

Employability Skills of Management Graduates: A Recruiters' Perspective

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KEYWORDS

*Employability,
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ABSTRACT

The employability of management graduates mainly depends on their skills. Mismatches between an individual's skills and employer expectations can hinder employability. A good placement offer is what any management student aims for when they get into management education. However, the gap between what the recruiters are expecting from a management student and what they get is widening day by day. The paper tends to identify the critical skills which recruiters look for when they hire management graduates.

Design/methodology/approach – Research design for the paper is a primary research conducted with the use of interview interview-administered research instrument. The respondents are working in medium and large organizations and have been recruiting management graduates for different roles and responsibilities. The population researcher took for the study is 50.

Findings – The research exposes that there are six critical skills which recruiters look for while recruiting Management Graduates are Good Communication & Presentation Skills, Hands-on Experience, Aptitude, Orientation and Attitude, Creativity and Out of the Box thinking, and Domain Knowledge.

Practical implications – The findings you refer to should focus on identifying key skills that management alumni need to develop to improve their placement outcomes. These skills typically encompass a variety of hard and soft skills that are vastly valued by employers across industries.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Management institutes and business schools are facing growing criticism for their continuous disconnect from the requirements of the business sector and industry regarding the attributes and skills in their graduates (Schlegelmilch & Thomas, 2011). They are failing to generate good employees or graduates who struggle and work hard to secure employment. This can be ascribed to several internal & external aspects, but leads to challenges for many. These challenges can affect both the institutes themselves and the industries for which they operate. With the dynamic corporate landscape, the expectations for management graduates have also changed. It has evolved in response to the emerging trends within various industries. Employers are look for management graduates who own the appropriate skills & knowledge, as well as the ability



to recognize and address issues effectively (Subrahmanyam and Shekhar, 2014). Nowadays, employers tend to favor management trainees who demonstrate self-motivation and creativity, as well as vital capabilities such as problem-solving, effective administration, teamwork, leadership, & interpersonal skills. Furthermore, candidates are expected to uphold high performance standards, exhibit a strong sense of accountability, and practice self-management & honesty. (Khurana, 2008; Shukla, 2013). Higher education institutions like management institutes need to take stock of the current situation of graduate employability from both the employer and alumni's perceptions, if they are to answer efficiently to the needs of the labour market. Shivoru and Kadhila (2018). The achievement of "employability skills" stands as a primary objective of management education, preparing graduates to seamlessly integrate into the workforce and contribute meaningfully to organizational objectives (Bhatnagar, 2020). The present study examines the competencies anticipated by managers during the recruitment and selection process

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Management education has been a focal point of extensive research and has attracted significant research attention, with investigations primarily centered on structural frameworks, pedagogical methodologies, and student preferences (Bhatnagar, 2020). However, the authors noted a notable gap in research that explores employers' views on the essential skills of management graduates that are appreciated in the workplace. There are very few research articles available in the literature on the said topic. Knoblauch & German (1989). The assessment focused on evaluating the specified knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which included oral communication, together with enthusiasm and working with others and self-starting ability, and job-specific knowledge as important employability skills. Employers are increasingly looking for candidates who possess specific expertise, attitudes, and behaviors, as noted by Scans (1991). In a study conducted by Clarkes (1997), several essential generic skills were identified, including problem-solving, decision-making, communication, initiative, and teamwork. Furthermore, Quek & Soon (1999) assert that in the current competitive landscape, the primary advantage that employers seek is the skill set that graduates bring, which can contribute to success in their businesses and workplaces. Today's management graduates face evaluation beyond their academic performance and technical skills, and behavioral competencies, because non-cognitive abilities have gained substantial importance. Academic success prediction through Conscientiousness matches intelligence according to Poropat (2009). According to Rajni (2011), management graduates need to be adaptable, aligning their mindset with industry learning trends, demonstrating teamwork capabilities, possessing a broader perspective, and proactively taking initiatives beyond their assigned responsibilities. A primary objective of management education is to cultivate 'employability skills' (Poropat, 2011).

