EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN MANAGEMENT STUDENTS – AN INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Employability skills are those basic skills necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on a job. These are the skills, attitudes and actions that enable workers to get along with their fellow workers and supervisors and to make sound, critical decisions. Unlike occupational or technical skills, employability skills are generic in nature rather than job specific and cut across all industry types, business sizes, and job levels from the entry-level worker to the senior-most position.

Management education today has to address a wide variety of critical issues, one of survival, intense competition, serving the needs of stakeholders, delivering industry employable graduates and in the process of doing all this develop brand equity. While all of these issues are critical and important enough to generate a discussion, research and elaboration at length, this paper will address the issue of employability skills needed by management students from an industry perspective which has been drawn from a survey of 48 corporate interviews, representing HR managers, marketing managers who are involved in recruitment process and later appraisal of the selected candidates also. The paper has drawn from their experiences and highlights the skill sets needed by management students in the current market scenario which shall be in the author's view even applicable in the next decade to come. 10 major skill areas have been identified and in them the important ones that need to be addressed are effective communication both oral and written, problem identification and problem solving, time management, numerical competency, data analysis, flexibility and adaptability.

KEYWORDS: Employability skill, management education, industry expectations.

INTRODUCTION

Employability Skills are skills that apply across a variety of jobs and life contexts. They are sometimes referred to as key skills, core skills, life skills, essential skills, key competencies, necessary skills, and transferable skills. Industry's preferred term is Employability Skills.
Employability Skills can also be defined as "skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.

When we talk of management students in the Indian perspective, there is a paradox, unlike the west wherein majority of students undergoing a management degree qualification have work experience, in a country like India, a management degree is considered a passport to seek a good job. This raises the criticality of employability skill development among management students in the Indian context. Developing these skills among students who usually have no hands on experience, no idea of reality what the industry wants and still desire the best. Here we are talking of management students who are from the business schools other than the Indian Institute of Management and related management schools of this category. 3500 business schools with an average of 200 students enrolled ready to face the industry for seeking employment lays a big pressure in the preparation of these as a GDP indicator and economic development initiative to make them employable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employability skills cover the following areas:

- Developing key transferable skills
- Planning and personal development skills
- Career planning and gaining employment
- Successfully contributing to the role once acquired
- Continuing to develop within a career throughout their working lifetime

From the perspective of employers, ‘employability’ often seems to refer to ‘work-readiness’, that is, possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable new graduates to make productive contributions to organisational objectives soon after commencing employment. Indeed, studies of employer demand for graduates in engineering and science disciplines have found that appropriate work experience and evidence of commercial understanding rank highly as selection criteria because of commercial pressures to seek graduates who will not require long ‘learning curves’ when they start employment (Mason, 1998, 1999).

However, in an extended discussion of the employability concept, Hillage and Pollard (1998:11) put more emphasis on individuals possessing the capability ‘to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment’. In a similar vein Harvey and Morey (2003) highlight the skills which graduates need in order to manage their own careers and those which will enable them to continue learning throughout their working lives.

These broader conceptions of employability partly reflect the influence of Coppers (1998) report which identified a set of key skills which were ‘relevant throughout life, not simply in
employment’ These skills are Communication, Numeracy, IT and Learning how to learn at a higher level and recommended that provision of such skills should become a central aim for higher education. Within HE the generic skills needed to enhance graduate employability (whether defined in terms of immediate work-readiness or longer-term career prospects) are now typically seen as including the skills emphasised by Dearing and also Literacy, Problem-solving skills and Team-working skills. In addition, the employability skills agenda is commonly defined to include ‘Understanding of the world of work’ which typically refers to knowledge about the ways in which organisations work, what their objectives are and how people in those organisations do their jobs (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998).

University responses to this agenda typically include modifications to existing course content (sometimes in response to employer suggestions), the introduction of new courses and teaching methods and expanded provision of opportunities for work experience – all intended to enhance the development of employability skills and/or ensure that the acquisition of such skills is made more explicit. In some cases university departments have sought to ‘embed’ the desired skills within courses; in other departments students are offered ‘stand-alone’ skills courses which are effectively ‘bolted on’ to traditional academic programmes. In fact many university departments now use a mix of embedded and stand-alone teaching methods in their efforts to develop employability skills.

METHODOLOGY

The work in this paper is descriptive in nature with data collected from 48 corporate managers who undertake recruitment process, interviewing management students enrolled in the MBA program through a structured interview containing both open ended and close ended questions. 100 corporate managers were targeted for the study while only 48 responded to spare their time for the interview positively to agree to participate in this dialogue giving a response rate of 48%. A convenience sampling was used for the study.

