

THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AMONG ENGINEERING GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impact of employability skills in career opportunities among engineering graduates. Employability skills can be defined as the transferable skills needed by an individual to make them 'employable'. Engineering education demands numerous challenges in the present context due to the difficulties posed by the placement scenario. Demand for competent engineering professionals has made the selection process highly challenging giving rise to a need for comprehensive education pedagogy not just confined to inculcating hard core technical attributes but also human skills. Hence there is an urgent need to continuously upgrade the curriculum design of engineering courses so as to better equip the technical graduates with employability skills. Employability is: "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." In everyday life, the development of life skills helps students to: Find new ways of thinking and problem solving. Recognize the impact of their actions and teaches them to take responsibility for what they do rather than blame others. Build confidence both in spoken skills and for group collaboration and cooperation.

KEYWORDS: *Employability Skills, Engineering, Graduates, Employment, Students.*

Introduction

The jobs market is deeply competitive and the candidates who can show key skills are the choice of most employers. Nearly 64% percent employers express their dissatisfaction with the current engineering graduate skills in India. The skills have been categorized as core employability skills, communication skills and professional skills. Candidates may have the qualification & hard skills needed to be able to manage the job role but, without a well-honed set of 'soft skills', employers are less inclined to hire. An employer can benefit in many ways if he has soft skills such as; he will have strong communication, good association, confidence, Etiquettes, good inter personal skills. Employers look for a range of skills in graduate applicants, many of which are common to a number of different career areas. Those most frequently mentioned are communication, team working, leadership, initiative, problem-solving, flexibility and enthusiasm. Employability skills are very essential in the current global job market. Engineering is directed to developing providing and maintaining infrastructure goods & services for industries & for the community. Therefore our engineering graduates perceptibly need to have certain skills to help them to apply & to practice the knowledge efficiently at working place. In order to prepare engineers to meet these new challenges, engineering training & education must be revised & modernized.

Literature Review

According to Berntson (2008) "Employability is an individual's perception of his or her possibilities of getting new, equal, or better employment". Smits (2001:15) distinguish between skills as being specific or generic in nature. Specific skills refer to those skills graduates need in a specific job

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such as the skills an accountant requires to function effectively as an accountant. These skills include management of financial resources, mathematics, systems analysis and perceptual speed. Generally speaking, specific skills could also be termed hard skills. Nagle (1987), "The educational institutions are responsible for preparing students for general skills and make students lifelong learners. Today's education system demand graduates to learn technical content at a faster pace. The graduates are expected to develop the "hard" (technical skills) and the "soft" (people skills) necessarily to succeed in the workplace". According to Martin et al. (2008:8) employers expect graduates to have a wide variety of skills especially a set of soft skills such as literacy, numeracy, enthusiasm and commitment. According to Yorke and Knight (2006) employability skills are "a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy."

Importance of Employability Skills

According to Greatbach and Lewis (2007) generic employability skills are important because the labour market is intensely competitive and employers in private, public and the third sector are looking for people who are flexible, who can take the initiative and have the ability to undertake a variety of tasks in different environments. Employability skills are not as narrowly prescribed and defined as in the past and generally they are more 'service oriented', making information and social skills increasingly important. Therefore, for example:

- The wide world trend towards an increase in service sector jobs (e.g. in business, finance and retail sectors) requires people to have interpersonal skills – staff who are able to explain things and solve problems in response to client needs.
- Those working in manufacturing industry increasingly work in teams or cells and this style of working demands more internal communication and an ability to persuade, negotiate and influence.
- Craft workers often work with more complex processes which demand greater thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills in order to operate machinery or deal with faults.
- Decentralized supply chain management and systems integration require greater communication, team leadership, business and commercial awareness from all the staff.
- The use of standardization of computer based packages in many insurance, banking and call centers highlights the significance of communication skills and attitudes such as confidence, judgment and personal organization.

Corporate Expectations

Finding a job as a fresher is a difficult task these days. While there are many jobs in the market, a person who is looking for a decent job can feel a little lost without committed guidance due to lack of experience. This is the reason fresher's always want to be aware of what a company or employer expects from fresher in terms of the skills set and knowledge.

Every employer or company will have a few expectations while choosing the candidates. They will expect a few things like:

- **Aptitude Skills:** Aptitude tests are conducted to know the problem-solving skills of the candidate, how efficiently he can work to solve a problem in the given time.
- **Technical Skills:** As a fresher, you must know the basics of any one programming language, SQL commands, LINUX commands etc. Apart from these you must have done at least two projects as part of your academics; Mostly your technical interview will revolve around these projects.
- **Communication Skills:** You should be able to express your ideas clearly and be crisp about it. Great communication skills are a must. This is one of the most critical skills that a fresher should possess and every step should be towards improving these skills.
- **Hardworking:** Well, the slang word used for it is Workaholic. Again working hard doesn't mean that hitting the rocks under the shining sun. It means that you should work hard towards the attainment of tasks allotted to you and you are available to the company whenever your company needs you.

