

HR Professionals' Perspectives on Skill Gaps among Management Graduates

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ABSTRACT:

In today's competitive employment market, employability skills are critical to the success of management graduates. While technical knowledge is necessary, soft skills like communication, adaptability, critical thinking, and problem-solving are also important. However, many management graduates fail to find job because they lack these necessary abilities, resulting in a mismatch between industry expectations and academic training. This study investigates the perceptions of HR professionals on skill gaps among management graduates. Data is collected using structured interviews to identify critical skill deficits and recommend targeted training programs. The findings emphasize the need for collaborative efforts between academia and industry to integrate practical learning opportunities, such as internships, mentorship programs, and skill-based workshops, into management education. By bridging the gap between conceptual knowledge and industry requirements, this study aims to enhance graduate employability and contribute to the development of a skilled workforce that meets evolving organizational needs.

KEYWORDS: Skill Gaps, Management Graduates, HR Professionals, Industry-Academia Collaboration

I. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 UNDERSTANDING SKILLS:

Skill refers to an individual's capacity to accomplish tasks efficiently and can be classed into hard and soft abilities. Hard skills are technical, measurable abilities acquired by school or training, such as coding, data analysis, and machine operation. In contrast, soft skills are interpersonal and behavioral characteristics such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and leadership. Both sorts of skills are necessary for career success: hard skills enable job performance, while soft skills facilitate workplace interactions and professional development.

1.2 MEANING OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS:

Employability skills are a combination of hard and soft talents that improve an individual's ability to secure and retain work. Communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and leadership are among the talents that the University of Sydney says are transferable across industries. They are critical to job growth and are highly regarded by employers.

1.3 ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (HEIS) IN SKILL DEVELOPMENT HEIS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN BRIDGING THE SKILL GAP AMONG MANAGEMENT GRADUATES BY:

- Curriculum Design: Aligning academic programs with industry requirements.
- Practical Exposure: Offering internships, live projects, and case studies.
- Soft Skills Development: Conducting workshops and personality development programs.
- Industry Interaction: Organizing guest lectures, industry visits, and collaborations.
- Career Services: Providing career counseling and placement support.
- Technology Integration: Enhancing digital literacy and online learning access.
- Global Exposure: Facilitating exchange programs and international collaborations.
- Assessment & Feedback: Implementing continuous evaluation methods.

1.4 INDUSTRY NEEDS FOR MANAGEMENT GRADUATES:

Contemporary industries require workers who are adept in both technical knowledge and interpersonal abilities. Employers desire candidates who can:

- Make data-driven decisions and adapt to digital disruption.
- Have excellent analytical and problem-solving abilities.
- Possess Strong communication and leadership skills. A well-rounded skill set, sometimes known as the "T-

shaped" skill set, combines broad business knowledge (horizontal) and deep functional competence (vertical).

1.5 CHALLENGES FACED BY MANAGEMENT GRADUATES IN SECURING JOBS:

Despite obtaining a degree, management graduates face several challenges in entering the job market, including:

- Lack of Employability Skills: Deficiency in soft skills, technical expertise, and adaptability.
- Limited Practical Exposure: Inadequate internship opportunities and industry interaction.
- Weak Professional Network: Insufficient networking with professionals and poor online presence.
- Geographical Constraints: Reluctance or inability to relocate for job opportunities.
- High Competition: A saturated job market with an increasing number of graduates.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:-

- To analyze the skills lacking among management graduates from the perspective of HR professionals.
- To suggest targeted training programs addressing specific skill gaps highlighted by HR professionals.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:-

According to the Oxford Dictionary, skill is defined as the "ability to do something well". University of Sydney describes, Employability skills (also known as soft skills) are a collection of transferable skills and critical personal traits that employers highly value and are required for efficient professional performance. Unlike professional or technical abilities, these employability skills are generic rather than job-specific, and are shared by all work roles and workplaces across all industry types, such as communication and teamwork.

In their study, Mohamed and Mohd (2005) discovered that graduates have a low opinion of the relevance of the content of their course in terms of employability skills because they believe the course content did not instill enough employability skills.

Gurvinder and Sharan's (2008) study examined employers' assessments of employability skills and graduates' perceptions of their present skills. The findings of this survey demonstrated that companies preferred to hire graduates of public universities. Furthermore, graduates and employers ranked employability skills in the same order of priority. Employers ranked graduates worse in all seven employability variables compared to their own judgments. The survey found that younger companies are more likely to help graduates improve their employability skills.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:-

- **RESEARCH DESIGN:** For the completion of this research, a descriptive research design would be used, as it will describe the perception of HR Professionals regarding the skill gaps among the management graduates.
- **SAMPLING DESIGN:** A convenient sampling method has been used as to mobilize the HR Professionals.
- **SOURCE OF DATA COLLECTION:-** The present study is based on the **Primary data** collected from the HR professionals. **Secondary data** consists of different literatures like various books, published articles, government websites, government reports and the past researches of this field.
- **SAMPLE SIZE:-** The sample size for this study is 30 HR Professionals.
- **TOOL OF DATA COLLECTION:-** To ensure comprehensive data collection, a structured interview schedule was used as the primary data collection tool. This quantitative approach consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions, with interviews conducted physically and telephonically.

