

A Study on Knowledge, Skill and Attitude for Bridging the Employability Gap between the Industry and Academia in Higher Management Education in India

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Abstract - It has become so imperative in this competitive economy for the employees to be equipped with right skills. The industry is expecting the skills to be acquired at the education stage itself thereby reducing the burden from their own shoulder. This especially holds good for managers and management graduates. It has become mandatory for all the management graduates at post graduate level to have acquired all the necessary and desired skills along with gaining sufficient knowledge and developing right attitude.

The uniqueness of this study lies in the model that demonstrates the relationship between recruiters, and placement officers. Arriving at this model in itself is a unique process. The researcher has tried to bridge the gaps identified in this literature review. In the process, the researcher has successfully demonstrated the need to combine the three important aspects for a student – knowledge, skill and attitude.

The study aims to understand the nitty-gritty of the students' preparedness for the corporate exposure, effort of the placement officers to understand the industry requirements and the recruiters' perspective of industry readiness.

Key Words: Skill Development, Acquiring skills, KSA attributes, Higher Education, Management Education, industry-academia, gap analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

DEFINING SKILL

In an age where organizations face margin pressure primarily due to the overhead expenses or direct costs such as salaries that refers to ongoing and inevitable expense of operating a business; skilled employees play a role that is pivotal and integral to success of the firm. The situation is not only for private organizations, even large governments of countries face severe strain on their exchequer due to the outgo of salaries to their employees.

It's needless to mention the importance of having people, especially right people with right skills to improve the prospects of success of any organization. Not just for business, even in research skill is widely regarded as a core input that frames policy which deals with changing lives of people.

This brings the focus on what is essentially the idea of Skills? It can be viewed as an ability or capacity which is acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained effort in order to smoothly and adaptively figure out ways to carry about function that involves ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills) and people (Interpersonal skills)¹. The skill can be also construed as an ability to carry out task with pre-determined results often within given amount of time, energy or both². These skills are basically classified as domain specific skills and generic skills. The concept of skills can at the same time be scientific, human, and social and may even be economic. Some of the academics state that skill can be seen as a personal quality with three key features namely, productive skill which uses skill to produce a value, expandable skills that are enhanced by training and development and social skills which are determined by the ability of the skill to bring about a deterministic social welfare.

¹ <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/skill.html>

² Massotte Pierre, Ethics in Social Networking and Business 1, Theory, Practice and Current Recommendations

COMPENDIUM OF SKILL SETS

A set of attributes that define the employability of a graduate comprises of their skill set. These skill sets are expected to be possessed by one and all who wish themselves an employment. When we are focusing on the skills, employability skills become all the more important. These are typically set of achievements, understanding and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and become successful in whatever career they choose.

Skill Set	Description
Communication and Interpersonal skills	It is one's ability to explain in clear terms as to what one wants the other person to understand. Essentially it should avoid all forms of misunderstandings.
Problem solving skills	An ability to catch the problem by its horns, that is to understand the problem by breaking down the problem into smaller and comprehensible units and apply knowledge from various areas to solve the challenge.
Initiative and Self-motivation	It concerns about the new ideas that usually gets generated within an individual and that which can be converted into a reality through effort; showcasing one internal longing for achievement.
Working under pressure and towards deadlines	This involves the ability to manage oneself emotionally, while handling stress due to deadlines and ensuring that we meet them.
Organizational skill	These skills are all about one ability to be methodical and systematic. This also means ones initiative in planning work so as to meet the deadlines and targets.
Team working skills	To work in collaboration with other people from different disciplines, backgrounds and expertise so as to accomplish ones goals and objectives.
Ability to learn and adapt	Person's ability to be enthusiastic about ones work. To have the natural passion and drive for the work. And to identify ways to learn from ones mistakes for the benefit of both employer and oneself.
Numeracy skills	Ability to use data and other mathematical models in order to support evidence and demonstrate a point.

