

TRAINING DEMANDS AND COMMITMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY-BUSINESS BINOMIAL: A MODEL OF STRATEGIC SYNCHRONIZATION AT THE UPV

M^a Elena Caballero Romero¹, Ester Sanchis Sanchis¹, & Elena de la Poza Plaza²

¹*Servicio Integrado de Empleo (SIE), Universitat Politècnica de València, Valencia (Spain)*

²*Centro de Ingeniería Económica (INECO), Universitat Politècnica de Valencia (Spain)*

Abstract

Training Demands and Commitment in the University-Business Binomial: The rapid evolution of the socio-economic environment requires the University to maintain a direct and constant channel of communication with the productive fabric. Under this premise, the Integrated Employment Service of the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV) conducted a pilot test in 2023 through a survey, "Training Needs of Employers," administered to companies participating in the UPV "Foro Empleo" Job Fair. The most significant finding of this initial analysis was the identification of organizational commitment not only as an added value but also as a strategic and priority transversal competence for today's organizations. With the results obtained, a framework of interconnected studies has been structured for the period 2024-2026 that includes: a) Business Perspective: Update of the training needs survey at Foro Empleo; b) Student Perspective: Analysis of expectations of Bachelor's and Master's students before their insertion; c) Graduates' Perspective: Follow-up of professionals with two and four years of experience to know what factors determine their permanence and commitment in an organization. The objective of this initiative is to identify the training and soft skills that companies currently demand. The post-pandemic work landscape – marked by teleworking, flexibility, and corporate responsibility – has transformed what professionals expect from their employers. Therefore, it is imperative that the University acts as a bridge, translating these needs into an improvement in degrees. Knowing what specific knowledge is missing and what values are most valued will allow the university to adapt its curricula to a highly changing environment, ensuring that graduates not only possess the technical excellence, but also the attitudes necessary to integrate successfully. To validate and deepen these findings, focus groups will be organized with collaborating companies and graduates. These sessions will have a dual purpose: 1 - Transfer knowledge to the company: Present organizations with the demands of the new generations so that they can improve their ability to attract and retain talent; 2 - Feedback for the University: Obtain first-hand information on deficiencies or strengths in training, allowing a curricular update based on real evidence from the market. In short, this project seeks to meet the expectations of all the entities involved. By understanding what companies need and what employees are looking for to engage in, the University can optimize its educational strategy. The result is a mutual benefit: more competitive companies with committed talent and an academic institution that responds with agility to the challenges of today's society.

Keywords: *Employability, skills gap, higher education, organizational commitment, labor market trends.*

1. Organizational commitment: Evolution and theoretical frameworks

1.1. Introduction

Organizational commitment can be understood as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a given organization. Over the last few decades, this construct has evolved from a one-dimensional view based mainly on loyalty to multidimensional models that integrate psychological, economic, and ethical components. In line with these approaches, commitment is no longer seen as a state, but as a set of bonds that explain whether an employee remains in an organization because they want to, because they feel they ought to, or because they need to. This differentiation is especially relevant for the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), as post-pandemic labour markets highlight that highly qualified talent tends to prioritize organizations that nurture affective commitment through culture and values, rather than relying solely on contractual stability (Becker, 1960; Mowday et al., 1979; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Cascio, 2003; Pfeffer, 1998; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

At the same time, the rapid transformation of the socio-economic environment – driven by accelerated digitalisation, hybrid work models, and shortages of qualified talent – requires universities to maintain a direct and continuous communication channel with the productive fabric. Within the Triple Helix framework, the alignment between academic training, business needs, and public policy becomes a key condition for updating core competencies. In this context, the Integrated Employment Service of the UPV launched in 2023 an analysis of employers’ training needs at the consolidated job Fair “Foro Empleo”, identifying organizational commitment not only as an added value, but as a strategic transversal competence for attracting and retaining talent (Stefán, 2024; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Suleman, 2018).