V. MAJOR FINDINGS:-

Some of the important findings of study are being discussed below:

- Most respondents (60%) believe that management graduates possess the necessary workforce skills, but 27% remain uncertain, and 13% feel these graduates lack essential competencies. While 40% are satisfied with the current skill levels of management graduates, 47% are neutral, and 7% express high satisfaction. However, 6% believe there is room for improvement in their skills.
- A significant portion of respondents (60%) emphasize the importance of problem-solving skills, while 53% identify critical thinking as the most lacking skill. Communication skills (47%) also emerge as a major gap,

followed by teamwork and technical skills (37%). Leadership skills are another concern, with 33% of respondents highlighting the need for improvement in this area.

- Technical proficiency is a recurring issue, as 63% of respondents indicate that management graduates "sometimes" lack technical skills, and 27% believe this occurs "often." Only 3% feel that graduates "always" lack technical expertise. Leadership skills are another point of concern, with 44% of respondents uncertain about graduates' leadership abilities. Additionally, 33% believe leadership is lacking, whereas 23% consider graduates adequately prepared.
- When it comes to teamwork, 47% of respondents find management graduates ready for collaborative roles, yet 30% remain unsure. Meanwhile, 23% believe teamwork skills require significant improvement. The hiring process places a strong emphasis on soft skills, as 90% of respondents confirm their importance, while only 10% disagree.
- An overwhelming 100% of respondents agree that management graduates need more practical training to enhance their job readiness. Industry collaboration is widely supported, with 93% believing that partnerships between academia and industry can help bridge the skills gap. However, 7% do not consider such collaboration to be essential.
- Mentorship programs receive strong backing, as 90% of respondents endorse them as an effective solution for skill development. Meanwhile, 10% question their overall impact. Communication skills (40%) are the most frequently cited deficiency among graduates during recruitment, followed by technical knowledge (26%), behavioral skills (17%), and organizational alignment (17%).
- Employers highlight key competencies that require development, with leadership skills being the most critical (30%). Additionally, communication (23%), behavioral skills (20%), problem-solving (17%), and technical proficiency (10%) are identified as essential areas for improvement.
- To address these challenges, respondents recommend various training approaches. Workshops and hands-on learning receive the highest support (43%), followed by mentorship programs (23%). Some advocate for blended learning approaches (17%), while others emphasize specialized learning formats such as case studies, group projects, and industry visits (17%).
- Industry collaboration is considered crucial in bridging the skill gap, with 40% of respondents advocating for internships and practical exposure. Another 23% believe mentorship programs and industry partnerships are key to career readiness. Training initiatives, such as executive training and seminars, are favored by 20% of respondents, while 17% emphasize the need for research-driven curriculum collaboration to align academic learning with workplace demands.

VI. SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:-

- Educational institutions must focus on developing students' practical skills by rewarding application-based learning rather than emphasizing rote memorization of theoretical concepts.
- Management schools, regardless of their tier, should implement continuous technical training programs focusing on emerging technologies relevant to the field of Human Resource Management (HRM), such as Power BI, Advanced Excel, and AI tools. Additionally, post-training assessments should be conducted to evaluate and enhance students' proficiency, ensuring they are well-prepared to meet industry demands.
- Management schools should incorporate simulations and in-depth discussions, along with the analysis of case studies, into classroom activities to assist students enhance their problem-solving and critical thinking abilities.
- Educational institutions should encourage students with limited communication skills to express themselves in a supportive, judgment-free environment. This will help build their confidence and improve their communication abilities over time.
- Management Graduates should embracing a mindset of continuous learning is vital to stay relevant and adapt to the dynamic demands of the professional world.
- Management schools should establish structured internship and mentorship initiatives in partnership with industries to provide management students with hands-on experience and personalized career guidance, enabling them to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges.
- Management schools should collaborate with industry professionals to design specialized courses, conduct skill-enhancing workshops, and deliver training sessions that align academic content with current industry demands.
- It is strongly recommended that fieldwork agencies/industry professionals allocate adequate time to training management students who come to your agency to learn and gain practical experience as a part of their

fieldwork/ internship so that, there are no skill gaps in the future and that they are guaranteed their desired job, as well as that industrial needs are met.

- It is recommended to the Schools of Social Work should actively engage experienced HR practitioners in the process of planning and developing the curriculum for Human Resource Management (HRM) studies. Educational institutions can ensure that their curricula are relevant, up to date, and linked with the industry's current demands by incorporating the insights, talents, and practical expertise of seasoned professionals in the area. This collaborative approach would not only close the gap between academic theory and real-world practice, but it would also better prepare students for whatever obstacles they may face in their HR careers.

VII. CONCLUSION:-

This study highlights the urgent need to bridge skill gaps among management graduates to enhance their employability in a competitive job market. While graduates possess basic workforce skills, deficiencies in critical areas like analytical thinking, leadership, and technical aptitude remain a challenge. Employers increasingly prioritize soft skills, yet traditional academic curricula often fail to nurture them.

To address this, educational institutions should integrate hands-on training, industry collaborations, and practical learning approaches. HR professionals and organizations must support graduates through structured internships, mentorship programs, and real-world exposure. Students, too, must take initiative in skill development through continuous learning and professional networking.

Bridging this gap requires a collective effort from academia, industry, and students to align education with evolving job market demands. A collaborative approach will help create a workforce that is competent, adaptable, and ready for future challenges.

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