has proven to be popular among students – enrolling in a student organization. Participating in student organizations has shown to facilitate cognitive and affective development together with academic engagement and connection with faculty during the university years (Astin, 1996, as cited by Martindale, Olate & Anderson, 2017, p. 2).

A student organization is essentially formed when a group of students come together voluntarily because of a common goal they have. The activity does not give them school credit nor is it planned by the university, but students participate with the aim of learning, getting experience and socializing (Borges, Ferreira, de Oliviera, Macini & Caldana, 2017, p. 154). Joining a student organization is a good way to get integrated in campus life (Holzweiss, Rahn & Wickline, 2007, p. 136) as they represent a variety of students from different backgrounds. Other benefits also include gaining communication and leadership skills that can be used in later life in different job positions. Boone, Kurtz and Fleenor (1988, p. 24) gathered data from over 200 CEOs in the US

and it shows that 70% of them had held a leading position at least once in a student organization during their studies, which might have helped them to gain practical skills for future life.

The simplest way to differentiate between student organizations is to divide them into academic and non-academic organizations. Academic ones bring together students from similar specialties and may be supported by universities to a small extent. Non-academic ones are for unifying students with other mutual interests, like sports, culture and international student organizations. A study by Holzweiss et al. (2007, p. 145) showed that there were differences between students choosing to join organizations of either type. Students who wanted to get preparation for their future careers were more interested in joining academic organizations, whereas non-academic ones were more for people who were looking for expanding their social networks and getting overall experiences that add value to their university experience. Academic organizations can also be profession-based organizations as they are a place for students to apply their knowledge learned from classes and get relevant practical experience (Rosch, 2014, p. 7). Although, what is not dependent on the organization type is the opportunity to be involved in teamwork projects and gain experience by acting in different roles (Smith & Chenoweth, 2015, p. 280).

Student participation in organizations can be explained by theories that acknowledge the fact that students have much to benefit from experiences outside of the classroom. Experiential learning theory, as proposed by David Kolb in the 1980s, explains that most effective learning happens when the following are put together: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Petkus, 2000, p. 64). The same happens in student organizations where students can put their knowledge into practice without the fear of failing, but with a hope to learn from mistakes. Motivation to take part in a student organization can also be explained by Vroom's expectancy theory, according to which people choose to allocate energy to activities that give them value (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006, p. 262). When students perceive that they can gain extra experience from student organizations that helps them to find a job after graduation, they are more likely to enrol.

1.7. Student organizations' importance in developing employability skills

Although it might seem that way to an outsider, student organizations are not just for students to spend their time in. They are a source of experience and skills that are beneficial for student's future career by giving either specialized or general knowledge. Participation in student

organizations helps to strengthen job market preparedness (Strapp & Farr, 2010, p. 52), create social networks and gain vocational skills (Ansala, Uusiautti & Määttä, 2016, p. 156-157) which are some of the most important incentives for students to join an organization as they would potentially help with finding employment in the future. Holzweiss et al. (2007, p. 146) further differentiated between the benefits of academic and non-academic organizations by showing that academic ones facilitate the development of career related skills whereas non-academic ones help with more general skills, like leadership and communication. In general, it has much to do with what kind of roles the student can take in the organization as somewhat different skills are needed and developed in different positions. Student's own motivation and dedication also play a role as the more a student takes on new challenges, the more he/she has to benefit from the experience.

When asked, what exactly are the skills and lessons learned in a student organization, students have mentioned a variety of outcomes which are mainly compatible with transferable skills that are important in the world of work today. A study by Borges et al. (2017) focused on student's expectations and experiences in student organizations and showed that while learning and developing of different personal and professional skills was the main aim of joining an organization, the elements that most exceeded expectations were learning, social network, participation in projects, teamwork and leadership skills (p. 158). Kezar and Moriarty (2000, as cited by Kim & Bastedo, 2017, p. 251) have found similar results showing that participation in student clubs plays a role in developing students' leadership and public-speaking skills. It is also supported by Rubin, Bommer and Baldwin (2002, p. 449) who found student organizations being beneficial for developing communication, decision-making and teamwork skills. In addition, other studies have reported student entities to help with profession-based connections and mentoring (Lebron, Stanley, Kim & Thomas, 2017, p. 85), interviewing and presentation skills (Peltier, Scovotti & Pointer, 2008, p. 54), leadership, networking and personal skills (Scott, McLaughlin, Shepherd, Williams, Zeeman & Joyner, 2016, p. 4; Dugan & Komives, 2010, p. 539), successfully dealing with stress, failure and conflicts (Smith & Chenoweth, 2015, p. 284), and self-confidence (Huang & Chang, 2004, p. 402). It is useful for the student organizations to keep these aspects in mind, because the more the organization provides development opportunities of the fields the student is interested in, the more likely they are to contribute to the organization (Holzweiss et al., 2007, p. 146).

The importance of extracurricular activities has even been noticed by recruiters. Presenting a considerable amount of student organization experience can be perceived as equal to or more

valuable than academic performance and work experience as it signals of a specialised skill set (Cole, Rubin, Feild & Giles, 2007, p. 336). The positive relationship also exists when the membership includes holding a leadership position or is relevant to applicant's job position and/or education (Nemanick & Clark, 2002, p. 215). Therefore, it is always reasonable to list all experiences to the resume as even extracurricular activities are used to differentiate between candidates. It is especially the case with positions that require a candidate to have good interpersonal, leadership (Rubin et al., 2002, p. 449), time-management (Kim & Bastedo, 2017, p. 253) and teamwork skills. Overall, listing several types of experiences helps the candidate to appear well-rounded (Nemanick & Clark, 2002, p. 215) and therefore stand out among other candidates.

What makes a student organization a good place to gather experience valued by recruiters is the fact that by joining one, the student enters an informal learning environment. Ansala et al. (2016, p. 152) have said that students learn as much or even more through informal learning as they do through formal learning at school. It needs to be recognized that students are often not only interested in going through every subject in the curriculum, but getting much more out of their university experience. An important factor is also the social support that comes from joining a student organization, as they enable a student to be socially integrated with their peers and the faculty (Talbert, Larke & Jones, 1999). Forming strong and lasting relationships with peers helps them fulfil their inherent social needs as well as grow their network which might become useful in their later careers (Dess & Shaw, 2001, p. 452). But such a nourishing environment can only be achieved when all stakeholders contribute and are on the same page. Students, the faculty and employers must all share the mindset that the most important thing is to provide students with a valuable learning environment (Lebron et al., 2017, p. 92).

2. CURRENT RESEARCH

2.1. Aim and hypotheses

The aim of this research was to determine the transferable employability skills that have been developed in Estonian student organizations and are useful when applying to an entry level job position after graduation. The study contributes to the existing literature by expanding the knowledge about the benefits of student organizations specific to Estonia. Based on the results, students, student organizations, universities and companies can take steps towards using more of the useful resources that student organizations provide.

According to the literature review and previous research, the hypotheses in this study are:

Hypothesis 1: Students perceive an increase of all measured employability skills as a result of participating in a student organization.

Hypothesis 2: Recruiters evaluate the development of Teamwork and Personal Management skills in student organizations the highest among others.

Hypothesis 3: Recruiters evaluate the importance of Teamwork, Personal Management and Problem-Solving skills in current labour market the highest among others.

Hypothesis 4: Students evaluate the extent of employability skills development in student organizations significantly higher than recruiters.

Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in the perceived levels of employability skills between the members of non-academic and academic student organizations.

Hypothesis 6: Students perceive learning, gaining a social network, teamwork and leadership skills as most exceeding their expectations as a result of participating in a student organization.

2.2. Measures and procedure

The research done for this paper comprises two sample studies where the members of Estonian student organizations and recruiters of Estonian companies were asked to evaluate a list of employability skills. The list was put together specifically for this research and in Estonian language based on the shortened Making the Match survey used by Rateau (2011), the Community-Based Research Course outcome survey developed by Lichtenstein, Thorme, Cutforth

and Tombari (2011) and the General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The final version of the list included 38 items divided into 7 subscales: Problem-Solving (PS), Personal Management (PM), Creativity & Innovation (CI), Self-Development (SD), Individual Strengths (IS), Teamwork (TW) and Self-Efficacy (SE). The list of items can be seen in Appendix A. The data for both studies was collected in February 2018 through Google Forms. All participants were guaranteed anonymity. After collecting the data, the survey websites were closed.