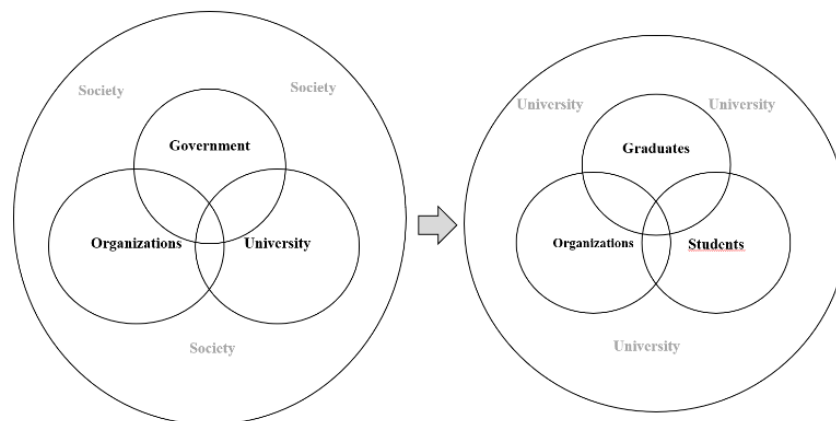
Figure 1. Connecting University Training, Talent Expectations and Organizational Engagement. Source: Own (2026).



1.2. Research design and objectives

This study applies a longitudinal design (2024–2026) that tracks talent development over time, rather than single-moment snapshots (cross-sectional studies). This approach examines the complete talent life cycle—from final-year students through graduates with 2–4 years of professional experience—through the Triple Helix model of university-industry-government collaboration (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000).

Figure 2. Model of the Triple Helix, categorization of its agents and their role with society. Source: Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff (2000).



Data triangulation from three sources (business sector, students, graduates) enables identification of both initial skills gaps and organizational commitment evolution as professionals adapt to post-pandemic work environments (Cascio, 2003).

Key benefits of the longitudinal approach: (i) it tracks skills gap changes across 3 years; (ii) it follows up the same graduates from T2 (2 years) to T4 (4 years), (iii) and it captures commitment development, beyond static measurements.

The central objective is to develop a strategic synchronization model aligning UPV's training offerings with actual labour market demands. Specific aims include: 1) identifying priority technical and transversal skills for talent retention; 2) assessing affective, normative, and continuous commitment levels in graduates (Meyer & Allen, 1991); 3) analysing Bachelor's and Master's students' expectations against organizational realities; and 4) transferring evidence-based insights to degree commissions for curriculum updates (Allen & De Weert, 2007).

Table 1. Technical Specifications and Scope of the Research Design. Source: Own (2026).

Dimension	Design Description
Type of Study	Longitudinal, descriptive-correlational (Framework 2024-2026).
Theoretical Approach	Triple Helix Model and Talent Life Cycle. Organizational Commitment based on the Allen and Meyer Model
Triangulation Sources	Business Fabric, Students and Graduates (2 and 4 years of experience).
Key Variables	<i>Skills gap</i> , Expectations and Engagement (Affective, Normative and Continuous)
Purpose	Strategic university-business alignment to update curricula with labour market evidence

1.3. Methods

To achieve the proposed objectives, the study uses a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative phase is based on structured surveys: a “Training Needs of Employers” survey conducted at “Foro de Empleo” and validated scales for measuring commitment in graduates (T2 and T4) and expectations in students. These instruments provide standardized indicators of skills requirements, perceived gaps, and levels of organizational commitment.

The qualitative phase is implemented through focus groups with firms’ Human Resources managers and UPV graduates. By utilizing this approach, we can better understand the dimensions proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991), exploring how teleworking, flexible hours, and development opportunities function as drivers of affective commitment. Data analysis involves descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, aimed at identifying correlations between the type of training received, perceived skills gaps and indicators of professional stability (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Qualitative data are analysed thematically to capture narratives around expectations, perceived fit and commitment.

1.4. Main findings

1.4.1. Top recruitment challenges facing employers in 2024-2026. The research identifies several factors that hinder talent recruitment, with notable changes between the two years analysed. In 2024, 65.26% of companies pointed out a lack of necessary technical skills as the main obstacle to hiring. In 2025, this factor was reformulated as “shortage of graduates with necessary skills”, and it was reported by 73.63% of organizations, highlighting a growing skills gap.