Padmini (2012) highlighted the employability skills necessary for graduates in technology and management fields. Additionally, Vani Bhagwath et al. (2013) The study analyzed management graduate employability skills and evaluated MBA student competencies for employment (Jackson, 2013). Rajanibala et al. (2014) studied the market expectations for management students while identifying the elements that affect their employability. Students should develop diverse skill sets and capacities to address various scenarios in society at large. (Chan, 2016). Abas and Imam (2016) investigate the correlation between graduates' competence in employability skills and their job performance, providing insights into how these skills influence workplace success.

Literature review reveals that employability is most crucial in higher education (Oliver, 2015; Wilks et al., 2017). The study Shivoru, R. S., Shalyefu, R. K., & Kadhila, N. (2018) assesses the insights of employers, lecturers, & graduates about the employability attributes essential for management sciences graduates in Namibia, highlighting mismatches between stakeholder expectations and curriculum emphasis. Research in India suggests that the non-cognitive skills are considered increasingly important, representing a shift in how employers assess the potential and suitability of management graduates for various roles and responsibilities. Employers highly value attributes such as communication, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, problem-solving and interpersonal skills (Bhatnagar, 2020). A recent research study proposes a conceptual framework exploring the relationship between alumni's capabilities and their employability, emphasizing the need for relevant skills in the job market. Mokhtar, Arifin., Rosman, Abdullah, Fadzil, & Isa (2022).

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research study are as mentioned:

- 1) To identify the skill sets that a recruiter looks for in a management graduate and which is currently lacking in a management graduate
- 2) To identify critical factors on the basis of the skillsets (variables) suggested by management recruiters.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This work aims to contribute to the research literature by using the findings of a primary research on a survey of 50 managers from different domains like marketing, finance, human resources, who are regularly recruiting from the management institutes in Gujarat from at least from last five years. The respondents are working in medium and large organizations and have been part of the recruiting team or campus placement teams for management graduates for different roles and responsibilities.



The survey was conducted using an interview-administered questionnaire as a research instrument. The questionnaire was developed based on the inputs agreed upon by the applicants in focus interviews conducted in the exploratory stage. The questionnaire has mainly closed-ended questions. Also, there are questions to be answered on a five-point Likert-type scale for level of agreement (e.g. 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The data suggest that 67% of the respondents are not gratified with the quality of management graduates they have recruited. 80% of them have started looking beyond management graduates for recruitment in recent scenarios. 90% of them say that the change in pedagogy in management institutes can improve the above-mentioned capabilities in Management Students. 75% of them agree that most of the students want to join the strategic positions in the organizations without having any hands-on experience in the job at the organization. 78% of them agree that the students are quite far from the real-life situations and don't understand the ground realities of the market, and are unaware of the social impacts of the various management decisions. 95% of them agree that students are just street smart and do not possess the required knowledge. They are also unaware of the happenings around them in the current scenario. 88% of them agree that there is a huge gap in student awareness about the practical implementation and application of management theories in the corporate world. They study everything in a black hole and are not able to relate the same when placed in the market. 97% of them agree that the students lack communication skills even in their vernacular languages. They are not able to communicate their ideas and decisions. Many of them can't even express themselves properly. Respondents have also given their opinion on the set of qualities which should be concentrated on to be imparted with the help of change in pedagogy is identified with the help of data analysis.

The exploratory factor analysis identified groups of variables which contained the required attributes for recruiters. The KMO & Bartlett's Test of Sphericity result is 0.000, indicating exploratory factor analysis is suitable for analysis because it satisfies the value lower than 0.05 criterion. The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy result reaches 0.639, which exceeds the minimum acceptable value of 0.6 for satisfactory factor analysis (See table I.). The extraction of factors used the maximum likelihood method, followed by varimax rotation. All variables demonstrate communalities exceeding 0.6. The Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues > 1) served as the basis for additional analysis. The factor analysis procedure automatically organized the scale items into the six predicted factors. The extracted 6 factors contain 26 variables, which have eigenvalues greater than 1. The extraction value of the communalities of all variables reaches a sufficient level of above 0.35, as shown in Table II. The six factors account for 83.03% of the total inherent variance.