2.2.1. Survey 1: members of Estonian student organizations

In order to get students to participate in the study, an email containing a brief overview of the study and the link to the survey was sent to 80 student organizations both in Tartu and Tallinn. An additional call for participants was put up in a Facebook group uniting the student organizations of Tartu. Filling in the survey in Google Forms was planned to take about 10 minutes.

In the survey, the students were first asked to provide some demographic data: gender, age, details about employment, year of studies, years in a student organization, the name of the organization (in case the student was a member in several ones, he/she was asked to pick one to base the answers on). The second part of the survey asked students to evaluate in what extent they had developed the skills listed by being a part of a student organization. The responses were recorded in the form of a Likert scale (4 = Extensively developed, 3 = Moderately developed, 2 = Minimally developed, 1 = Not at all developed, 0 = Can't evaluate), where participants were asked to only use the option "Can't evaluate" when it's absolutely necessary and the skill does not fit with the activities of the organization. In the end of the survey, there was one open-ended question about which experiences from being a member of a student organization had exceeded their expectations.

2.2.2. Survey 2: recruiters of Estonian companies

The invitations for recruiters with a brief description of the study and the link to the survey were distributed through many different virtual channels. Personal invitations were sent to over 130 companies' general or HR email addresses while more generic invitations were asked to be distributed to the email lists of PARE (Estonian Human Resource Management Association) and TTÜ's Human Resource Management students. The invitation to participate was also posted to Facebook with the aim of reaching more potential participants. Filling in the survey in Google forms was planned to take 15-20 minutes.

In the survey, the recruiters were first asked to provide demographic data: gender, job title, number of employees in a company, sector of activity. The second part of the survey included two copies of the same list of employability skills as did the students' survey but the task was different. The recruiters were asked to evaluate 1) in what extent they believed a student could develop those skills as a volunteer, apart from their studies and work, and 2) to what extent they believed those skills were important in the Estonian labour market for the position of a Junior Specialist. The responses were recorded in the form of a Likert scale (4 = Extensively, 3 = Moderately, 2 = Minimally, 1 = Not at all, 0 = Can't evaluate), where participants were asked to only use the option "Can't evaluate" when no other option was suitable.

2.3. Participants

2.3.1. Sample 1: members of Estonian student organizations

The first sample of the study was made up of 180 members of Estonian student organizations from Tartu and Tallinn. The majority of participants, specifically 76% ($N = 136$) were female and 24% ($N = 44$) were male. The youngest participants were 19 years old and the oldest was 40 years old, with the mean age of the participants 23.18 years, $SD = 3.63$. The students were mostly in the middle of their 2nd (26%, $N = 46$) or 3rd (29%, $N = 53$) year of studies. Of all the participants, 42% ($N = 75$) were not working at the time of the study, 38% ($N = 69$) were working part-time and 20% ($N = 36$) were working full-time. More than half of the participants (55%, $N = 98$) had been a member of a student organization for 1-3 years. The sample represented students from both academic (41%, $N = 73$) and non-academic (59%, $N = 107$) student organizations.

2.3.2. Sample 2: recruiters of Estonian companies

The second sample of the study consisted of 88 recruiters from Estonian companies. Keeping in mind, that not all companies in Estonia are big enough to employ an HR or recruitment professional, all employees who were responsible for recruitment decisions were invited to participate, allowing also smaller companies to be a part of the study. Most of the recruiters were female (90%, $N = 79$) with only 10% being male ($N = 9$). Of all the participants, 82% ($N = 72$) had positions related to HR (e.g. HR specialist, recruitment specialist) and 18% ($N = 16$) were on more general job positions (e.g. CEO, production manager, department head). According to the size of the company the sample was quite well distributed with 31% ($N = 27$) of recruiters working in a

company with up to 50 employees, 32% ($N = 28$) with 51-250 employees and 37% ($N = 33$) with more than 250 employees. The companies represented 21 different sectors of activity in Estonia, the most popular ones being financial and insurance (16%, $N = 14$), service (15%, $N = 13$) and manufacturing (13%, $N = 11$), which implies that the results can be quite well generalized.

2.4. Data analysis

The data analysis was carried out by using both Microsoft Excel 2016 and IBM SPSS Statistics 23.0. Cronbach's α s were calculated for each subscale to explore the internal reliability of the scale. It was followed by a descriptive and correlative analysis of all mean scores. The data was then explored with normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Shapiro-Wilk) as well as with skewness and kurtosis as instructed in a statistics textbook by Field (2013). Afterwards, non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests were used to explore the differences between the mean scores of recruiters, students as well as members of academic and non-academic student organizations separately. Chi-square tests were then used to explore the relationships between the demographic variables and mean scores of the students. Finally, answers to the open-ended questions were manually analysed and coded based on the emerging themes.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Descriptive statistics

The explorative analysis showed high internal reliability of all three scales and each subscale which implies that the survey was successful in measuring the perceived development and importance of the employability skills. All Cronbach's α s, means and standard deviations can be seen in Table 1. A graph displaying the mean scores of all subscales and distributions of the mean scores per subscale can be seen in Appendix B and C, respectively. As the analysis for exploring normality showed that the data is strongly skewed and not with a normal distribution ($p < .05$), a decision was made to use non-parametric methods for during the rest of the analysis.

Table 1. Mean scores, standard deviations and reliability statistics of all subscales

Subscale	Development (S)			Development (R)			Importance (R)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Problem-Solving	3.12	.05	.85	3.34	.06	.82	3.39	.06	.89
Personal Management	3.14	.06	.82	3.53	.05	.80	3.54	.05	.73
Creativity & Innovation	3.01	.05	.75	3.34	.08	.86	3.37	.07	.81
Self-Development	2.77	.06	.80	3.37	.06	.83	3.38	.06	.82
Individual Strengths	2.98	.05	.86	3.33	.05	.79	3.51	.04	.84
Teamwork	3.20	.05	.86	3.21	.06	.86	3.11	.06	.83
Self-Efficacy	2.96	.05	.86	3.22	.07	.90	3.41	.06	.90
All subscales	3.01	.06	.92	3.33	.05	.88	3.38	.05	.90

Notes: S – students' sample; R – recruiters' sample

As can be seen from Table 1, students gave the lowest mean score to Self-Development skills ($M = 2.77$) and the highest to Teamwork skills ($M = 3.20$). Skills that received a score higher than “3” (moderately developed) were Creativity & Innovation ($M = 3.01$), Problem-Solving ($M = 3.12$), Personal Management ($M = 3.14$) and Teamwork ($M = 3.20$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was partly supported as four out of seven subscales were reported as at least moderately developed during the student organization experience.

The recruiters' scores about employability skill development in student organizations were less distributed than students' ones. Personal Management skills were scored the highest ($M = 3.53$), followed by Self-Development ($M = 3.37$), Problem-Solving ($M = 3.34$) and Creativity & Innovation ($M = 3.34$). The lowest mean score was given to Teamwork ($M = 3.21$) and therefore all the skills were evaluated as at least moderately developed in student organizations. Hypothesis

2 was partly supported as Personal Management skills did indeed receive the highest mean score, but contrary to expectations, Teamwork was scored the lowest.

Recruiters' scores about the importance of the employability skills in the labour market showed a slightly different picture. Personal Management skills were once again scored the highest ($M = 3.54$), followed by Individual Strengths ($M = 3.51$) and Self-Efficacy ($M = 3.41$). Quite similar scores were then received by Problem-Solving ($M = 3.39$), Self-Development ($M = 3.38$) and Creativity & Innovation ($M = 3.37$). The lowest score was attributed to Teamwork skills ($M = 3.11$). Hypothesis 3 found partial support as Personal Management skills did indeed receive the highest mean score and Problem-Solving was third in the ranking, but Teamwork was scored the lowest.

3.2. Comparative analysis

A non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the mean scores of each skill subscales between students and recruiters. The analysis showed that when comparing the skill development scores of students and recruiters, there were statistically significant differences for all but one subscale (Table 2).

