

Business Students' Self Perceived View of Their Competence of Performing Employability Skills in Their Future Careers

Paramesswari. N, V. C. Praveen Priyaa

Assistant Professor, Department of Management, KG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to study the self-perceived level of competence at performing some basic skills needed by business students for managerial careers in business organisations. A total of 20 MBA students of select business school in Coimbatore, participated in this study from a target population of 60 business students. A convenient sampling technique was used due to a time constraint. This study employs an existing employability skills instrument to assess the above objective.

The result of the study indicated that the respondents of MBA students have developed between moderate and major competence to serve as productive employees in the workplace "equally from program and non-program."

It was concluded that the respondents are quite confident with their employability skills. Further research can be done to verify whether a business student's self-perception of his/her competencies are same as those of their existing skill levels.

KEYWORDS: self-perceived, Competency, career

INTRODUCTION

According to the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, employability skills are those "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". Employability skills are also sometimes referred to as generic skills, capabilities or key competencies.

As entry level managers, business students are expected to possess certain set of employability skills. In 2001, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) conducted a research to elucidate the generic and employability skills required by industry. The results of the project was published in a report titled 'Employability skills for the future', providing the Department of Education, Science and Training with consolidated industry views on the range of key skills that applied across the range of business contexts including small, medium and large enterprises.

The report identified the following 8 employability skills:

- communication
- teamwork
- problem solving
- initiative and enterprise
- planning and organising
- self-management
- learning
- technology

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These skills are of the utmost importance to a MBA graduate to become employable in any industry.

NEED FOR STUDY

Nowadays organisations require newly graduated business students to join with a certain set of competencies. Some of these competencies are tested during the recruitment and selection processes. Many students tend to fail to meet these requirements in the initial stages itself. This may be due to lack of preparation of the student, ineffective learning methods and so on. Therefore it is necessary to understand what the students think about these indispensable employability skills, their self-perception towards the possession of these competencies and whether the program or non-program environment has ensured the gain of the same set of competencies.

Objective of the study

The following secondary objectives were formulated to accomplish the purpose of this study:

1. To describe the students' self-perceived level of competence at performing employability skills necessary for careers in business.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted taking into consideration the self-perceived views of MBA students at Select business school regarding their employability skills. The MBA programs and curriculum varies from institution to institution and therefore this study cannot be generalized beyond the group of students at this institution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Population:** The target population for this study were students in the MBA program at Select business school who belonged to the 2011-12 Batch (N = 60).
- **Sample Selection:** A convenient sample of the business students was taken and the questionnaire was directly administered to them. A convenient sampling was used due the presence of a time constraint and as data was collected from respondents who were available at that time rather than selecting from the entire population.
- **Sample Size:** A sample size of 20 students was selected for this study.

DATA COLLECTION

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of two parts. It was adapted from the instrument used by Ogbeide (2006) in a study 'Of Employability Skills and Students' Self-Perceived Competence for Careers in the Hospitality Industry.'

The questionnaire included items to solicit information about the perceptions of the senior students regarding their

level of competence at performing 67 employability skills. A four-point Likert-type scale with the following response choices was used in this part of the instrument:

- 0 = no competence,
- 1 = minor competence,
- 2 = moderate competence,
- 3 = major competence.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Quantitative research methods were used to analyse the given data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14.0 for Windows, a product of SPSS, Inc. aided the data analysis.

FINDINGS ASSOCIATED WITH THE OBJECTIVE

The first objective of the study was to describe the students' self-perceived level of competence at performing the employability skills necessary for careers in business. Table 1 presents the mean and the standard deviation of the respondents' self-perceived level of competence at performing 67 employability skills.

TABLE 1

Item	interval	frequency	%	Mean	SD
Identify problems	MC	13	36.1	2.00	.75
Prioritizing problems.	MC	10	27.8	2.26	.696
Solving problems	MiC	8	22.7	2.00	.795
Identifying essential components of the problem.	MC	9	25.0	1.70	.979
Sorting out the relevant data to solve the problem	MC	10	27.8	2.10	.718
Making decisions in a short time period.	MC	13	36.1	1.75	.786
Assessing long-term effects of decisions.	MC	11	30.6	2.35	.587
Making decisions on the basis of thorough analysis of the situation	MC	7	19.4	2.00	.918
Identifying political implications of the decision to be made.	MC	7	19.4	1.70	1.031
Recognizing the effects of decisions made	MC	11	30.6	1.85	.875
Establishing the critical events to be completed.	MC	10	27.8	1.80	.894
Assigning/delegating responsibility	MC	10	27.8	2.05	.826
Contributing to group problem solving	MC	7	19.4	1.79	1.031
Knowing ethical implications of decisions	MC	8	22.2	2.05	.887
Monitoring progress against the plan	MC	8	22.2	1.90	.788
Integrating strategic considerations in the plans made.	MC	8	22.2	1.80	.788
Setting priorities.	MC	12	33.3	2.00	.649
Allocating time efficiently	MC	13	36.1	1.75	.786
Managing/overseeing several tasks at once	MC	11	30.6	2.35	.587
Taking reasonable job-related risks	MC	7	19.4	1.70	1.031
Monitoring progress toward objectives in risky ventures.	MC	11	30.6	1.85	.875
Recognizing alternative routes in meeting objectives.	MC	10	27.8	1.80	2.20
Conveying information one-to-one	MC	14	38.9	2.20	.523
Communicating ideas verbally to groups	MiC	6	16.7	1.80	1.005
Making effective business presentations	MC	9	25.0	1.85	.933
Writing external business communication.	MC	13	36.1	1.80	.696
Writing internal business	MC	14	38.9	2.20	.523
Communication, Using proper grammar, spelling, & punctuation.	HC	6	16.7	1.80	1.005
Listening attentively	MC	9	25.0	1.85	.933
Revising plans to include new information.	MC	7	19.4	1.60	.665
Meeting deadlines	MC	7	19.4	2.00	.918
Identifying potential negative outcomes when considering risks venture.	MC	8	22.2	2.05	.887
Making impromptu presentations	MC	7	19.4	1.90	.912
Writing reports	MC	13	36.1	2.05	.605
Responding to others' comments during a conversation.	MC	7	19.4	1.90	.912
Working well with fellow employees	MC	13	36.1	2.05	.605
Relating well with supervisors	MC	16	44.8	1.90	.447
Establishing good rapport with subordinates.	MC	12	33.3	2.30	.571
Empathizing with others	MC	7	19.4	2.05	.826