An exploratory factor analysis produced factor groupings of variables which met the recruiters' expectations. The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy yielded a result of 0.639, surpassing the minimum threshold of 0.6 for good factor analysis (Refer to Table I).

**Table I: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.639
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	1593
	Df
	325
	Sig.
	.000

Table II: Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
Industrial Exposure	1.000	.763
Research skills	1.000	.827
Entrepreneurial Skills	1.000	.811
Hands-on approach	1.000	.835
Understanding of changing workplace practices	1.000	.856
Prior exposure to the work	1.000	.888
Numeracy or quantitative literacy	1.000	.720
Decision-making abilities	1.000	.829
Learning Attitude	1.000	.635
Knowing the organisations/Industry	1.000	.881
Ethics and Integrity	1.000	.809
Ability to relate a specific issue to the broader whole	1.000	.773
Commitment to the organization	1.000	.861
General knowledge about local and global affairs	1.000	.861
Intellectual flexibility and adaptability	1.000	.871
Ability to Suggest Solutions	1.000	.837
Technical ability	1.000	.829
Subject or discipline knowledge	1.000	.824
Ability to recognize a problem situation	1.000	.958
Ability to express and communicate with confidence	1.000	.887
Written communication skills	1.000	.853
Critical and analytical ability	1.000	.868



Presentation skills	1.000	.815
Proficiency in English	1.000	.854
Innovative Thinking	1.000	.822
Ability to apply knowledge to new situations	1.000	.824

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table III: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	of Cumulative %
1	10.029	38.574	38.574	10.029	38.574	38.574	5.936	22.830	22.830
2	5.768	22.186	60.759	5.768	22.186	60.759	4.338	16.684	39.514
3	2.035	7.825	68.584	2.035	7.825	68.584	3.930	15.115	54.629
4	1.436	5.523	74.108	1.436	5.523	74.108	2.585	9.941	64.569
5	1.211	4.656	78.764	1.211	4.656	78.764	2.431	9.348	73.918
6	1.111	4.273	83.037	1.111	4.273	83.037	2.371	9.119	83.037
7	.686	2.638	85.674						
8	.603	2.321	87.995						
9	.500	1.923	89.918						
10	.476	1.831	91.748						
11	.428	1.645	93.393						
12	.345	1.328	94.721						
13	.289	1.110	95.832						
14	.229	.881	96.713						
15	.198	.762	97.475						
16	.144	.553	98.028						
17	.132	.510	98.538						
18	.105	.405	98.942						
19	.094	.360	99.302						
20	.056	.215	99.517						
21	.047	.182	99.698						
22	.038	.146	99.844						
23	.021	.080	99.924						
24	.012	.044	99.969						
25	.005	.019	99.987						
26	.003	.013	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**Table IV: Rotated Component Matrix**

Variables	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Industrial Exposure		.761				
Research skills						.624
Entrepreneurial Skills					.825	
Hands-on approach		.696				
Understanding of changing workplace practices		.859				
Prior exposure to the work		.698				
Numeracy or quantitative literacy						.267
Decision-making abilities			.744			
Learning Attitude			.228			
Knowing the organisations/Industry		.558				
Ethics and Integrity			.599			
Ability to relate a specific issue to the broader whole				.566		
Commitment to the organization			.875			
General knowledge about local and global affairs				.812		
Intellectual flexibility and adaptability			.766			
Ability to Suggest Solutions					.744	
Technical ability						.729
Subject or discipline knowledge						.881
Ability to recognize a problem situation					.244	
Ability to express and communicate with confidence	.766					
Written communication skills	.725					
Critical and analytical ability				.288		
Presentation skills	.875					
Proficiency in English	.829					
Innovative Thinking					.274	
Ability to apply knowledge to new situations				.494		
a. Rotation converged in 9 iterations.						