RESULTS

The gender respondents from the industry who participated in this survey was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INDUSTRY SECTORS: The respondents from various industry sectors have been represented below with their percentage representation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTOR</th>
<th>% age RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TELECOM</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANKING</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOSPITALITY</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REAL ESTATE</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSURANCE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

The skill sets identified by the respondents in the order of importance are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.NO.</th>
<th>SKILLS IDENTIFIED</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:</strong> The ability to explain what is meant in a clear</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>concise way through written and spoken means. The ability to listen to people and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>act upon key instructions and information.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>PROBLEM SOLVING:</strong> The ability to identify key issues, implications and generate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>solutions. The ability to process data, formulate a vision and resolution. To be</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>able to apply knowledge through critical thinking and creativity within a framework</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of bounded rationality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>NUMERACY:</strong> To be able to use data and mathematics to support evidence and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>demonstrate a point. To understand and apply mathematical concepts and reasoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>SELF MOTIVATION:</strong> The possession of a strong personal drive where you do not</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wait to be told what to do. The possession of own ideas and innovative thinking and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the ability to transform this thinking into reality through action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS:</strong> The ability to be organised and methodical in meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>priorities, deadlines and targets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>LEADERSHIP &amp; MANAGEMENT:</strong> The ability to manage and lead teams with a strong</td>
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<td></td>
<td>focus on organisational goals, perform under pressure and manage a crisis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>FLEXIBILITY &amp; ADAPTABILITY:</strong> The ability to adjust to ever changing business</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>demands, adjusting in a cross cultural work force, adapting to unforeseen situations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>effectively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TEAM WORKING: the ability to work with people in a group from different disciplines, backgrounds, expertise to accomplish a task or common goal with or without minor supervision.

NEGOTIATION SKILLS: the ability to express your own requirements in an unemotional and clear fashion to achieve a win-win outcome whilst taking on board other people.

DIVERSITY/SENSITIVITY: The ability to build cultural sensitivity and share a common platform with people in a multicultural environment without hurting the feelings, emotions and sentiments of others. Being Geocentric rather than ethnocentric.

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

The personal attributes that the industry looks for in management students as being desirable are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.NO.</th>
<th>PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Professional but friendly behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Good time keeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Excellent communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Personal grooming and etiquette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Good time keeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Adaptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Resourceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Self Confidence (not over confidence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thinking and reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Commercial awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Self motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Integrity, trustworthiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Proactive nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Negotiation skill</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Goal orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Willingness to Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Creativity &amp; innovativeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Social concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Conflict management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MANAGEMENT TASKS THAT AID EMPLOYABILITY SKILL DEVELOPMENT

WRITING SKILLS

- Writing up a project or dissertation
- Writing for the student newspaper
- Writing a report for a course placement
- Essays, dissertations, project reports
- Secretary of student society
- Publicity materials for a charity
- Letter to raise sponsorship for an event

SPEAKING SKILLS

- Joining a campus drama group.
- Public speaking or debating
- Seminars
- Working in a summer/ vacation job
- Market research, telesales
- Showing new entrants/guests around the campus
- Course presentations
- Student presenter for various events
ADAPTABILITY SKILLS

- Year abroad or independent travel abroad
- Working part-time while studying
- Changing courses
- Combining study with family
- Shift work or working at short notice

OPERATING SKILLS

- Working on a group project
- Rag fund-raising
- Team sports
- Working as a clerical assistant in a busy office
- Group project
- Team sports
- Playing in an orchestra or band

ANALYSING SKILLS

- Preparing Student Election Statistics
- Analysing data from an experiment
- Vacation job as a market research interviewer
- Voluntary work for a publisher
- Creative solutions to coursework problems
- Chess, computing, role playing

INITIATIVE TAKING SKILL

- Suggesting changes to a course when a student representative
- Getting relevant work experience/project work/sponsorship
- Starting your own business: selling on Ebay
- Starting a new society
- Creating a website/blog
- Coping with a sudden crisis
- Stretching your loan to go further

**PLANNING AND ORGANISING SKILLS**

- Organising your revision schedule
- Planning a trip round Europe with friends
- Stage manager for a play
- Representative for an event
- Managing a course project
- Organising sporting events
- Organising charity events
- Students' union activities

**LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

- Leading a group project
- Chairing a student society
- Captaining a sports team
- Being a play scheme helper
- Guide leader
- Air training corps
- Mentor in school to juniors

**NEGOTIATING SKILLS**

- Negotiating the rent with your landlord
Negotiating the late handing in of essays
- Staff-student liaison committee
- Resolving an argument between friends

**PERSUADING SKILLS**
- Arguing your case in a seminar
- Getting club members to turn up for events!
- Fund-raising for a local charity
- Telesales job in the vacation