Table 2. The results of the comparison of the skill development scores between recruiters and students

Subscale	$M_{rank}(R)$	$M_{rank}(S)$	U	z	p	r
Problem-Solving	149.84	126.34	6451.50	-2.34	.019	.14
Personal Management	159.91	121.26	5595.50	-3.90	< .001	.24
Creativity & Innovation	159.01	121.91	5654.50	-3.72	< .001	.23
Self-Development	176.10	114.16	4259.00	-6.16	< .001	.38
Individual Strengths	162.11	120.18	5402.50	-4.18	< .001	.26
Teamwork	132.82	135.32	7772.50	-.25	.804	.02
Self-Efficacy	150.44	124.62	6197.50	-2.58	.010	.16

Notes: R – recruiters' sample; S – students' sample

As can be seen from the results, recruiters reported significantly higher mean scores for Problem-Solving, Personal Management, Creativity & Innovation, Self-Development, Individual Strengths and Self-Efficacy skills. The mean scores for Teamwork skills, however, did not significantly differ between recruiters and students. Although the effect sizes show minimal to moderate effect, the analysis shows differences between the two groups. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported

as recruiters evaluated the extent of employability skills development in student organizations more highly than students themselves.

Additional analysis was also carried out to see, whether there will be different results when students' sample is divided into two: members of academic and non-academic student organizations. The division was made based on the student organizations' main activities.

Table 3 shows the results of the Mann-Whitney U test comparing academic organization members to recruiters.

Table 3. The results of the comparison of the skill development scores between recruiters and members of academic student organizations

Subscale	$M_{rank}(R)$	$M_{rank}(S)$	U	z	p	r
Problem-Solving	90.70	68.35	2288.50	-3.06	.002	.24
Personal Management	91.72	66.78	2180.50	-3.45	.001	.27
Creativity & Innovation	91.57	67.30	2212.00	-3.35	.001	.26
Self-Development	96.72	62.05	1828.50	-4.72	< .001	.37
Individual Strengths	96.09	61.45	1796.50	-4.71	< .001	.37
Teamwork	84.99	76.19	2861.00	-1.20	.232	.09
Self-Efficacy	88.92	68.24	2285.50	-2.85	.004	.22

Notes: R – recruiters' sample; S - members of academic student organizations

The outcome showed similar results as the overall analysis, meaning that recruiters reported significantly higher scores than academic organization members for all skills besides Teamwork.

Table 4 shows the results of the comparison between non-academic organization members and recruiters which showed slightly different results.

Table 4. The results of the comparison of the skill development scores between recruiters and members of non-academic student organizations

Subscale	$M_{rank}(R)$	$M_{rank}(S)$	U	z	p	r
Problem-Solving	103.15	92.91	4163.00	-1.27	.204	.09
Personal Management	112.69	85.92	3415.00	-3.35	.001	.24
Creativity & Innovation	111.43	86.17	3442.50	-3.16	.002	.23
Self-Development	123.88	76.71	2430.50	-5.83	< .001	.42
Individual Strengths	110.52	87.70	3606.00	-2.82	.005	.20
Teamwork	92.34	102.66	4209.50	-1.28	.202	.09
Self-Efficacy	105.01	90.56	3912.00	-1.78	.072	.13

Notes: R – recruiters' sample; S - members of non-academic student organizations

Recruiters reported significantly higher mean scores for Personal Management, Creativity & Innovation, Self-Development, and Individual Strengths skills, with no significant difference for Problem-Solving, Teamwork and Self-Efficacy skills.

When comparing the mean scores of each skill subscales between the members of academic and non-academic student organizations, the results showed a statistically significant difference for three subscales (Table 5).

Table 5. The results of the comparison of the skill development scores between the members of academic and non-academic student organizations

Subscale	$M_{rank}(A)$	$M_{rank}(N)$	U	z	p	r
Problem-Solving	81.02	96.97	3213.50	-2.02	.043	.15
Personal Management	86.92	92.07	3630.00	-.66	.510	.05
Creativity & Innovation	86.90	92.95	3643.00	-.77	.440	.06
Self-Development	90.62	90.42	3896.50	-.03	.979	.00
Individual Strengths	78.87	97.49	3050.50	-2.36	.018	.18
Teamwork	80.66	97.21	3187.00	-2.10	.036	.16
Self-Efficacy	84.46	93.73	3453.00	-1.18	.239	.09

Notes: A – members of academic student organizations; N – members of non-academic student organizations

Non-academic organizations reported significantly higher scores for Problem Solving, Individual Strengths and Teamwork skills. For Personal Management, Creativity & Innovation, Self-Development and Self-Efficacy skills there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Hypothesis 5 therefore found partial support based on the data analysis.

3.3. Relationships between variables

The correlation analysis explored correlations between the mean scores of each skill subscale reported by students and recruiters. As could be expected, the mean scores reported by students had all significant strong positive correlations with each other. The more they perceived having developed one set of skills, the more they perceived the development of others. The highest correlations were between the mean score of Individual Strengths and Teamwork ($r = .73, p < .01$) and Individual Strengths and Self-Efficacy ($r = .73, p < .01$). Other significant positive correlations appeared when comparing recruiters' perceptions about the development of all the employability skill groups to their importance in the labour market. The correlations ranged from low to moderate

with the development and importance of Problem-Solving skills ($r = .45, p < .01$) having the highest correlation among others. Comparing the mean scores perceived by students to the ones of recruiters no statistically significant correlations appeared. More results from the correlation analysis can be seen in Appendices D and E.

To perform the Chi-square tests, new variables were computed by dividing the participants into two groups. Participants with mean scores lower than “3” (Moderately developed) formed Group 1 and participants with mean scores equal to or higher than “3” formed Group 2. As the total mean scores of all skill subscales were located around “3” and all the variables were negatively skewed, this way of grouping the participants for the analysis seemed the most reasonable. As a result of the Chi-square tests, all demographic variables besides the employment status showed statistically significant relationships with at least one skill subscale.

The results showed a significant association between the gender of students and whether they perceived Problem-Solving ($\chi^2(1) = 4.55, p = .03, \phi_c = .16$), Self-Development ($\chi^2(1) = 6.36, p = .01, \phi_c = .19$) or Teamwork ($\chi^2(1) = 5.59, p = .02, \phi_c = .18$) skills to be at least moderately developed. Specifically, female students were more likely to give above average scores to the development of Problem-Solving skills (70%) than male students (52%). The same applied for scores given to Teamwork skills where female students gave significantly higher scores (74%) than did male students (55%). For Self-Development skills male students were more likely to give less than average scores (68%) than female students (46%).

In addition, it turned out that there was a significant association between the length of membership in a student organization and whether they perceived Problem-Solving ($\chi^2(2) = 7.38, p = .03, \phi_c = .20$), Individual Strengths ($\chi^2(2) = 6.28, p = .04, \phi_c = .19$) or Teamwork ($\chi^2(2) = 10.42, p = .01, \phi_c = .24$) skills to be at least moderately developed. Students who had been members for 1-3 years (65%) or more than 3 years (78%) were more likely to report higher scores to the development of Problem-Solving skills than students who had been members for less than a year (49%). The same results came up for Individual Strengths skills for which students with 1-3 (58%) or over 3 years (63%) of student organization experience were more likely to give higher scores than those who had been members for less than a year (36%). Also, students with 1-3 (74%) or over 3 years (76%) of student organization experience gave higher scores to the development of Teamwork skills than students with less than a year of the same experience (46%).

The last significant association appeared between the type of student organization (academic or non-academic) and whether they perceived Innovation & Creativity ($\chi^2(1) = 5.75, p = .02, \phi_c =$

.18) and Teamwork ($\chi^2(1) = 7.39, p = .01, \phi_c = .20$) skills to be at least moderately developed. The members of non-academic student organizations were more likely to report higher scores for Innovation & Creativity skills (63%) than members of academic student organizations (44%). The same result came up for Teamwork skills for which the members of non-academic student organizations were more likely to give higher scores (77%) than the members of academic student organizations (58%).

3.4. Analysis of open-ended questions

The open-ended questions in the end of the survey held an exploratory purpose. The main interest was to gain knowledge on what experiences have most exceeded students' expectations from their time being a member in a student organization. Of all participants, 151 students responded to this question. The answers were thoroughly analysed which resulted in 206 main keywords that could be divided into 24 different themes. While some themes include only one to five similar keywords, the most popular themes included 11-14% of all keywords.