The 6 factors are categorized as Communication Skills, Hands-on experience, Aptitude, Orientation and Attitude, Creativity, out-of-the-box thinking and Domain Knowledge. Reliability tests of each factor were conducted, which approves the reliability of these four factors with Cronbach's alpha of 0.842, 0.757, 0.860, 0.839, 0.765 and 0.889 for every group. The reliability of the scale (all 26 variables) is 0.918. Here, the factor analysis is carried out in accordance with Hair et al. (2005) standards. Wholly of Cronach's alpha values are significantly higher than the 0.6 threshold set by Hair et al. (2005), ensuring the constructs' dependability and internal consistency. Table V below displays the items for each factor along with additional descriptive data, such as means, standard deviations, and reliability statistics (Alpha Value).

**Table V: Descriptive and Reliability Statistics**

Factor No.	Factor Name	Alpha (α)	Variables (Statements)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Factor 1	Communication & Presentation Skills	0.842	Ability to express and communicate with confidence	3.7600	1.04119
			Written communication skills	3.6000	1.08797
			Presentation skills	4.1200	.79898
			Proficiency in English	4.3600	.80204
Factor 2	Hands-on experiences	0.757	Industrial Exposure	4.6400	.52528
			Hands-on approach	3.9600	1.06828
			Understanding of changing workplace practices	4.2600	.89921
			Prior exposure to the work	3.9400	1.18511
			Knowing the organization/Industry	3.6600	.98167
Factor 3	Aptitude	0.860	Ability to relate a specific issue to the broader whole	3.6800	1.01900
			General knowledge about local and global affairs	3.6400	.89807
			Critical and analytical ability	3.3800	1.24360
			Ability to apply knowledge to new situations	3.8400	.86567
Factor 4	Orientation and Attitude	0.839	Decision-making abilities	3.2200	1.28238
			Learning Attitude	4.3400	.47852
			Ethics and Integrity	3.5200	1.03490
			Commitment to the organization	3.1000	.95298
			Intellectual flexibility and adaptability	2.9400	1.07684
Factor 5	Creativity and out-of-the-box thinking	0.765	Entrepreneurial Skills	4.7400	.44309
			Ability to Suggest Solutions	3.7400	.44309
			Ability to recognize a problem situation	3.6600	1.08063
			Innovative Thinking	3.8200	.80026
Factor 6	Domain Knowledge	0.889	Research skills	4.4600	.64555
			Numeracy or quantitative literacy	4.3400	.47852
			Technical ability	3.6800	.58693
			Subject or discipline knowledge	3.8400	.50950

6. Findings and Discussion:

Factor 1 - Communication & Presentation Skills: The most crucial fundamental skill needed for entry-level positions is communication skills. Their ability to express themselves and communicate their thoughts, ideas, viewpoints, etc., is one of the most critical skills required in a management graduate. Written communication skills and proficiency in the English Language have been stressed by the majority of recruiters these days. They have even introduced special rounds for evaluating the written communication skills as part of their recruitment process. On average, employers placed twice as much value on communication abilities as they did on managerial skills. Presentation skills are one of the skills which is non-negotiable for the majority of recruiters these days. Employers look for the following four communication-related qualities in new hires: speaking and listening skills, then written communication and presentation abilities, and finally, fifth place goes to flexibility to work in a team. (Weber *et al.*, (2009); Rao et al, 2014). In India, where the corporate landscape is rapidly evolving, these skills are essential for professionals to navigate multicultural workplaces and engage in global business interactions (Gupta and Ramanathan, 2021).

Factor 2 - Hands-on experience: Recruiters across various sectors believe that the only thing preventing some management graduates from landing their ideal positions is practical experience. Employers prefer applicants with real-world experience and practical on-the-job training over those with strong academic records because they can handle a wide range of challenges in different situations. (Rao et al, 2014; Bruner et al, 2011) Management Graduates with work experience or a pre-exposure to the corporate world are preferred over a fresher. Graduates having a prior exposure to the industry in the capacity of an employee or an intern already have some knowledge of the industry and its norms, which provides them better understanding of the corporate environment. Such graduates are better adapted to the changes in workplace practices in comparison to freshers. Hands-on Experience is one of the critical differentiating factors considered by Recruiters. Morris (2019).

