

Employers Perspectives on Graduates Employability Skills: Soft Skills

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ABSTRACT

Today, requirement to become successful in employment are not only being measured based on the examination result. Local employers believed that graduates are lack of prerequisite in their soft skills that affect their performance while completing a task. Then, it is a must for each graduate to polish their soft skills while they are still studying. The purpose of this study was to identify the perception of employers' towards the skills that graduates' possessed when they start toward the working environment. The objective were studied in this research was to examine the relationship between communication, interpersonal and management skills with employee productivity. The finding reveals that there is a positive relationship between communication, interpersonal and management skills with employee productivity. The data collected from the respondents through distribution of questionnaires. The outcome of this study will give employee know the best skills that should be possessed to be successful in the future employment.

KEYWORDS: Communication, Interpersonal, Management, Employee Productivity, Soft Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian institution has produced a huge pool of graduates for every year. It is understood by the government the important of providing soft skills training to the students to reduce the gap between campus and industry. Soft skills are not fully integrated into the curriculum subject of university. Even, students also not interested to attend any program that are not seen as core to the discipline of their study. The higher education sector should take an action to monitor this issues in identifying on how to improve the soft skills by meeting the future skills demand and at the same time produce a good quality of graduates. Soft skills can be enhance the competency and at the same time increase one's capability in the societal advancement and modernization [23]. Too many graduates leave universities without the necessary skills that needed by the world of work. That will result on the increase of number unemployment of our graduates. Usually, jobs are readily available for them but these graduates are lack on what the requirement needed by the industries.

Communication

In [3] views communication as the exchange of information, facts, feelings and emotions between people. To support that, in [22] expresses that communication between employees and employers are important in professional fields. In [17] discusses that employers prefer employees who have generic competencies of interpersonal skills for work performance such as oral and written communication skills. In [16] state that an active verbal communication will be more effective when the communicated information is understood by the listener.

In [9] also share the ideas on the skills required by employers to include written communications skills, verbal communications skills, listening skills and the ability to provide feedback from conversations. The skills required for the communication is important to ensure the delivery of messages is effective, and thus messages are understood.

In today's situation of work globalization, English communication is essential as to cope with the current changes. In [4] lists several benefits that employers and employees may gain from the usage of English communication. As employees are able to communicate in English, they will speak with greater confidence while performing their work. Besides, it may help in selling the value of employees and the company's image with greater ease.

Interpersonal

In the current situation, employees are no longer evaluated based on their qualifications only but their representative of personality plays an important part in determining the employment opportunity. This considers on the interpersonal skills that are being developed by the graduates. In [18] also view that employers are

looking for vital interpersonal skills in graduates and their period of work experience rather than degree of specific knowledge. To support that, in [10] state that some employers consider degree subjects studied are not as important as the graduates' ability in handling complex information and communicate it effectively.

The skills presented by graduates can add to growth, competitiveness and profitability [12]. As graduates are being employed, the skills that they already have can grow when they enter the working environment. Moreover, the skills that they have are essential for the survival in the working world that will enhance the employability. In understanding interpersonal skill, in [20] defines it as a skill that does not have specific curriculum guideline but it can be developed through any subject integration or method. These skills are functional and adaptive which can produce a competent and productive employee.

Management

Employability skills are not specific for a certain task, but the abilities, which involve horizontally across all working activities and vertically across all jobs from every level [5]. Management skills are similar to leadership skills where it includes problem solving, decision making, critical thinking and time management. In hiring employees, employers prefer to select candidates who are motivated, able to possess basic skills and able to adapt through the use of creative thinking and problem solving skills in employment [19]. Finding for alternative solutions in problem solving is not easy. In [1] views that by understanding a multiple answers available to a problem, leads to seek for the input from others and combine them to achieve solutions. The result leads towards employee with expertise on alternative problem solution.

Beside critical thinking and problem solving matters, employees also need to have the ability to look for a new idea. In [8] states that great thoughts and creative ideas may come from places other than executive officers. It is important to encourage employees to share their ideas for organization development. The results of sharing new ideas often lead to increase of productivity in the organization.

Employee Productivity

A perfect blend of personal qualities, interpersonal skills and hard skills will definitely contribute in enhancing employment opportunity [6]. According to [15], employability is largely referred to graduates' possession of certain level of skills, attitude and ability to search for a job. In [5] found that unemployment rate among graduates are the highest in this country as the jobs are readily available for the graduate, but lack of the skills lead to the difficulties of getting and keeping the jobs.