- **Honesty:** Employers want their employees to be transparent and they need timely delivery of information with accuracy. Made a mistake? Then don't cover it up. They appreciate your honesty.
- **Ability to Manage Multi-Task:** The ability to manage multiple assignments at a time is the need of the hour. An employer today desires a candidate who can handle multiple portfolios at a time, prioritize them correctly, divide time proportionately between them and ultimately meet all the deadlines effectively.
- **Good Learner:** This trait is not only meant for your company's growth but also your own enhancement. One should always carry the attitude of eagerness to learn new things. Interviewers are keen on observing this attitude of you, so be conscious, friends.
- **Self-discipline:** What will you say about being disciplined? Do you think the interviewer will hire a person who is not well-mannered and childish? No, so don't fall into that dangerous zone and behave like a graduate.
- **Loyalty:** It is a well-versed fact that companies expect its employees to be loyal towards the company. They don't look for a person who is not committed and who cannot be trusted to represent the company in public. They usually want a person who doesn't require close scrutiny.
- **Work Ethic:** Work that is achieved without your dedication and hard work is like a water bubble. So be on time to the workplace, use your abilities to the fullest in the accomplishment of tasks assigned to you, do what you are hired to do. What else will the employer ask you?
- **Initiative:** Being initiative pays off in this highly competitive world. It can be supported by a saying "The early bird gets the worm". This is one of the key traits that every employer looks for in a person that he wants to hire.
- **Flexibility:** The ability to adapt to changing work environment and work assignments is absolutely critical in today's context.

Understanding the Academia–Industry Gap

Many newspapers in India have repeatedly highlighted the limitations of engineering graduates. On July 15, 2014, the Times of India published an article with the heading, "Only 18% engineering grads are employable, says survey." Based on the survey, the article argued the incompetence of the engineering graduates by stating: Less than one out of four engineering graduates are employable, a survey has found. The third edition of the National Employability Report, Engineering Graduates - 2014, released by a private employability solutions company, revealed that though 18.33% of the engineers are employable, 18.09% actually get a job. Of the 1.2 lakhs candidates surveyed across multiple states, 91.82% lack programming and algorithm skills, 71.23% lack soft and cognitive skills, 60% lack domain skills, 73.63% lack English speaking and comprehension skills and 57.96% have poor analytical and quantitative skills.

Talent Management

Talent management is defined as the retention of potential candidates by motivating in order to attain organizational returns and in the long run to develop emotional attachment towards the organization. The fast pace of technological development creates people as highly skilled workers. Most of the organizations in the world find it difficult to get skilled workforce because the demand for talent is more than the supply (Chambers et al, and Axelrod, 2001). The concern towards the acquisition of talent and retention has become serious (Guthridge, Komm, & Lawson, 2008) and many studies were taken up to focus on global talent shortage, talent mobility and cost effective talent utilization (Guthridge et al., 2008). There are many Global Talent Management (GTM) initiatives to overcome the challenges systematically with the help of various policies and practices (Schuler, Jackson and Tarique, 2011).

Graduate's Expectations on Employment

Many graduates expect very high earnings than they actually deserve and a much higher position than the job market can offer. Most of them believe that a degree they possess will assure a job that they deserve. As mentioned earlier the organizations do not like to engage candidates based on their certificate and their strong domain knowledge alone (Bohlinger 2012). Various studies revealed that for the employers non academic skills and attributes are more important than academic success (Crebert 1998). However, graduates may not be under the same assumption. Most of the graduates were unable

to satisfy the organizational expectations because of their misconception. There is a difference between the experience and exposure gained during their education and the real time work environment (Binkley, Erstad, Herman, Raizen, & Ripley, 2010).

Conclusion

These days, employers look for skills beyond the 'academic qualifications' of candidates. Many of them believe that academic qualifications and experience are something that can easily be found but the right combination of characteristics that help a company make money or save money, are hard to find. However, there are certain differences in terms of the fluency in expression and the language as there are certain students who are not at par with the mainstream engineering students due to their educational background and hence their performance is not as good as the engineering students. It's very much needed to update the syllabus at regular interval to provide the need of the companies. Also that there should be strong well plans to train our young engineers according to the needs of the companies. It's essential to increase the industrial contacts. This will assure regular supply of the talent to the global talent workforce. This country has published reports on the necessary frameworks of employability skills to prepare engineering graduates for the employment today and in the future. Overall, the studies suggest that the engineering graduates should opt and demonstrate a set of basic skills such as Communication skills, Strong basic, Interpersonal skills, problem solving and good Presentation skills. This review paper tries to search the various employability skills that employers require from job aspirants while hiring students & the reasons for the low level of employability skills among students. These skills are prerequisites for employability.

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