Factor 3 - Aptitude: For a management graduate to succeed, aptitude is essential. It includes a range of abilities and proficiencies that support efficient leadership, problem-solving, and decision-making in intricate organizational settings. Aptitude is essentially well-defined as a distinctive, learned or learned ability of a distinct to complete specific tasks based on the ability to grasp and apply knowledge. A strong aptitude gives management graduates a competitive advantage that



enables them to succeed in a diversity of positions & sectors. In count to natural aptitude, skills must be regularly developed and refined to meet industry expectations and professional objectives. When aptitude is paired with education, knowledge and experience, management graduates are better equipped to lead and impact change inside their organizations. Management involves analyzing data, interpreting details desirable at the early stage of running an initiative & also later during the growth stage. Their aptitude skills also include the candidate's aptitude to problem solve, reason, write coherently and get along with others in broader contexts (Kumar & Jain, 2010; Rao et al, 2014; Morris, 2019).

Factor 4- Orientation and Attitude: Attitude and orientation of a management graduate are critically important in effective leadership. The orientation and attitude of management graduates are critical to their success as management professionals. While technical knowledge and aptitude are essential, orientation and attitude define how effectively they apply their skills, engage with others, and navigate challenges in the dynamic business world. The right attitude towards learning new things, taking initiatives, flexibility to work in different scenarios, being adaptive, commitment towards an organization with a mix of professional ethics and integrity, helps the management graduate to have appropriate decision-making abilities (Buenviaje et al., 2016). The management graduates must understand *what* drives attitudes on their team to determine how they can make changes (Kumar & Jain, 2010; Rao et al, 2014; Poropat, 2009; Weber *et al.*, 2009).

Factor 5- Creativity and Out of the box thinking: Recruiters seek employees who think outside the box because they believe such individuals will generate innovative solutions that lead to daily breakthroughs and effective problem resolution (Mohanty, 2011; Rao et al, 2014; Weber *et al.*, (2009), Thompson, L. (2003). For management graduates, creativity, entrepreneurial skills, the ability to suggest out-of-the-box solutions and innovative thinking are crucial because they enable them to overcome obstacles, invent, and propel organizational success in a corporate environment that is changing quickly.

Factor 6 - Domain Knowledge: Domain knowledge is a cornerstone of a management graduate's success. It is critically important as it forms the foundation of their expertise and enables them to put on theoretical concepts effectively in practical circumstances. It not only improves functional expertise but also enhances their ability to innovate, lead, and contribute effectively to organizational objectives. While soft skills and general management principles are essential, domain knowledge provides the depth and specificity needed to excel in today's specialized & modest business environment. A management graduate's success is largely dependent on their domain expertise. In today's specialized & modest business climate, subject knowledge offers the depth and specificity required to succeed, even though soft skills and general management principles are also crucial. The essential capability involves evaluating situations while obtaining diverse viewpoints and conducting additional research to pinpoint essential problems for resolution. Every employer is seeking management students who can help them to solve problems (Amen, 2014; Rao et al, 2014; Weber *et al.*, 2009).

7. Conclusion

Management education is in a downward spiral today. Barring a few institutes of repute, most of the so-called management institutes are unable to cater to the expectations of the corporate. The fact that a significant portion of the respondents are dissatisfied with the caliber of management graduates they have hired serves as evidence of this. This is highlighted by the fact that a major number of the candidates are not satisfied with the quality of management graduates that they have recruited. Now, the direct fallout of this is that the corporates feel that they are unnecessarily shelling out more money for the management graduates when they know quite well that these students would not stand the scrutiny of corporate demands. Many of the respondents have decided to move forward and look beyond management graduates, which is a very alarming signal. The researchers have been able to identify six critical factors, which they have arrived at on the basis of the answers given by the respondents to the structured questionnaire. These six critical factors are Good Communication & Presentation Skills, Hands-on Experience, Aptitude, Orientation and Attitude, Creativity and Out of the Box thinking, and Domain Knowledge. Now, in order that a management graduate is able to get the above six factors inculcated into him or her we have come up with some suggestions which we feel are both disruptive.

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