Based on the results it can be said that the experiences and skills that most exceeded students' expectations were the opportunities to gain confidence and self-belief as well as overcome their fears and insecurities. This topic was brought up in 14% of the answers. Leading big projects, being a host at a gala event and doing things they never would have done before led the students to discover new sides of themselves. The relationships and friends gained through being an active member in an organization was the second most popular topic with 12% of the answers bringing it up. As the participants said:

It's unbelievable to finally realise, how many people are out there who share the same mindset as I do.

(Student #18)

I was very positively surprised to see how tolerant and inclusive the people in the organization were.

(Student #29)

I'm a totally different person now than I was when I first started my studies. (Student #60)

The third most popular topic that emerged from the answers was the development of interpersonal skills. About 12% of the answers showed that students appreciated the listening and self-expression skills as well as the ability to understand other people's point of view. Interpersonal skills were followed by three other topics: leadership and delegating experience, teamwork skills as well as problem-solving and organization skills. As the students said:

In the beginning I put more emphasis on how to follow other people's lead, but in the end also got knowledge on how to be a leader myself. (Student #9)

I would have never believed in high school that I could lead a non-profit organization, solve problems that seem out of my reach and develop so much in terms of communication skills. (Student #150)

I have personally seen how small but constant steps and a lot of effort can bring success in the end. (Student #147)

Lastly, the students brought out that the time-management skills together with punctuality and multi-tasking experience as well as constant learning and expanding their horizons had also exceeded their expectations they had had before joining the student organization. A couple participants could not even pick out some specific things, as everything they had experienced had been above expectations. Here are some more of their comments:

I did not believe I could find out so much about myself. The good as well as the bad. Even less, I didn't think I could overcome it all. (Student #91)

Basically everything [has exceeded my expectations]. When I joined, I could not have even imagined how much I had to gain and how much it would change my life. (Student #78)

According to these results, Hypothesis 6 was supported as among the most often emerged topics were also learning, expanding their social network and gaining teamwork and leadership skills. In addition to those, however, students also valued self-confidence, interpersonal, problem-solving and time-management skills highly.

4. DISCUSSION

This study confirmed that student organizations in Estonia provide efficient environments for learning and developing transferable employability skills. Out of all seven, none of the skills were reported as “not at all developed” which means that it is possible to gain useful skills by being a member in some student organization. The fact that students gave the highest scores to Teamwork skills shows that the main emphasis in these organizations is on building effective and supportive teams. It is excellent practice for later careers as it is not possible to get by without having to collaborate with colleagues or outside partners. Most jobs involve a great deal of communication and taking into account other people’s perspectives which is a lot easier with prior teamwork experience.

The same applies to Problem-Solving and Personal Management skills which were also highly rated by students. These results infer that in student organizations it is possible to get practical experience with different aspects of solving problems as well as learn how to effectively manage one’s time to meet goals and deadlines. It may be because as a member the student takes on an organization-specific role which comes with its own responsibilities. May it be connected with marketing, public relations, event management or other, through experimenting and learning it is possible to develop all these employability skills that are later transferable to every job position available. These results of this study support previous research about student organizations facilitating the development of communication, decision-making and teamwork skills (Rubin et al., 2002, p. 449), networking and personal skills (Scott et al., 2016, p. 4; Dugan & Komives, 2010, p. 539) as well as teaching how to effectively deal with stress failure and conflicts (Smith & Chenoweth, 2015, p. 284).

An added value for this study comes from the fact that recruiters also reported that they believe student organizations are a source of valuable employability skills. Even though students’ and recruiters’ reported scores about the development of the skills used in this survey were different, it can still be concluded that both students and recruiters have the same overall opinion. When recruiters perceive a candidate to have good Personal Management, Self-Development and Problem-Solving skills as a result of being an active student, it assures students that their extra-curricular efforts are being acknowledged. Furthermore, the perceived high level of importance of all seven employability skills means that it is worth developing those skills when pursuing towards a successful career and that Estonian recruiters put high value on transferable and/or soft skills similarly to the results of other researchers (Bennett, 2002, p. 465; Billing, 2003, p. 335; The

Gallup Organisation, 2010, p. 12; Lowden et al., p. 12; Pritchard, 2013; AQU Catalunya, 2015, p. 17).

The results of the comparative analysis showed that on average recruiters gave similar or higher scores than students to the development of employability skills in student organizations. It means that recruiters perceive candidates that have been members in said organizations to have as high or even higher levels of these transferable employability skills than the students themselves. Comparison between all students and recruiters showed that they were on the same page about the development of Teamwork skills, but for all other skills recruiters gave higher scores than students. The results were the same when the comparison was done with recruiters and academic organizations separately – there were significantly different scores given for all skills besides Teamwork. But the comparison between recruiters and non-academic organizations showed non-significant results for Teamwork as well as Problem-Solving and Self-Efficacy skills. It can be concluded that recruiters' perceptions about employability skill development in student organizations were more compatible with non-academic organization members than academic ones.

The comparison between academic and non-academic organizations showed that there are differences between the perceived levels of employability skill development depending on which organizations students are a part of. Non-academic organizations seemed to enable stronger development of Problem Solving and Teamwork skills as well as Individual Strengths. For all other skills the results were similar between the two groups showing that students can get a wide array of employability skills from both types of student organizations, but non-academic organizations put more emphasis on activities that among others give them experience with working in teams, problem analysis and solving, accepting constructive criticism, managing resources and stress. Holzweiss et al. (2007, p. 146) reported similar results by saying that academic organizations developed students' career related skills while non-academic ones enhanced more general skills. However, the results of this study show that employability skills are developed in both types of organizations, the difference is more in the emphasis.

This study also found that the more students perceived having developed one set of skills, the more they perceived the development of others. It shows that all transferable employability skills are intertwined and co-existing with each other and it is likely that when one skill is developed, the others are as well to some extent. The highest correlations that the Individual Strengths skills had with Teamwork and Self-Efficacy give reason to believe that the elements of Individual Strengths

skills facilitate the development of teamwork skills and self-efficacy beliefs and *vice versa*. Even though the correlations between the mean scores given by recruiters showed low to moderate results, it still indicates that the more important the recruiters perceive an employability skill to be in the labour market, the more they also think the skill can be developed in a student organization.

The differences that emerged in relation to gender, tenure in the organization and organization type provide additional insight into the topic of employability skill development. As it turned out, female students were more likely to give higher scores to Problem-Solving, Self-Development and Teamwork skill development in student organizations. The difference might be caused by the fact that women tend to take roles or tasks on themselves in these organizations that men usually don't and therefore experience the development in different degrees. The background prior to joining a student organization or different levels of engagement might also affect the results. Analysis of the length of membership in a student organization showed that in order to get the positive effect on skill development, a student needs to be a member for at least a year. Students who had been a member for 1-3 years or even more than three, were more likely to report higher scores for Problem-Solving, Individual Strengths and Teamwork skills. It confirms the fact that every skill requires practice, and practice takes time. Finally, the results also showed that the members of non-academic organizations were more likely to report higher scores for Innovation & Creativity and Teamwork skills than members of academic organizations. The underlying reason might be that in academic organizations main emphasis is put on self-development and gaining experience in their field, but in non-academic organizations students get to be part of various projects which teach them teamwork skills and how to adapt to changes.

The open-ended question part of the survey gave students the opportunity to express their thoughts on which experiences exceeded their expectations prior to joining the organization. These results give reason to believe that student organizations provide an excellent environment for gaining self-confidence, taking on new challenges, forming new relationships as well as developing interpersonal, leadership, teamwork, problem-solving and organization skills. These results support the work of Borges et al. (2017, p. 158) who showed that the opportunities to learn, gain a social network, and develop teamwork and leadership skills exceeded the expectations of students the most. For students without any organizational background joining a student organization can open many doors and opportunities, as their main focus is developing students. Students who already have some experience have also much to gain because skills can always be strengthened and even passing along their own knowledge provides valuable teaching and

leadership opportunities. Regardless of the type of the organization, current members perceive them to be useful stepping stones into the world of work and fortunately, so do recruiters.