Skillset Description*KEY IMPERATIVES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA AND GLOBAL RELEVANCE*

There is raising need for human resource besides the threat of automation that looms large over the employment opportunities of future generations. In the Indian context, most of the job opportunities will be seen arising in the services and capital intensive manufacturing sectors. Most of the reports on the state of affairs of employment in India discuss on the plan 2020, where close to around ninety percent of Gross domestic product is expected to come from the services and manufacturing sector, meanwhile the sector can be seen to consume about 70 percent of emerging work force in the next few years.

The demographic dividend in favor of India needs to be utilized to its advantage. This opportunity will be squandered unless India finds itself utilizing the resources to be more globally competitive. And it calls for a revamp in the way higher education is being viewed in the country, which has to serve both the burgeoning domestic and global demand while being competitive in both the spheres. The Industry experts and the academicians are talking about Higher Education to be a key contributor towards job and employability opportunities. There are discussions concerning the need for Higher education in countries to be relevant and reassuring, especially when it is in sync with the industry expectations. While they are relevant at the domestic level, the Higher Education is expected to be relevant at the international level as well, needless to mention we are in an era of globalization. When it comes to our Indian University education, the Higher Education is being placed at a top level and at a higher pedestal when it comes to the higher education. It is measured as such when the universities in India are able to compete globally for mind share among the students and industries alike.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature review will help identify the gaps in the previous researches by virtue of which the present study can be executed. Review of literature will provide with the theoretical base for the present study. The whole objective of literature review is to make the researcher understand what knowledge and ideas have been established on the topic and what their pros and cons are. Though there are various sources that were referred to for this purpose, a few selected and very relevant studies, mainly research papers and articles from various journals, were selected for the report.

Employability Skill

There are many definitions which have come about in the past studies. Among them there has been a study which talks about employment that has a considerable relationship with the society. The author goes on to observe that it is actually a social integration process, acting as a strategy for participation and sustenance³ (Savickas, 2005).

Higher Education and the skill sets

There has been a body of new literature which has come about higher education and gap in the skill sets perceived by the employers within the industry fraternity. It is precisely why the concept of employability has been debated vociferously in the past few years. There are certain skills which are expected before the students go about to graduate and research is happening around these areas⁴ (Rothwell et al. 2008)

Employability and Higher Education

Gracia Louise (2009) researched on employability and higher education with special reference to female students, contextualizing their work place experiences to augment to the understanding of employability development. The author feels previous literature on political and economic discourse on employability has positioned its responsibility on higher education provided by the Universities.

Economics of Employment

Employers of today are based largely out of the Knowledge driven economies. Their way of identifying the employability skill is unique and peculiar to the conventional blue chip companies. Those with qualification of degrees are seen to play an important role in managing the knowledge driven economy, especially of one of the future. The aim of this article was to closely examine the way employability is typically described in official statements is seriously flawed, since it ignores what will be called as duality of employability. Meanwhile it introduces the positional conflict theory as a way of conceptualizing the changing relationship between education, employment and labour market⁵ (Phillip Brown, Anthony Hesketh and Sara Williams, 2003)

Self-esteem

Self Esteem and other employable attributes are important from the behavioural perspective. In this regard, Potgieter (2012) conducted a study to examine the relationship between self-esteem and employability attributes of post graduate business management students. The study could observe that challenges were in large measure with respect to the management graduates. They were decreased employment opportunities, increased personal responsibility, skill shortages among the candidates aspiring for a good job and inability to retain talent. The study aims to ascertain and describe the relationship between self-esteem and employability attributes.

Perceived Employability

³Savickas, M.L, The theory and practice of career construction

⁴ Rothwell, A., Herbert, I. and Rothwell, F, 'Self perceived employability: Construction and initial validation of a scale for university students'

⁵ Phillip Brown, Anthony Hesketh and Sara Williams. Employability in a Knowledge-Driven Economy

Studies are set out to assess the nature, implications of employability perceptions. Erik Bernston (2008) conducted a study and its aim was to measure if the employability and self-efficacy are two distinct but related construct. Subsequently, they sought to investigate the nature of their association. The findings of this study were that, employability was distinct from self-efficacy and interestingly, employability predicted subsequent self-efficacy. Another study done by the same research team wanted to find out or identify predictors of perceived employability. National economic prosperity, living and working in metropolitan areas, poor physical and good psychological work environments, formal education and competency development were found to be positively associated with perceived employability⁶.

