

Employability Attributes and Values

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Abstract

India is on the edge to obtain a 'Demographic Dividend' because the size of its working age population will increase to a likely peak of 95 crore in 2026. In 2020, the average Indian will be in his twenty's, compared with 37 in China and the US, 45 in West Europe and 48 in Japan. Such a demographic advantage is enough to build a case of claiming economic supremacy in the global economy. Although the Indian economy appears to experience GDP growth rate of 7% and beyond in the next few years, but there has been an increasing concern regarding jobless growth, widening of inequality in terms of region, gender, and a mismatch between demand of skilled labour and its availability, especially in potential sectors. Substandard Institutes are producing mere graduates instead of true professional, who cannot meet the expectations of Industries. There are a lot of references to research statistics regarding employability in every forum. The references frequently are: just 20-30 % of the postgraduates are employable. In the recent years, the problem of unemployment among professional graduates is a cause of concern. This study attempts to find out the various employability attributes and the work values of the MBA graduates and their relative importance to the employers in IT industry at Pune. A survey of HR professionals was conducted to gather the data for the study. It is a research conducted to understand the skill expectations of the corporate from new MBA students with special reference to IT industry in Pune. The study report might be used as a reference in better preparing the MBA graduates for industry and make them employable.

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in personal development and development of the business as well as the nation. India has made significant progress in the field of education, especially higher education like engineering, MBA and physicians. The scope of Masters of Business Administration or MBA is huge today. The market for management education in the country is growing at the rate of about 12%. Currently, the number of business schools in India is over 1750, including public and private institutions, providers of distance education and foreign suppliers of education. Each year, these business schools are producing more than 100,000 graduates from management to meet the demand of different industries. But, this number is not sufficient compared to the growing demand for MBAs in India and many companies have also raised the issue of lack of sufficient manpower for its growth operations. There is a paradox. On one hand there are many unemployed educated graduates and

postgraduates and on the other hand many organizations have inadequate manpower and are on a recruitment spree.

Having known these issues, it is important to create and sustain the populations of MBA graduates that are capable, committed, diverse, and ultimately, employable. Hence, recruiters for MBA programs have to thoroughly scrutinize the profiles of students being recruited into the program. It is therefore important for the existence of this research to study and understand the skill expectations, that is, the work attributes and values desired by employers from MBAs.

This research should be able to provide some insights into the work attributes and values that are desirable of the MBA graduates for employability.

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of employers and their expectations from new MBA graduates regarding their attributes and work values needed for the entry-level positions in Information Technology sector.

Employability Attributes

Studies have shown that MBA graduates' attributes played the most important role in guiding firm's perceptions in employment other than the business schools' ranking and its program value. It was argued that recruiters highly valued MBA graduates who have the attributes such as strong communication and interpersonal skills, analytical and strategic thinking skills, success with past hires, leadership potential, fit with the corporate culture, likelihood of recruiting "stars", and being well rounded (World Street Journal, 2005; and Kane, 1993) Along the same line, Eberhardt, Moser, and Mc-Gee (1997) found evidence that decision-making capability, analytical skills, previous work experience, financial skills, and technical skills are among the ten most important attributes in the hiring of MBA graduates.

Of course, it was indicated other than the above attributes, generic competencies such as team working skills (Ball, 1989; Kanapathy, 2001; Boud and Middleton, 2003), cognitive skills like numerical skills, innovative skills, problem-solving skills, research skills (Day, 1988; Lam, 1994; Sear, 1994) and computer skills (Cheah and Yu, 1996; Lee, 2000; Owen and Bound, 2001) were also reported to be important criteria in the selection process of MBA graduates.

Empirical evidence also identifies practical-orientation abilities such as diversity awareness and global understanding, knowledge skills and flexibility as generic competencies that recruiters' will look out for. In addition, the graduate employees also expressed value-improving skills, practical orientation abilities and cognitive skills as being important for successful work performance. Of the work attributes listed, interpersonal skills has been repeatedly reported by different sources to be the attribute that is important for MBAs (Greatex and Phillips, 1989; Quek, 1996 & 2005; Savickas, 2000; Lee et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2002). On the other extreme, Ray and Stallard (1994) reported that human resource managers were concerned with job-related technical skills, human relations skills, knowledge of software applications, and knowledge of office information systems. Whereas, Asian employers wanted MBA graduates to be strong in entrepreneurial skills other than possesses

attributes such as creativity and innovativeness, leadership, communication and strategic planning skills (Fung, 1995).