4.1. Limitations

Both samples in this study had a good coverage. The students' sample included various student organizations from both Tartu and Tallinn, almost tied between academic and non-academic organizations. The recruiters' sample represented companies from 21 different sectors of activity in Estonia. The variety of both samples adds confidence when generalizing the results to the overall populations. However, there were some limitation to this study that need to be considered when interpreting the results.

First, it is possible that each recruiter was thinking about the candidates or positions that they personally are most frequently operating with when filling in the survey. Even though the description asked them to think about a Junior Specialist position, there is no such thing as an average position. Therefore, the results might be different and more accurate when the same study was carried out in several sectors of activity separately. Then there would be more confidence that the recruiters are answering the questions while thinking about as similar position as possible. Another bias might have been caused by the availability heuristic. For example, when in one company there is currently a big project for hiring Junior Developers and in another company, they are hiring a large amount of Customer Support Specialists, the answers of these recruiters might differ due to their most recent experiences. Secondly, recruiters' own experience with student organizations might have been a factor causing bias. It applies for both their own experience from when they were students as well as experience with recruiting students that have been members of student organizations. In case of much previous contact, the answers might have been biased due to excessively positive or negative personal experiences. Without prior knowledge, the recruiter might have chosen middle or random options because he/she has no experience to base the opinion on.

In addition, students' ability to perceive their own development can also greatly influence their answers. Are students aware of how much they are learning and developing new skills? As the survey used in this study was as self-reporting survey, the students were asked to rely on their own perceptions of their experiences in student organizations while answering. If the students were underestimating the magnitude of how much they have developed through the student organization

experience, they might have given lower scores to each of the employability skills than the recruiters did.

4.2. Suggestions for future research

To get around of this study's limitations and get more specific results, future research could concentrate on two main things. First, opinions of the recruiters could be measured separately among several sectors of activity. Although the employability skills used in his study are transferable and should therefore be applicable in every field and position, the experiences of recruiters might still differ. If it turns out that they are similar, it is still valuable information because it means that the employability skills developed in student organization are appreciated by recruiters in all fields of life.

Second, the following research could aim to measure the employability skills longitudinally instead of merely capturing perceptions of self-development. A sample of fresh university students before and after a year or two of being active in student organizations could give a more thorough understanding of the qualities of said organizations. The measurements could be done via exercises and tasks that require the students to show their interpersonal, teamwork, problem-solving skills etc. Via this method, student organizations would have much to gain by receiving information on which skills they are addressing in their work and what could they add on to provide even better environments.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to determine the transferable employability skills that have been developed in Estonian student organizations and are useful when applying to an entry level job position after graduation. The survey included subscales for transferable employability skills such as Problem-Solving, Personal Management, Creativity & Innovation, Self-Development, Individual Strengths, Teamwork and Self-Efficacy skills. The results showed that all the skills included in this survey had been developed in student organizations with four out of seven of them reported as at least moderately developed. This brought partial support for Hypothesis 1. Hypotheses 2 and 3 were also partly supported by the results as recruiters reported the highest development and importance scores for Personal Management skills, but against expectations Teamwork was scored the lowest. In addition, it was hypothesized that students evaluate the extent of employability skills development in student organizations significantly higher than recruiters. The results showed that the situation is exactly the opposite with recruiters evaluating the extent of development more highly than students themselves and therefore hypothesis 4 was not supported. Hypothesis 5 was partially supported as the results showed that non-academic organizations gave significantly higher scores for Problem Solving, Individual Strengths and Teamwork skills than academic ones.

Additional differences were found through exploring the relationships between variables. The results showed that the higher the students' scores were for one employability skill, the higher they were for others as well. Similar relationship was found between recruiters' development and importance scores of each employability skill. Furthermore, the results showed that when it comes to reporting higher than average scores for skill development, women were more likely to do it than men (for Problem-Solving, Self-Development and Teamwork skills), and non-academic organization members were more likely to do it than academic organization members (for Innovation & Creativity and Teamwork skills). The length of membership also played a role as students who had been members for more than one year were more likely to report higher scores for Problem-Solving, Individual Strengths and Teamwork than students who had been members for less than a year. Finally, hypothesis 6 also found support as similarly to previously done research, students in this study reported learning, expanding their social network and gaining teamwork and leadership skills as exceeding their expectations from the time spent in their organization. Even more, students in this study also placed high value on self-confidence, interpersonal, problem-solving and time-management skills.

This study is the first of its kind in Estonia according to currently available information. It contributes to the existing international literature by expanding the knowledge about the benefits of student organizations specific to Estonia. Based on the results, all stakeholders – students, student organizations, universities, recruiters and companies – have the opportunity to use the information provided here to their advantage and take steps towards using all of the resources that student organizations have to provide. For example, students can have assurance that student organizations are not just for fun, but instead offer wide learning opportunities which become useful straight away as well as in the future. The same goes for recruiters, who can take these results as proof that their perceptions are not wrong and students with organizational background have made efforts to prepare themselves for the labour market. Student organizations could use the results of this study to enhance their recruitment methods by bringing forth the skill development opportunities. If students can see the potential benefits of joining an organization beforehand, they could be more prone to join. The knowledge from this study can also be used in the development process of student organizations as it shows, which transferable skills are wanted in the labour market. Focusing on activities that enhance these skills can be beneficial for the organization as well as its members.

Finally, universities and companies can also benefit from this study. It has been shown that lectures alone do not provide sufficient preparation for the world of work and companies would like students to be better prepared. One option to ease the situation would be that both universities and companies support the activities of student organizations. Universities could start taking time spent in student organizations into consideration when students are completing their curriculums which could give students more time and motivation to participate in self-development. Co-operation between companies and student organizations could give students better projects for skills development and in return companies have a chance to mould the future workers. All in all, student years could become more productive and practical because, after all, one of the aims of higher education should be preparing students for their future careers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Survey items used in the current study

Scale:

4 = Extensively developed

3 = Moderately developed

2 = Minimally developed

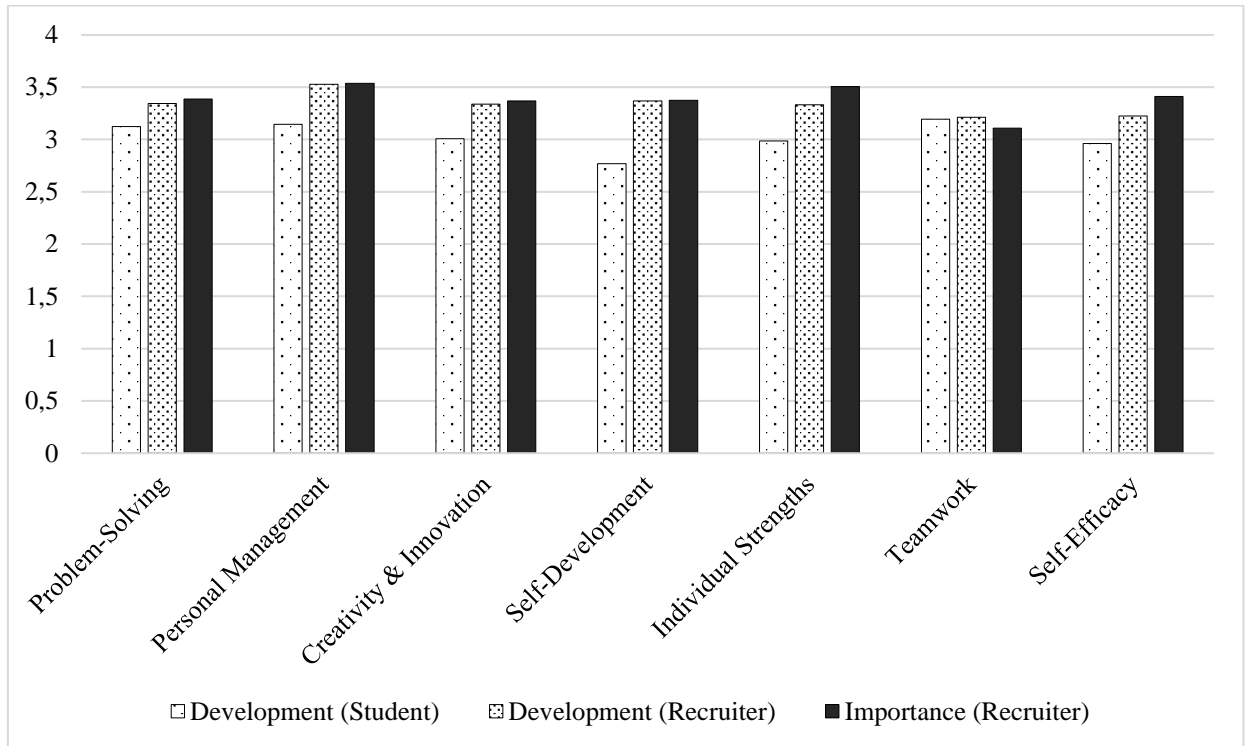
1 = Not at all developed

0 = Can't evaluate

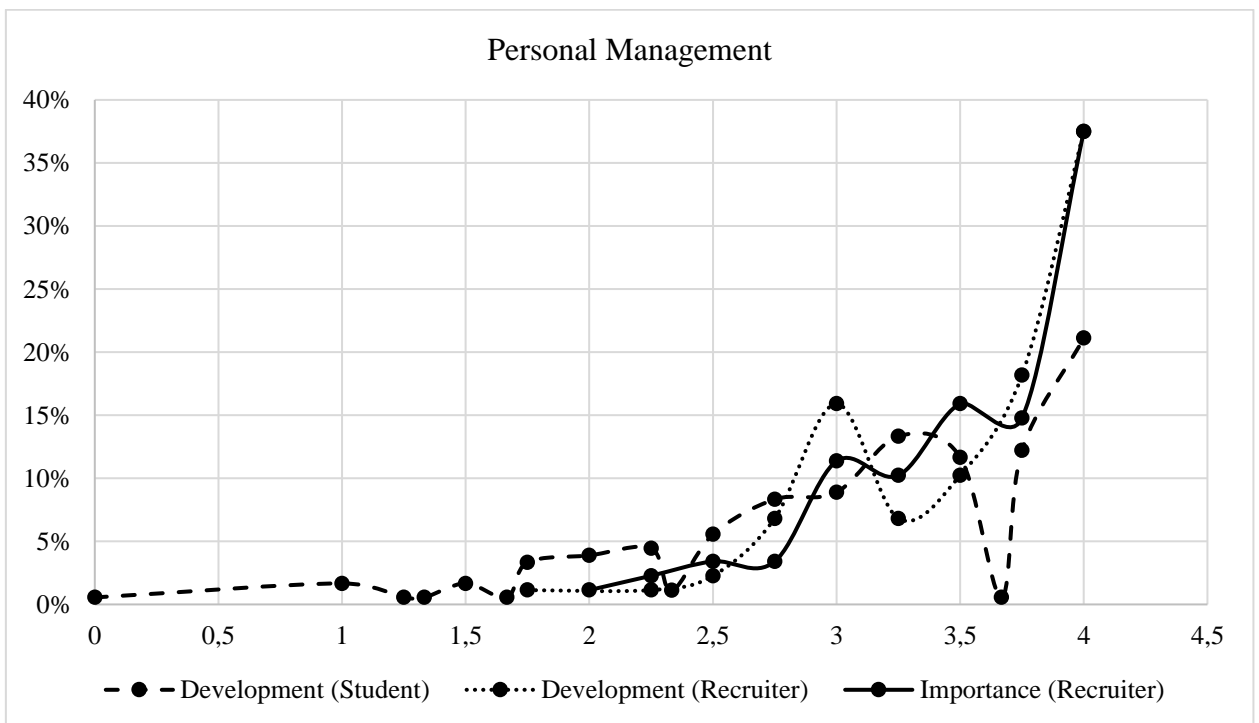
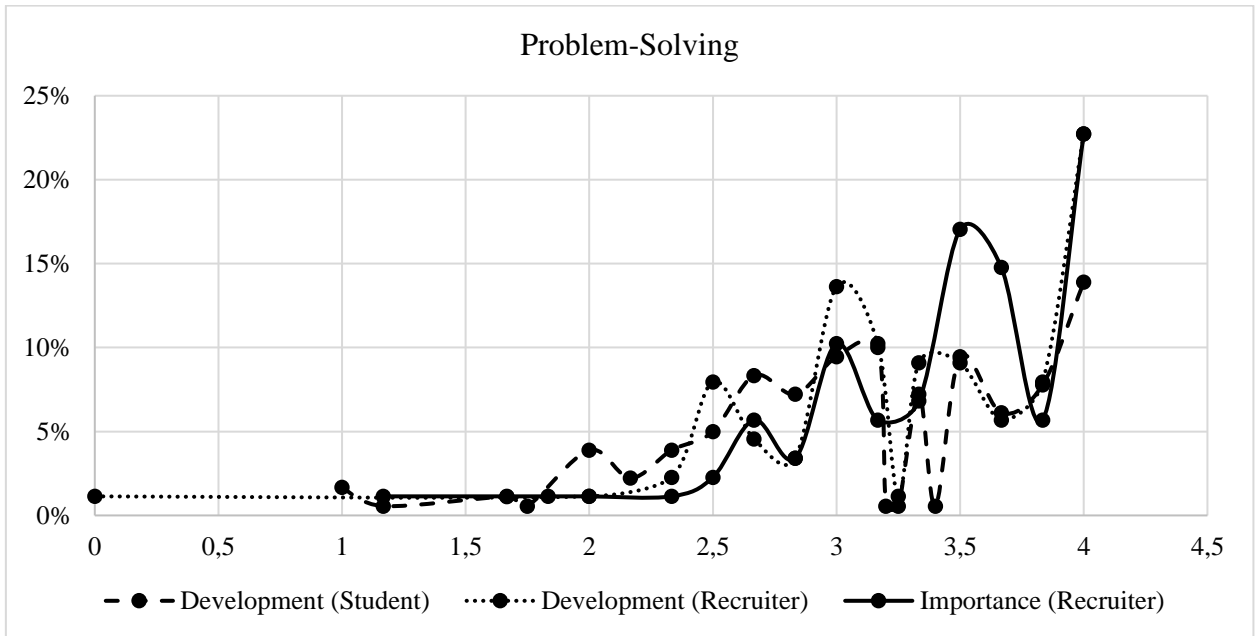
Probleemide lahendamine ja analüütiline mõtlemine / Problem Solving					
1. Probleemide märkamine / Identifying problems	0	1	2	3	4
2. Probleemide olulisuse hindamine / Prioritizing problems	0	1	2	3	4
3. Probleemide lahendamine / Solving problems	0	1	2	3	4
4. Probleemide lahendamine grupi koosseisus / Contributing to group problem solving	0	1	2	3	4
5. Probleemi oluliste osade tuvastamine / Identifying essential components of the problem	0	1	2	3	4
6. Probleemi lahendamiseks vajalike andmete otsimine / Sorting out relevant data to solve the problem	0	1	2	3	4
Enesejuhtimine / Personal Management					
7. Prioriteetide ja eesmärkide seadmine / Setting priorities	0	1	2	3	4
8. Aja eesmärgipärane jaotamine / Allocating time efficiently	0	1	2	3	4
9. Mitme ülesandega samaaegselt tegelemine / Managing/overseeing several tasks at once	0	1	2	3	4
10. Tähtaegadest kinnipidamine / Meeting deadlines	0	1	2	3	4
Loovus, innovatsioon, muutused / Creativity & Innovation					
11. Uudsete lahenduste leidmine probleemide korral / Providing novel solutions to problems	0	1	2	3	4
12. Muutustega kohanemine / Adapting to situations of change	0	1	2	3	4
13. Muudatuste algatamine paremate tulemuste nimel / Initiating change to enhance productivity	0	1	2	3	4
Enesearendamine / Self-Development					
14. Erialaste uuendustega kursis olemine / Keeping up-to-date on developments in the field	0	1	2	3	4
15. Erialaväliste uute teadmiste omandamine / Gaining new knowledge in areas outside the immediate job	0	1	2	3	4