Personality

Personality and successful performance has been linked and their link is well established by research studies in the past. Personality and leadership style can be intricately linked and the outcome is decided by how strong is the influence of one's personality when it comes to the overall performance⁷ (Hogan, 2007). Meta skills are ones that include communication skills, working in teams, adaptability, social sensitivity, time management, goal orientation, adaptability and so forth. This is essentially a combination of both the personality and intelligence dimensions to bring about application of an individual to work⁸ (David & Melanie., 2016).

MAJOR GAPS IDENTIFIED

- Employability is mainly focused on the domain specific skills.
- Required skills is studied based only from one or at the most two perspectives (among recruiters, placement officers and students).
- The role an institution offering higher education has to play in skill building exercise among their students is not highlighted much.
- A combination of knowledge, skill and attitude is missing in the earlier studies.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study focuses on identifying the gap between Industry expectations and students' skill set obtained from Institutions. By doing so, the study offers solution to the stakeholders. The study also measures the stakeholders' perspective, understanding the Knowledge, Skills and Attitude (KSA) and the role of institutions to enhance the basic skills and other industry related skills.

OBJECTIVES

- There is wide gap existed between Industry expectations and Students skill set obtained from Institutions – Assessing the GAP
- Each Stakeholders namely, recruiters and Institutional placement centres' perceptions towards employability is vary based on their own perspectives – Measuring the stakeholders' perspective and understanding the (KSA) Knowledge, Skills and Attitude
- To know the skills and attributes expected from Industry recruiters - assessing the right combination of KSA

HYPOTHESIS

- **H01:** There is a significant difference between demographic profile of the respondents such as gender and type of institution and the dimension's perspective of placement officers

⁶ Erik Bernston. Employability Perceptions: Nature, determinants, and implications for health and well-being.

⁷ Hogan, R, Personality and the Fate of Organizations

⁸ David J Finch, Melanie Peacock, Nadege Levallet, William Foster, "A dynamic capability view of employability"

- **H02:** There is a significant difference between the mean score of autonomous and private university institution with regard dimension's perspective of placement officers
- **H03:** There is a significant difference between dimension's perspectives of placement officers among the total work experience of the respondents as placement officer in the study area

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study focuses on describing the existing characteristics of the population under study. By describing, the study evaluates the skillset the industry requires and the skill-set the students possess. Hence, the cross-sectional and descriptive study designs are adopted in this study. In this research, both primary and secondary data are utilized. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire. The secondary data sources are various published reports, journals, articles that are related to the research topic. A convenience sample is a type of non-probability sampling method where the sample is taken from a group of people easy to contact or to reach. There are no other criteria to the sampling method except that people be available and willing to participate. Sample size was 58 recruiters and 64 placement officers. Data analysis was conducted using MS Excel (for initial tabulation of data, and simple data analysis) and IBM SPSS (for arriving at cross tabulation, descriptive statistical measures, Correlation analysis, Hypothesis testing – ANOVA). Some of the tests undertaken are as follows:

- Exploratory Data Analysis to summarize the main characteristics of the data collected in the form of graphs/charts.
- Descriptive Statistics to describe the phenomena
- Exploratory Factor Analysis to determine dimensions of Employability skills
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Model using Covariance Based SEM (CBSEM) framework
- Reliability and Validity tests.
- GAP Analysis through 't' test and ANOVA.
- Pearson Correlation to explore the relation among the study constructs
- Mediator Analysis based on Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) frame work

IV. EXPERIMENT AND RESULT

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher has divided this chapter into two parts according to the stakeholders' perspectives. The first part contains the recruiters' point of view and the second part displays the placement officers' perspective wise.