Understanding the needs of others	MC	9	25.0	1.60	.940
Identifying sources of conflict among people	MC	11	30.6	1.90	.788
Resolving conflicts	MC	12	33.6	2.20	.616
Supervising the works	MC	13	36.1	1.85	.813
Gaining direction	MC	11	30.6	2.35	.587
Delegating work to peers	MC	7	19.4	2.05	.826
Delegating work to subordinates	MC	9	25.0	1.60	.940
Coordinating the work of subordinates	MC	11	30.6	2.25	.639
Providing novel solution to problems	MC	14	38.9	1.80	.768
Adapting to situations to change	MC	11	30.6	2.35	.587
Initiating the change to change to enhance productivity.	MC	7	19.4	2.05	.826
Keeping up to date with external realities related to our company's success.	MC	9	25.0	1.60	.940
Re conceptualising your role in response to changing corporate realities.	MC	10	27.8	1.95	.826
Conceptualizing future for The company	MC	12	33.3	2.20	.616
Proving innovative paths for the company to follow for future development	MC	14	38.9	1.80	.788
Applying information to new or broader contexts.	MC	7	19.4	2.05	.826
Integrating information into more general contexts.	MC	8	22.2	1.65	.988
Gaining new knowledge in areas outside the immediate job	MC	13	36.1	2.15	.587
Gaining new knowledge from every day.	MC	14	38.9	1.80	.768
Maintaining a high energy level	MC	12	33.3	2.30	.571
Functioning at an optimal level of performance	HC	8	22.2	2.10	.852
Combing relevant information from a number of sources.	MC	12	33.3	2.30	.571
Keeping up to date on developments in the field	MC	11	30.6	1.90	.788
Coordinating the work of peers	MC	11	30.6	1.90	.788
Responding positively to constructive criticism	MC	9	25.0	1.60	.940
Functioning well in stressful situations	MC	13	36.1	2.15	.587
Ability to work with independently	MC	12	33.3	2.20	.618
Maintaining the positive attitude	MC	11	30.6	1.90	.788

The mean for each of the skills included in this study was approximately 2.00 indicating that, on average, the respondents' perceived themselves to have at least a moderate level of competence at performing all the employability skills. The most highly rated skills were "Assessing long-term effects of decisions" (M = 2.35), "Managing/overseeing several tasks at once" (M=2.35), "Gaining direction" (M=2.35), "Adapting to situations to change" (M=2.35), "Relating well with supervisors" (M=2.30), "Combing relevant information from a number of sources." (M=2.30), and "Maintaining a high energy level" (M=2.30).

The lowest rated skills included: "Integrating information into more general contexts" (M=1.65), "Revising plans to include new information" (M=1.60), "Understanding the needs of others" (M=1.60), "Delegating work to subordinates" (M=1.60), "Keeping up to date with external realities related to our company's success" (M=1.60), and "Responding positively to constructive criticism" (M=1.60).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The respondents consider themselves to have a moderate degree of competence in majority of the employability skills. It can be concluded that the business students are quite confident in their competencies. They have high confidence in their skills related to assessing long-term effects of decisions, managing/overseeing several tasks at once, gaining direction, adapting to situations to change, relating well with supervisors, and combing relevant information from a number of sources and maintaining a high energy level. They must work on trying to improve their skills such as : "Integrating information into more general contexts", "Revising plans to include new information" , "Understanding the needs of others", "Delegating work to subordinates" , "Keeping up to date with external realities related to our company's success" , and "Responding positively to constructive criticism". On the whole the respondents are confident about their leadership as well team building skills which is essential for any entry-level manager.

Further research may be conducted to determine what aspects of the program or non-program experiences are

contributing most to the development of these skills. It would also be of value for research to be conducted focusing on the employability skills the students considered themselves to have the lowest competence. Students may also be tested using personality assessments such as Myers-Briggs Typology Inventory or Thomas Profiling to determine whether the students self-perceived competence is their actual competence and any such gap can be bridged by using the program and non-program environments effectively.

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