16. Igapäevasest elust uute teadmiste omandamine / Gaining new knowledge from everyday experiences	0	1	2	3	4
17. Uute informatsioonikanalite kasutamine / Using new sources of information	0	1	2	3	4
18. Erinevatest allikatest pärit informatsiooni otsimine ja analüüsimine / Searching and analyzing information from different sources	0	1	2	3	4
Individuaalsed tugevused / Individual Strengths					
19. Energilisuse säilitamine ja looderdamisest hoidumine / Maintaining a high energy level	0	1	2	3	4
20. Energia mõistlik jaotamine ja stressist hoidumine / Functioning at an optimal level of performance	0	1	2	3	4
21. Konstruktiiivse kriitika vastu võtmine / Responding positively to constructive criticism	0	1	2	3	4
22. Positiivse hoiaku säilitamine / Maintaining a positive attitude	0	1	2	3	4
23. Stressirohketes olukordades edukalt hakkama saamine / Functioning well in stressful situations	0	1	2	3	4
24. Iseseisvalt tegutsemine / Ability to work independently	0	1	2	3	4
25. Enesekindlus / Self-confidence	0	1	2	3	4
26. Selgelt ja arusaadavalt enese väljendamine / Being clear in expressing oneself	0	1	2	3	4
Meeskonnatöö / Teamwork					
27. Meeskonna juhtimine / Managing a team	0	1	2	3	4
28. Koosolekute juhtimine / Running meetings	0	1	2	3	4
29. Delegeerimine / Delegating	0	1	2	3	4
30. Meeskonnaliikmeks olemine / Working as part of a team	0	1	2	3	4
31. Teiste inimeste vaatenurkadega arvestamine / Considering others' perspectives	0	1	2	3	4
32. Teiste inimeste kuulamine / Listening to others	0	1	2	3	4
33. Projekti ellu viimine / Project management	0	1	2	3	4
Enesetõhusus / Self-Efficacy					
34. Usk oma eesmärkidesse ja nende saavutamise võimesse / Belief in sticking to my aims and accomplishing my goals	0	1	2	3	4
35. Usk oma eesmärkide saavutamisse hoolimata teiste vastuseisust / Belief in finding the means and ways, even if someone opposes me	0	1	2	3	4
36. Usk ootamatute sündmustega hakkama saamisesse / Belief in handling unforeseen situations	0	1	2	3	4
37. Usk rahu säilitamise võimesse raskete probleemide ilmnemisel / Belief in remaining calm when facing difficulties	0	1	2	3	4
38. Usk igasuguste probleemidega toimetulekusse / Belief in handling everything that comes my way	0	1	2	3	4

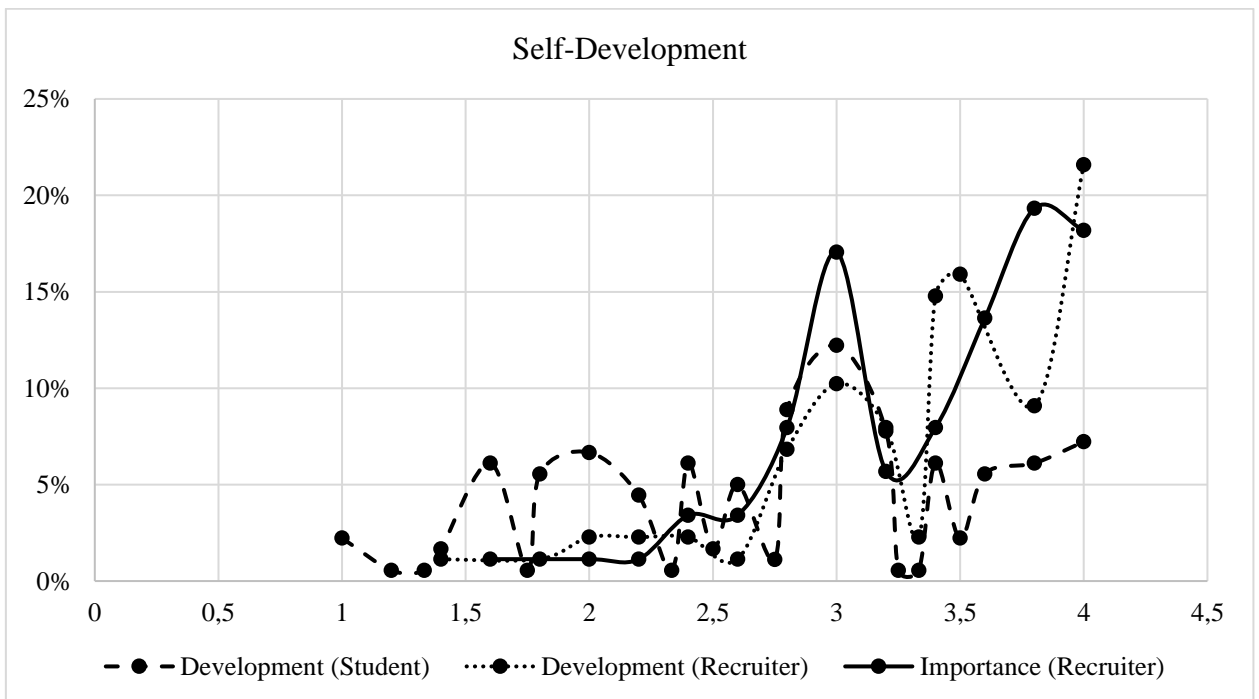
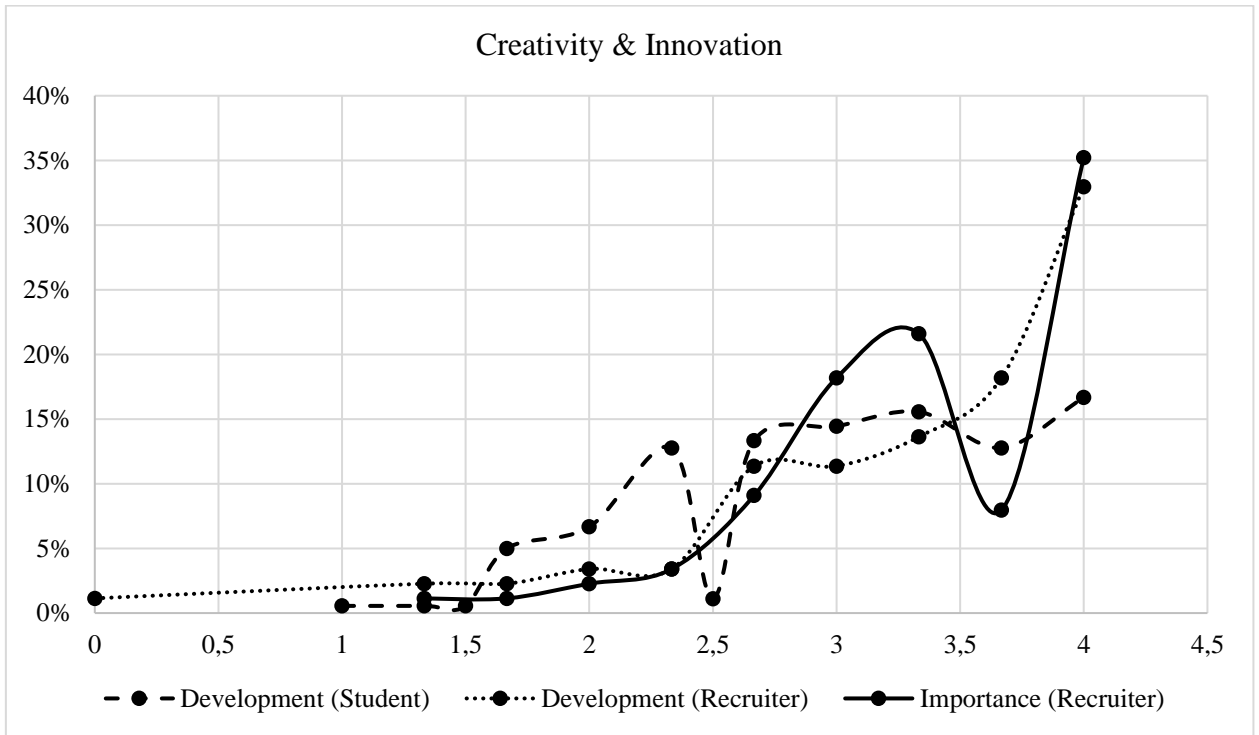
Appendix B. Overview of the mean scores for each subscale