RECRUITER'S PERSPECTIVES

This part consists of the demographic profile of the respondents such as gender wise classification, type of the company, sector wise classification, work experience as recruitment manager/executive and total work experience as recruitment manager/executive. The researcher has computed the descriptive statistics for attributes and students' knowledge, skill and ability in the study area. The researcher has applied exploratory factor analysis to analyze the students' knowledge, skill and ability.

The researcher has framed twenty four statements regarding recruiters' perspective towards students' knowledge, skill and ability. The researcher has got the opinion through likert five point scaling techniques.

It was found that the statement "Student's ability to solve number challenges, essentially good at handling numbers" achieved the standard deviation value is 0.71, "Students have decent knowledge on how to operate computers" statement achieved the highest mean score of 3.91, "Students must have a reasonable perspective on globalization and its impact on business" statement achieved the lowest mean score of 2.97. Majority of the statements minimum and maximum value is 1 and 5 respectively.

Exploratory Factor Analysis: Recruiter's expectation on Skill

Basic skill set possessed by student's communities across various education Institutions is explored in the previous part. In similar way, basic skill set perceived from recruiters perspective is explored using again Exploratory Factor analysis, the items are given below to do exploratory factor analysis.

Variable No	Variables
1	Students ability to read and comprehend
2	Students ability to write and communicate
3	Student's ability to solve number challenges, essentially good at handling numbers.
4	Students ability to solve problems and provide alternatives
5	Students ability to generate new ideas and develop macro picture of the situation
6	Student's ability to set goals and achieve them.
7	Students are generally positive and believe in themselves.
8	Taking responsibility and initiative
9	Team work among students
10	Students work in a team work and support one another
11	Students on the team exhibit friendliness and healthy competitive spirit.
12	Students are flexible to work in different groups simultaneously
13	Students have decent knowledge on how to operate computers
14	Student's ability to create documents and work on MS office.
15	Student's ability to create spread sheets and work on MS office.
16	Students are reasonably good with data collection and basic statistical tools for analysis.
17	Students must have a reasonable perspective on globalization and its impact on business
18	Students must be familiar with the working of Organization in the real world.
19	Students have sufficient knowledge on their chosen specialization
20	Students have certificate courses to their credit according to their specializations.
21	Students have prior internship experience with Organizations.
22	Students meet the set academic criteria to consider for recruitment as per the company policy
23	Students are extroverted and participate in activities other than curriculum
24	Students work on real time projects that are useful for their career.

Items considered in EFA Analysis

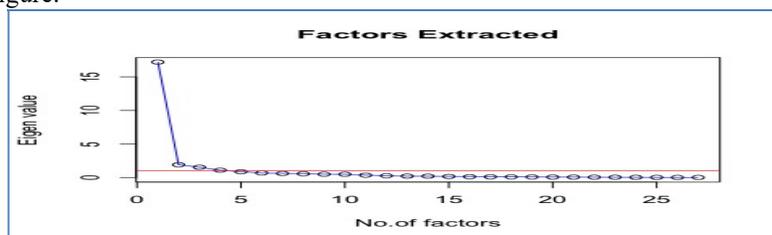
Exploratory Factor Analysis procedures is followed, converting raw data into correlation matrix, further used Eigen value more than 1 to identify the number of dimensions in factor analysis, used ML as estimation method, on rotation, oblimin rotation method is used.

PLACEMENT OFFICER PERSPECTIVES

This part consists of the demographic profile of the respondents such as gender wise classification, type of the institution, work experience and total work experience as placement officer. Exploratory factor analysis is used to reduce the statements regarding Skill set, ability and knowledge from placement officer or institution perspective. Placement criteria needs is analyzed through exploratory factor analysis. The researcher has computed the descriptive statistics concerning dimensions perspective of placement officer. T-test is applied to test the significant difference between demographic profile of the respondents such as gender and type of institution and the dimensions perspective of placement officers. Moreover, the researcher has applied ANOVA test to examine the significant difference between the dimensions perspective of placement officers among demographic profile of the respondents such as work experience and total work experience as placement officer.