Tanyel et al (1999) found significant differences between prospective employers and university faculty members in their perception of the relative importance of attributes. Prospective employers placed greater importance on oral communications, decision-making, and analytical ability, written communication, and creativity and creative writing whereas university faculty members attached greater importance to ethical values, project management, and persuasive ability. Employers and business school administrator ought to work together to produce MBA graduate of quality that will benefit everyone. Generic competencies enable employees to draw upon the strengths of their specialized know-how to resolve problems in the workplace. MBA graduates who have acquired generic competencies are often said to have an edge in employability over their counterparts who are lacking in such competencies (Quek, 2004). Indeed, other than the attributes listed, some researchers argued that the most important factors for recruiters are work experience and grades (Rynes, Trank, Lawson, and Ilies, 2003). Eberhardt et al. (1997) add empirical evidence to this line of thought, indicating that one of the greatest motives for firms in their decision not to contract MBA graduates is their lack of work experience. Kane's (1993) also agreed with Rynes et al., (2003) as he concluded that previous work experience and the grade point average were the most important factors in evaluating students, along with student interview performance.

Employability Work Values

Studies have examined the importance of work values and their relationships with work-related organizational behaviors. However, limited research has emphasized on important work values of MBA graduates for employability. Indeed employers recognized graduate employees who have good work values other than the ability to integrate and mobilize skills and abilities to suit the demands of the workplace (Lam, 1994; Quek and Soon, 1999). A study by Tay (2001) revealed that MBA graduates with good work ethics other than sound management and leadership skills as well as critical thinking and analytical abilities are more likely to be hired. However, personal ethics and integrity were also cited as important work values that MBA graduates should possess for employability (World Street Journal, 2005). In addition, Rynes, Trank, Lawson, and Ilies (2003) state that work values such as affability, camaraderie, extroversion, independent of coursework or knowledge are pertinent of an MBA graduates. Conscientiousness such as interested in the work, responsible, motivated, committed and independence; agreeableness such as sensitive to diversity, cultural and global issues as well as flexible were also cited as important work values of MBA graduates and selection criteria of recruiters' to hire or not to hire employees (Greatex and Phillips, 1989; Elizur, 1996; Quek, 1996 & 2005).

Research Design

To objectively assess the employers' preferred attributes and work values of MBA graduates in IT industry, empirical investigation was performed by means of questionnaires. The research focused on a empirical design as it involved understanding of:

- a) The current skill requirement of MBA students by corporate and in particular from the IT industry

- b) Understanding of skill gap that exists between what the corporate expect and what the institutes deliver in preparing its students for the corporate world.
- c) Evolving skill sets required by students. This was done by interviewing corporates, their suggestions thereof to arrive at requisite skill sets that MBA students need to possess at the end of the programme.

Sources of Data

Data was collected using both the Primary and secondary sources.

For secondary sources the research relied on extensive work done earlier by other researchers and articles in the form of :

- Research papers pertaining to skill set requirement by the industry from MBA students. These were obtained by referring to journals both of national and international publication.
- Specific journals and articles from the field of education, Higher education in particular were accessed.
- Reports of FICCI¹ on skill gap.
- Publications by the World Bank²
- Reports on the Committees formed by the Government of India on higher education.
- Text books and magazines of relevance to the research topic

The particulars of references are documented in Bibliography

The Primary Data has been collected using a structured Questionnaire. The questionnaire was formulated based on

- a) Referring to relevant work as mentioned above. The skills set arrived to formed part of the questionnaire.
- b) Series of discussion with Senior Professors at IMED³. The outcome of the deliberations helped shape the tool for collection of data.

Sampling Plan

The study was conducted at Pune city, India. It focused on organizations within the IT Industry. The reason for choosing the IT industry alone was done based on the following:

- a) That a single industry would limit the scope of coverage of organizations
- b) That the IT industry is among the major recruiting industry in India and Pune
- c) That Pune has a large concentration of IT companies in and around
- d) That the skill sets required in the IT industry may be benchmarks to follow for some other industries such as the broad services industry which significantly contributes to the Indian economy.