The “*Lack of commitment to the organization*” appears as a persistent barrier. In 2024, it represented a difficulty for 32% of employers, while in 2025 it was reported by 26% of organizations, remaining the second most important concern after technical skills. Other relevant factors include logistics and mobility, cited by 30.53% of companies in 2024 and 25.27% in 2025 under a revised categorization, and working conditions. Salary was mentioned as a barrier by 25.26% of employers in 2024; in 2025, an adjusted metric shows 13.19% reporting salary-related difficulties.

1.4.2. Perception of commitment in UPV talent. A central aspect of the study is the assessment of the degree of commitment demonstrated by UPV graduates once integrated into organizations, using a 0–10 scale. In 2024, employers assigned an average score of 6.84/10 to the commitment shown by graduates. In 2025, a slight decline was observed, with an average score of 6.73/10.

This leads to what the project describes as the “paradox of talent”: although graduates receive a relatively high rating for commitment (close to 7), lack of commitment remains among the top two reasons for hiring difficulties. This suggests that companies may be seeking an “ideal” or intensified form of commitment that does not always align with current graduates’ expectations regarding flexibility and work–life balance. At the same time, the increase from 65% to 73% in concern about technical skills reinforces the need for a Strategic Synchronization Model, where technical training acts as the first filter and commitment becomes the key factor for long-term retention.

1.4.3. Expectations, work–life balance and stability. Strategic synchronization requires not only understanding business demand but also student expectations. The analysis reveals a systematic gap between the importance students assign to certain work-related factors and their perceived probability of achieving them in the labour market. Students rate “*having time for leisure activities/flexibility*” and “*ease of reconciling work and family life*” with an importance close to 4.5 out of 5. However, their expectations that these conditions will actually be met drop to around 3 out of 5.

This mismatch creates a potential focus of dissatisfaction that directly affects future affective commitment. Even when technical fit is adequate, the perception that work–life balance and flexibility are unlikely to be realized can weaken emotional attachment to organizations and increase turnover intentions.

1.4.4. The role of leadership in affective engagement. Analysis of affective commitment shows a systematic gap between individuals in leadership positions and those who are not. Leaders display higher scores on all items related to affective commitment. Pride in belonging to the organization (“*I enjoy talking about my organization...*”) is rated 3.70 by leaders compared to 3.42 by non-leaders. This pattern is repeated in the perception of “family” (3.52 vs 3.12) and in emotional involvement with organizational problems (3.33 vs 2.69).

These results suggest that responsibility and participation in decision-making are key elements of the emotional bond with the organization. Leadership roles, autonomy and influence seem to enhance identification with organizational goals and values, reinforcing affective commitment.

1.5. Discussion

The findings from the job fair “Foro Empleo” 2024-2026 pilot phase suggest a transformation in the hierarchy of skills demanded by the productive fabric. Organizational commitment is redefined as a strategic competency, in line with perspectives that link organizational effectiveness to the degree of identification of members with its goals (Mowday et al., 1979). When analysed through Meyer and Allen’s (1991) three-component model, the data indicate a shift in business interest: organizations are less focused on employees tied to the organization by the cost of leaving (continuous commitment) and more interested in professionals with strong affective commitment, who remain because they share values and feel part of the organization (Becker, 1960; O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

At the same time, the paradox between relatively high commitment ratings and the persistence of “lack of commitment” as a major hiring difficulty points to misaligned expectations between organizations and new generations of talent. Employers may implicitly demand high levels of availability, stability, and flexibility that conflict with graduates’ desire for balance, autonomy, and mobility. This tension calls for a redefinition of sustainable commitment in hybrid and dynamic work contexts, and highlights the need for universities to create spaces where students can explore realistic scenarios of engagement and negotiate expectations with employers.

1.6. Conclusions

Transitioning toward an educational model based on real evidence from the labour market is imperative to guarantee the excellence and social relevance of the UPV. The preliminary conclusions of this project indicate that the university should act as a proactive agent that not only provides solid technical training but also promotes attitudes aligned with affective commitment, moving beyond transactional approaches based on continuance commitment (Becker, 1960).

Understanding which values and behaviours are most appreciated by organizations will enable curricula to adapt to a rapidly changing environment, ensuring that graduates develop the resilience and skills needed to integrate successfully. Close collaboration in the university–industry relationship emerges as the most effective tool for attracting and retaining qualified talent, transforming employer feedback into a driver of pedagogical innovation and social responsibility (Pfeffer, 1998; Suleman, 2018).

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