According to a study conducted by [21], changes in business environment involve both the working environment and the technology used in performing the job. In [7] discuss that the trend for today's employment concerns on the variety of skills available among graduates as organizations are currently facing with changes in work environment. Supported by [11], the relation between interpersonal skills and information technology is needed as to produce a good output of information resources. This shows that interpersonal skills are highly needed in competing with technology advancement. Research conducted by [13] discovers that the issues related to interpersonal skills are rank at number 10 during the interview session compared to issues related to academic which are ranked at number 18. This finding shows that the issues related to interpersonal skills need serious attention, especially by the Higher Education Institution.

Hypotheses Development

H1: There is a positive relationship between communication and employee productivity.

H2: There is a positive relationship between interpersonal and employee productivity.

H3: There is a positive relationship between management and employee productivity.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted specifically to investigate the relationship between communication, interpersonal and management skills with employee productivity. To achieve the objective of the study, a quantitative correlation research design was used to investigate the relationship between the variables.

A questionnaire is the instrument for this study and was adopted from studies of [5, 24]. A set of questionnaire was distributed to the respondents and the questionnaire was divided into three section which were section A, B and C. Section A covered the demographic questions of respondents, whereas section B covered the dependent variables and lastly section C covered the independent variable. The questions in section B and C required them to rate their skills level with a 5-point Likert scale measuring from 1 (not at all excellent) to 5 (very excellent).

A comprehensive list of number of graduates' student from 4 programs in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Puncak Alam campus is 1480. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to the employers and a total of 150 questionnaires were received that yields to 50% response return rate.

Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 21.0). The SPSS is to provide a broad range of capabilities for the entire analytical process. Descriptive statistics included percentages, present the main characteristic of the respondents. Since this study was interested in examining the relationship of the variables indicated communication, interpersonal and management skills with employee productivity, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study discussed three variables namely communication, interpersonal and management skills. Descriptive statistics for respondent profiles indicated that 61.4% were female. In terms of age, majority of the respondents are in the age of 26-30 years old which is 34.6%. The statistics also shown that most of the graduates are served for the middle level management (60.6%). It was also found that 52.0% most of them had a working experience between 1.5 years and 40.7% of them are employees of the private sectors.

Table 1: Correlation analysis result

No	Variables	1	2	3	4
1	Communication	1.00			
2	Interpersonal	0.328**	1.00		
3	Management	0.551**	0.573**	1.00	
4	Employee Productivity	0.550**	0.574**	0.802**	1.00

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); Cronbach's alphas in the parentheses along the diagonal

Table 1 illustrates the relationships between Communication, Interpersonal, Management skills and Employee Productivity. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to assess the relationship among the independent and dependent variable. The values of the correlation coefficient tabulated in Table 1 indicate that there is a positive large significant relationship between communication and employee productivity ($r = 0.550$, $p < 0.05$). Meanwhile, the correlation between interpersonal and employee motivation is $r = 0.574$, $p < 0.05$ and correlation between management and employee productivity also a positive large significant relationship, $r = 0.802$, $p < 0.05$. Therefore, hypothesis 1, 2 and 3 was accepted. The result indicated that management skills is more correlated with employee productivity compared to other elements.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explores the three hypothesis of soft skills that effect on employee productivity. The analysis ends up with the positive large significant for each element towards employee productivity. The management skills element that was considered as the most needed as perceived by employers. However, the differences on the correlation analysis among the elements only showed slight differences where another elements also results as a positive large significant toward employee productivity. This showed that other elements were also considered important for the employers' perspectives.

Today's work environment considers the overall aspect of a graduate before they are recruited. In [14] support that by explaining that today's competitive trend for employment does not only evaluate academic achievement criteria, but also the interpersonal skill that the graduates possesses. If a graduate has both the quality of academic criteria and the soft skills, their employment opportunity will automatically increases.

Based on the result and the interpretation of the findings, the following recommendation and suggestion are drawn. Even though management skills was ranked as the most needed elements for soft skills, it is recommended that the scope for communication skills is widen and the focus on language of communication should especially be English. Current employments are engaged with international situation and this automatically requires employees to communicate in English, the global language.

Finding from the survey conducted by [2] record that the language is a primary cause of discrimination due to the difficulties of communication on both sides of an employee and employer. As for a business purpose, the need of English language as main communication medium is required in dealing with international scenario.

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