¹ FICCI – Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry. FICCI has conducted several research based surveys on corporate expectations from B-Schools along with NMIMS (Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies). These reports are available in the website of FICCI

² The World Bank regularly conducts research on higher education, its development, and its contribution to the economy. These reports are published on a yearly basis for each nation.

³ IMED – Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship Development, Pune. This institute is perhaps one of the oldest B-School in Western Maharashtra began in 1978 and is a constituent unit of Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pune.

The mode of inquiry adopted for the fieldwork was based upon judgmental purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) in which questionnaires were emailed to Human Resource managers, Heads of Department, recruiters or any personnel with hiring decisions in IT industry in Pune. These officials formed the most appropriate respondents for the research work as they are involved in hiring and recruiting of staff for various departments on a regular basis. The skill relevance will be most felt by the said respondents and hence provide valuable inputs to the research. Having this in mind care was taken to consider those respondents who had a minimum work experience of 5 years in the HR⁴ domain. This experience would necessarily translate to providing requisite skill sets for aspiring MBA students.

Using judgmental purposive sampling, twenty two organizations in the IT industry were considered for the study, the sampling frame being the IT companies located in Pune, the list of which was obtained from MCCIA⁵. A Total of 40 officials were sent emails consisting of the questionnaire. Twenty five of the officials responded to the survey representing a high response rate thereof. The participation of the respondents was positive as they contributed to evolving skill sets for new MBA employees to follow.

Important Attributes Expected From MBA Graduates

The findings of this study showed that the top two extremely important attributes/skills expected from a MBA graduate are good communication skills and interpersonal skills.

The following skills (in order of preference) were found to be very important: leadership skills, decision making skills, presentation skills, ability to work in team, entrepreneurial spirit, analytical and critical thinking, corporate etiquette, business acumen/domain knowledge, creativity and innovation, basic educational background, previous work experience, and ability to understand global business practices.

Additionally, employers also considered MBA result, aptitude for research, extra-curricular activities and exposure to ERP/CRM/IT/Business applications to be important.

Findings

For the following section readers should interpret the findings using the following Indicators:

- 1.0 – 1.49 = Least important
- 1.50 – 2.49 = Somewhat Important
- 2.50 – 3.49 = Important
- 3.50 – 4.49 = Very Important, and
- 4.50 – 5.0 = Extremely Important

Important Attributes Expected From MBA Graduates

As seen in Table 1, there are eighteen (18) important attributes of MBA graduates listed in their order of importance.

⁴ HR – Human Resource domain

⁵ MCCIA – Maharashtra Chambers of Commerce Industry and Agriculture, Pune. It has an extensive library and consists of relevant information about organization situated in Pune.

TABLE 1: IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTES OF MBA GRADUATES FOR EMPLOYABILITY

S. NO.	ATTRIBUTES	MEAN	S.D.
1	Communication Skills	4.50	0.79
2	Interpersonal skills	4.50	0.62
3	Leadership Skills	4.18	0.73
4	Decision making skills	4.17	0.99
5	Presentation Skills	4.11	0.68
6	Ability to work in a team	4.00	0.84
7	Entrepreneurial Spirit	3.89	0.58
8	Analytical & Critical Thinking	3.78	0.73
9	Corporate Etiquette	3.72	0.89
10	Business Accumen/ Domain Knowledge	3.67	1.08
11	Creativity & Innovation	3.61	0.70
12	Basic educational background (like engineering, commerce etc)	3.61	1.04
13	Previous Work experience	3.61	1.09
14	Able to understand global business practices	3.61	0.85
15	MBA Result	3.39	0.61
16	Aptitude for Research	3.33	0.97
17	Extracurricular Activities	3.22	0.88
18	Exposure to ERP, CRM or business applications/ IT Exposure	3.11	1.18

Scale: 1 = Least Important/Unimportant, 2 = Somewhat Important, 3 = Important, 4 = Very Important, 5 = Extremely Important

Important Attributes Expected From MBA Graduates

In the business world or any workplace, employees with good work values are highly sought. In this study, work values of MBA graduates for employability are listed in Table-2 in their order of importance according to respondents' degree of responses.