Exploratory Factor Analysis: Skill Set, Ability and Knowledge

Skill set is explored from placement officer or Institution perspectives, 27 items are considered to do exploratory factor analysis. Out of 27 items, four factors are derived, where, Eigen value is more than 1, which is shown in the below figure.

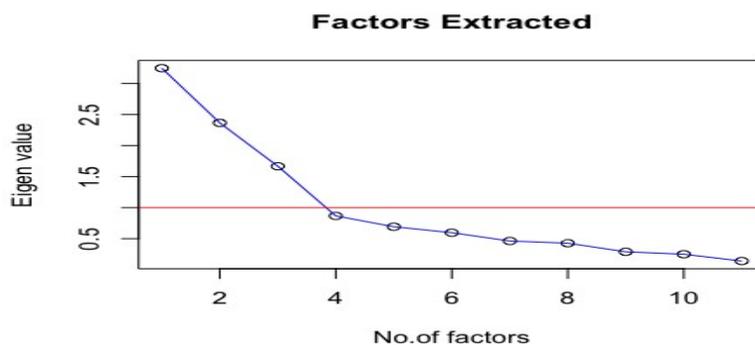


Exploratory Factor Analysis: Skill Set, Ability and Knowledge

Further, four factors identified, keeping factor loadings are minimum .40 and less than is suppressed in the analysis. All the four factors contributed .57 or 57% among the four factors, the relation is established which is ranged between .3 and .6.

Placement Criteria Needs: Exploratory Factor Analysis

19 items are considered for exploring the dimensions of placement criteria needs by the researcher. Out of which, 11 items are retained for the EFA, in which, three factors are obtained, where Eigen value is more than 1.



Eigen value and Number of Factors extracted

Factor loadings are ranged between .47 and .76 and first factor loaded 4 items, Second factor loaded 3 items and third factor loaded 4 items. All the 3 factors contributed for the factor model is 53%.

Type of Institution and Dimensions Perspective of Placement Officers: Application of T-Test

In order to analyze the significant difference between the mean score of autonomous and private university institution with regard dimensions perspective of placement officers. The results are as follows:

- **Analytical:** The Autonomous respondents achieved the highest mean score of 3.90 while Private University respondents achieved the lowest mean score of 3.12. The analysis of the above Table 4.62 brings out that the T value is 3.56 and significant value is 0.00. Since, the significance value is less than 0.05, the mean difference existing about this dimension is significant at 5% level. Hence, Null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted.
- **Augmented:** The Autonomous respondents achieved the highest mean score of 4.62 while Private University respondents achieved the lowest mean score of 3.39. The analysis of the above Table 4.62 brings out that the T value is 5.54 and significant value is 0.00. Since, the significance value is less than 0.05, the mean difference existing about this dimension is significant at 5% level. Hence, Null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted.
- **Team work:** The Autonomous respondents achieved the highest mean score of 4.27 while Private University respondents achieved the lowest mean score of 3.49. The analysis of the above Table 4.62 brings out that the T value is 3.53 and significant value is 0.00. Since, the significance value is less than 0.05, the mean difference existing about this dimension is significant at 5% level. Hence, Null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted.

- **Specialized:** The Autonomous respondents achieved the highest mean score of 4.05 while Private University respondents achieved the lowest mean score of 2.95. The analysis of the above Table 4.62 brings out that the T value is 4.80 and significant value is 0.00. Since, the significance value is less than 0.05, the mean difference existing about this dimension is significant at 5% level. Hence, Null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted.
- **Industry oriented:** The Autonomous respondents achieved the highest mean score of 4.33 while Private University respondents achieved the lowest mean score of 3.69. The analysis of the above Table 4.62 brings out that the T value is 3.84 and significant value is 0.00. Since, the significance value is less than 0.05, the mean difference existing about this dimension is significant at 5% level. Hence, Null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted.
- **Basic Facilities:** The Private University respondents achieved the highest mean score of 3.73 while Autonomous respondents achieved the lowest mean score of 3.51. The analysis of the above table brings out that the T value is -1.00 and significant value is 0.32. Since, the significance value is more than 0.05, the mean difference existing about this dimension is not significant at 5% level. Hence, Null hypothesis is accepted.
- **Others:** The Autonomous respondents achieved the highest mean score of 4.03 while Private University respondents achieved the lowest mean score of 3.84. The analysis of the above table brings out that the T value is 0.92 and significant value is 0.36. Since, the significance value is more than 0.05, the mean difference existing about this dimension is not significant at 5% level. Hence Null hypothesis is accepted.