**NETWORKING SKILLS**
- Careers fairs
- Speculative applications for work

**INVESTIGATING SKILLS**
- Researching for coursework in the library
- Student journalism
- Finding out about different careers through work shadowing
- Market research interviewer in a vac. job
- Building your own computer

**LISTENING SKILLS**
- In lectures!
- Helping the student telephone counselling service
- Working as a waiter or barmaid

**LEARNING NEW SKILLS**
- Learning a new language
- Taking up a new sport
- Improving your computing skills
- First aid
- Music/dance like jazz/Salsa

**MAKING SKILLS**

- Deciding which modules to take next year
- College Welfare Representative
- Buying an expensive item (car or computer)
- Targeting appropriate customers in a sales job

**NUMERACY SKILLS**

- Working in a bank or managing your own savings account/investment portfolio
- Budgeting your expenses over the year
- Interpreting a statistical table for your course
- Treasurer of committee

**COMMERCIAL AWARENESS**

- Current affairs interest
- Taking business options on a course
- Organising events
- Reading financial pages of a newspaper

A rigorous and continuous personality development program should encourage the students to ask themselves the following questions:

- How well am I doing?
- What are my strengths?
- What are my goals?
- What could I do better?
- What academic support or skills do I need?
• What skills do I need to gain or develop further?

• What extra-curricular activities will help me towards my career goals?

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT EDUCATORS

Management teachers need to address these skill development orientation while teachign their respective courses, giving assignments to students so that the entire learning process creates the skill development. It is important to realise that skill development is not an overnight ask and not a pill oriented method that a specific course taken will develop these skills in the student. Although the academic skill level required by some entry-level jobs may be low, basic academic skills are still essential for high job performance. Ideally, new hires will have the ability and will want to learn. They also need the ability to listen to and read instructions and then to carry out those instructions. When asked for information, these individuals should be able to respond appropriately both orally and in writing, including recording and relaying information. Reading ability includes comprehending what has been read and using a variety of written materials, including graphs, charts, tables and displays. Entry-level employees also need the ability to complete basic math computations accurately. Perhaps even more important to job success than having good basic academic skills is having good higher-order thinking skills. The ability to think, reason, and make sound decisions is crucial for employees desiring to do well and advance. A person who can think critically, act logically, and evaluate situations to make decisions and solve problems, is a valuable asset. Application of higher order thinking skills in the use of technology, instruments, tools and information systems takes these higher order skills to a new level making the employee even more valuable. Employers will usually try to help valued employees seek and get more advanced training, thus widening the gap between those with higher order skills and those possessing basic academic skills alone.

If basic academic skills and higher order thinking skills are so important, why then are employers deeply concerned with personal skills? Because in most jobs, it is difficult to utilize workers effectively who lack personal skills. Entry-level employees with good personal skills have confidence in themselves and deal with others honestly and openly, displaying respect for themselves, their co-workers, and their supervisors regardless of other people’s diversity and individual differences. They view themselves as a part of a team and are willing to work within the culture of the group. They have a positive attitude and take the initiative to learn new things to get the job done. Rather than blaming others when things go wrong, they are accountable for their actions. They also have the ability to set goals and priorities in their work and personal lives so that resources of time, money and other resources may be conserved and managed. These individuals practice good personal habits, come to work as scheduled, on time and dressed appropriately, and are agreeable to change when necessary.

The following is a direction which could be adopted to correct the skill development process:

1. Employability skills are teachable skills and may be taught in business school and employment settings. Goals and objectives for teaching employability skills should be set. Instruction should be designed to ensure those goals and objectives are reached.
2. Parents need to be involved in goal setting and modelling behaviour.

3. Teach employability skills using a democratic approach so that students’ awareness of values, attitudes, and worker responsibilities is increased.

4. Supervisors, trainers and teachers should set good examples of the desired behavior. Students should have the opportunity to observe the type of work place behavior that is being required of them.

5. When possible, classrooms should replicate the features of real work settings.

6. Set and communicate high expectations and hold students responsible for their behavior.

7. Psychometric analysis of student personalities can be adopted and detailed systematic feedback for modelling desired behaviour can be given to keen followers.

8. Neuro Linguistics techniques can be adopted to shape behavior and mapping techniques can be adopted to generate the desired skill development.

9. Teach, don’t tell. Teachers and trainers tend to be most effective when they assume the role of coach or facilitator.

CONCLUSION

It is often said that it is too late to teach values after a child has reached or completed high school; that their personality is set and nothing can change it. That is not true. It is, fortunately, never too late. Change may be difficult, but it can be done. Teaching of values should begin in the home as a child, be continued through development to adulthood, and reinforced as an adult. If good behavior is reinforced and good role models are presented, people can change for the better. Good habits can be acquired. Employers, schools and parents should remember that you get the behavior you reward and model.

REFERENCES

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