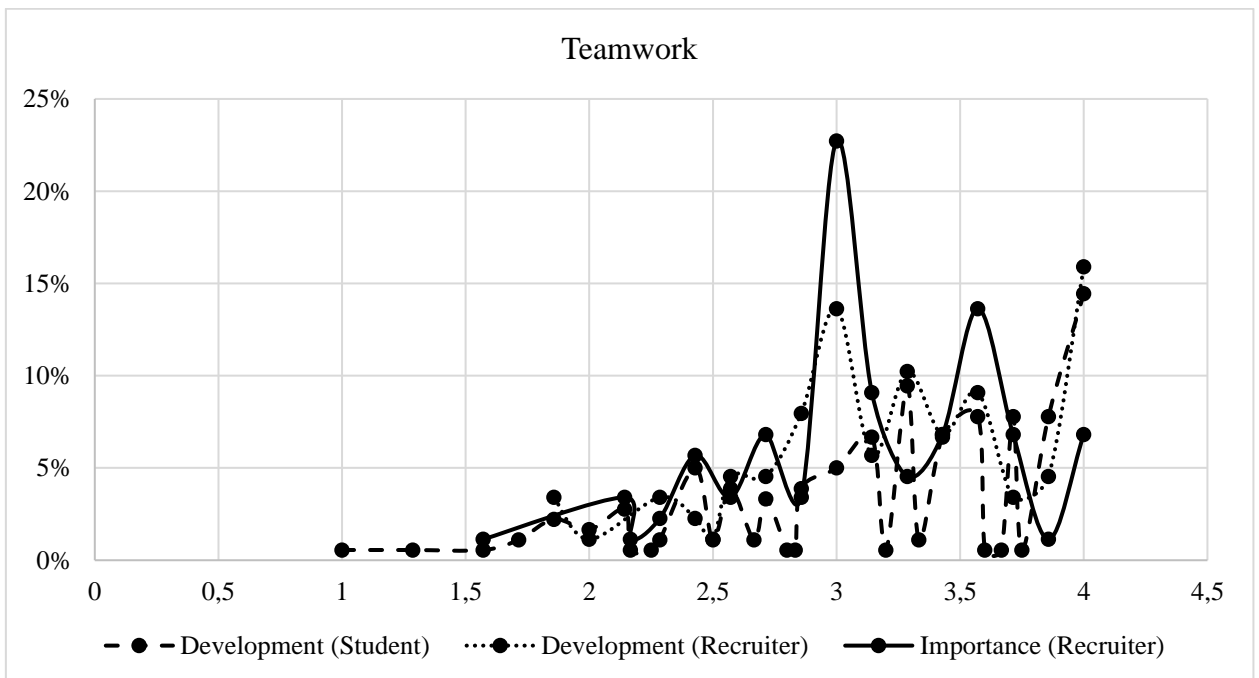
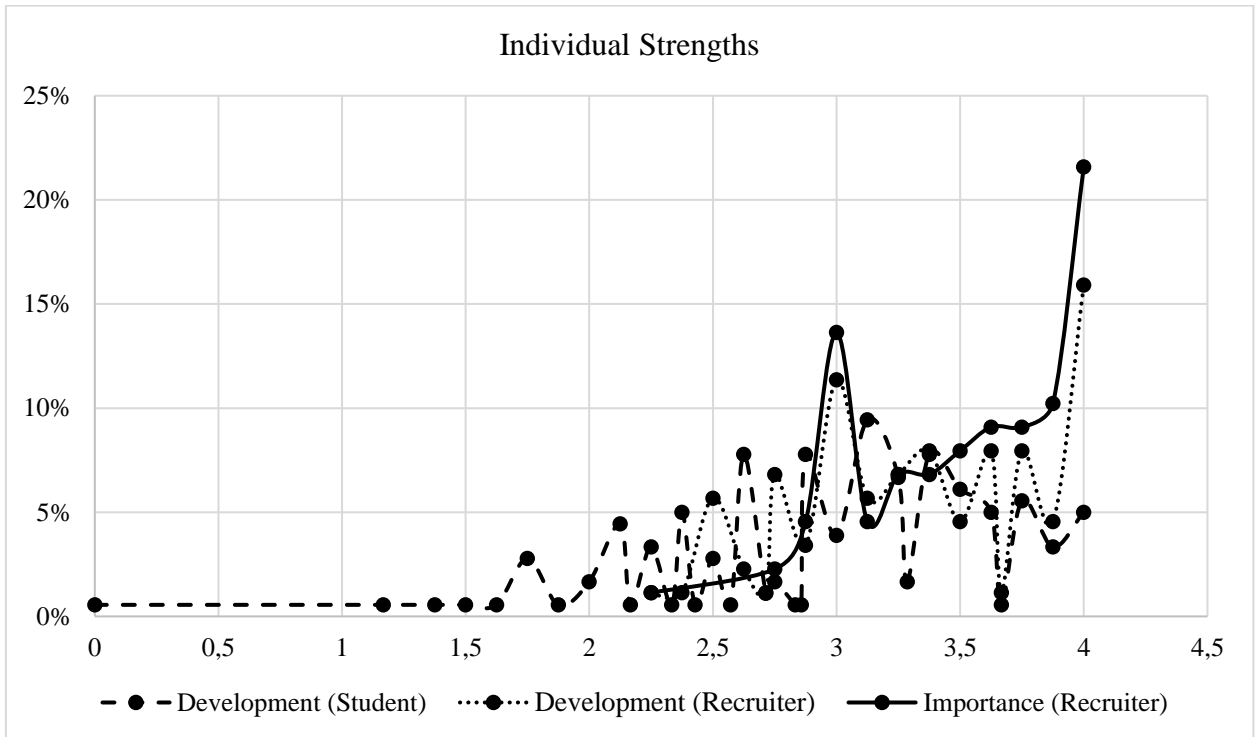
Appendix C. Distributions of the mean scores for each subscale



Appendix C continued



Appendix C continued



Appendix C continued



Appendix D. Correlations between the mean scores of all subscales as reported by students

Subscale	PS	PM	CI	SD	IS	TW	SE
Problem-Solving	—						
Personal Management	.63**	—					
Creativity & Innovation	.66**	.51**	—				
Self-Development	.55**	.45**	.64**	—			
Individual Strengths	.68**	.67**	.64**	.57**	—		
Teamwork	.67**	.55**	.61**	.49**	.73**	—	
Self-Efficacy	.68**	.57**	.68**	.60**	.73**	.69**	—

Notes: ** $p < .01$

Appendix E. Correlations between the mean scores of all subscales as reported by recruiters

	PS _{Dev}	PM _{Dev}	CI _{Dev}	SD _{Dev}	IS _{Dev}	TW _{Dev}	SE _{Dev}	PS _{Imp}	PM _{Imp}	CI _{Imp}	SD _{Imp}	IS _{Imp}	TW _{Imp}	SE _{Imp}
PS _{Dev}	—													
PM _{Dev}	.49**	—												
CI _{Dev}	.56**	.40**	—											
SD _{Dev}	.47**	.42**	.50**	—										
IS _{Dev}	.57**	.55**	.51**	.40**	—									
TW _{Dev}	.66**	.57**	.51**	.34**	.66**	—								
SE _{Dev}	.62**	.39**	.52**	.37**	.70**	.65**	—							
PS _{Imp}	.45**	.32**	.37**	.36**	.25*	.32**	.21	—						
PM _{Imp}	.37**	.33**	.23*	.23*	.42**	.26*	.30**	.54**	—					
CI _{Imp}	.37**	.11	.23*	.31**	.40**	.19	.32**	.56**	.64**	—				
SD _{Imp}	.16	.13	.28**	.35**	.37**	.09	.19	.47**	.47**	.50**	—			
IS _{Imp}	.46**	.30**	.39**	.45**	.43**	.26*	.36**	.67**	.67**	.68**	.43**	—		
TW _{Imp}	.42**	.20	.31**	.34**	.30**	.36**	.29**	.66**	.50**	.61**	.39**	.68**	—	
SE _{Imp}	.43**	.15	.36**	.39**	.39**	.28**	.38**	.55**	.53**	.66**	.44**	.78**	.68**	—

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; Dev – scores about development in a student organization, Imp – scores about importance in the labour market