MAJOR FINDINGS

RECRUITERS PERSPECTIVE

SKILL SET:

- The statement “Student’s ability to solve number challenges, essentially good at handling numbers” achieved the standard deviation value is 0.71, “Students have decent knowledge on how to operate computers” statement achieved the highest mean score of 3.91, “Students must have a reasonable perspective on globalization and its impact on business” statement achieved the lowest mean score of 2.97. Majority of the statements minimum and maximum value is 1 and 5 respectively.
- The researcher has applied exploratory factor analysis to reduce the statements regarding the students’ knowledge, skill and ability. The result reveals that five constructs are extracted from the EFA. The constructs are
 - Team work
 - Career focus
 - Basic skill
 - Operations
 - Leadership

PLACEMENT OFFICER PERSPECTIVES

SKILL SET:

- Skill set, ability and knowledge is explored from placement officer or Institution perspectives, 27 items are considered to do exploratory factor analysis. Out of 27 items, four factors are derived. The four factors are
 - **Factor 1 – Corporate Exposure**
 - **Factor 2 – Guided Exposure to the External Environment**
 - **Factor 3 – Attitude towards Teamwork**
 - **Factor 4 – Awareness about their Domain**
- The researcher has applied Exploratory Factor analysis to reduce the statements concerning placement criteria needs. 19 statements are used in EFA. The result reveals that 11 statements are extracted from EFA under three factors. Three factors are
 - **Factor 1- Thorough with placement preparation**
 - **Factor 2 – Clarity in job expectation**
 - **Factor 3 – Clarity about the organization and their offer**

- The researcher has applied t-test to examine the significant difference between demographic profile of the respondents such as gender and type of institution and the dimensions perspective of placement officers. The results are
 - There is no significant difference between the mean score of male and female with regard to dimension perspective of placement officers.
 - There is significant difference between the mean score of autonomous and private university institution with regard to analytical, augmented, team work, specialized and industry oriented dimensions of perspective of placement officers.
 - There is no significant difference between the mean score of autonomous and private university institution with regard to basic facilities and other dimensions of perspective of placement officers.
 - In total work experience, there is significant difference between the dimensions perspective of placement officers such as analytical, team work, specialized, basic facilities and others among the total work experience as placement officer.
 - There is no significant difference between the dimensions perspective of placement officers such as augmented and industry oriented among the total work experience of the respondents as placement officer in the study area.

V. CONCLUSION

The research was conducted with an intention to understand perspectives of placement officers and the recruiters on various aspects of preparing students for a successful placement in corporate houses by institutes imparting higher management education. The research also highlighted the fact that how all the major stakeholders –placement officers and the recruiters - will look up to the institution to address the issues concerning the preparedness of the student for a grand entry into the corporate world. All of them expects the institutions to develop their curriculum which would make the life of all the stakeholders easy. On the contrary, it is also evident by the system followed by most of the institutions that most of them would give most prominence to exam based education than skill based. This research has explored the ways in which this kind of glitches can be addressed successfully.

The entire research was conducted to offer relevant information to all the three stakeholders and the institutions. The whole objective of this research was to identify essential skills, accrued knowledge and the right attitude. In short, right combination of KSA. With this information the institutions can go a long way in bridging the gap between the industry and academia, especially in management education at post-graduation level. Right choice of course curriculum from the institutions, will take all the three stakeholders a long way in realizing their success.

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