Work values such as the positive attitude towards work, ability to work under pressure and high motivation towards work are considered as the three extremely important values by employers.

Other work values that employers believe as very important are drive for achievement, openness for change, ability to influence, being competitive, perseverance, and pace and independence.

The ethical values were also considered as important by the respondents.

Scale: 1 = Least Important/Unimportant, 2 = Somewhat Important, 3 = Important, 4 = Very Important, 5 = Extremely Important

TABLE 2: IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS WORK VALUES FOR EMPLOYABILITY

S.NO.	WORK VALUES	MEAN	S.D.
1	Positive work attitude	4.61	0.50
2	Able to work under pressure	4.50	0.62
3	Highly motivated	4.50	0.62
4	Drive for achievement	4.39	0.78
5	Open to change	4.17	0.62
6	Ability to influence	4.11	0.76
7	Competitive	4.11	0.76
8	Perseverance	3.94	0.80
9	Pace & Independence	3.89	0.83
10	Ethical	3.44	0.78

Suggestions

The skill expectations of corporate from new MBA graduates have been studied and analyzed in the research. The following have been the findings:

The communication skills and interpersonal skills have topped the list of expectations of employers from the new MBA graduate and are considered to be extremely important in the selection procedure. Among the other very important attributes are leadership skills, decision making skills, presentation skills, ability to work in team, entrepreneurial spirit, analytical and critical thinking, corporate etiquette, business acumen/domain knowledge, creativity and innovation, basic educational background, previous work experience, and ability to understand global business practices. Some other attributes such as MBA result, aptitude for research, extra-curricular activities and exposure to ERP/CRM/IT/Business applications were also considered by the employers.

Amongst the work values, the positive work attitude, ability to work under pressure and highly motivated values topped the expectations of employers and were judged as extremely important while selecting a MBA. Other work values that employers believe as very important are drive for achievement, openness for change, ability to influence, being competitive, perseverance, and pace and independence. The ethical values were also considered as important by the respondents.

In order to improve the employability of the MBA graduates, the students and MBA institutions both need to work on the skills expected by corporate from the MBA graduates. After analyzing the expectations of the industry from the management graduates, it can be suggested MBA students should be involved in various kinds of activities throughout their programme in order to enhance their skill set and hence the employability.

The kinds of activities that can go into skill augmentation have been classified under three broad types of activities :

1. Direction based activities
2. Involvement based activities
3. Experiential based activities

1. The Direction Based Learning

The direction based learning as the name suggests takes place the learners are under instructions and they are directed or guided by some knowledgeable instructor. The activities under this category can help in the enhancement of various below mentioned skills:

- It has been put forward by the employers that the communication skills of the MBA graduates is not up to the expectation level. The reason behind this could be that in India we have students from other than english medium schools and they may have problem in communicating in english. Therefore, the institutes should come up with classes/courses to enhance the communication skills of the students if required so as to improve their employability. Apart from verbal communication, strong written communication is also required by professionals. The seminars and workshops specially targeted on same can work out very well in this direction.
- Guest lectures, seminars, cross functional sessions etc. can be arranged in order to enhance the domain knowledge of the students.
- Also the workshops can be arranged for the students to facilitate the experimental learning of various tools and techniques used by the corporate in their day-to day functions.

Therefore, the direction based learning through the above mentioned activities can help the students in improving their communication skills, domain knowledge and facilitate experimental learning.

2. Involvement based activities

Involvement based learning takes place when the learner himself is involved in working on some assignment and learns and enhances his skills through these activities/assignments. The activities under this head are those activities in which the learner is directly involved.

- The institutes should come up with the idea of committee formation. Various committees like placement committee, event organizing committee, cultural committee, library committee etc. can be formed by the students with the help of some faculty as the guiding partner. This would make the students take initiative and responsibility of work to be done. This will not only enhance the interpersonal skills of the students and their ability to work in teams but also the leadership skills of the students can be developed.
- Participation in seminars and giving presentations would improve their ability to demonstrate, presentation skills and self confidence.

- Case studies, role plays and business games can perk up their analytical and critical thinking ability and decision making skills. These activities would give the students a chance to think in context of the real time industry problems and analyze them from all aspects and take decisions in secured artificial environment and get feedback on same. It makes a person critically think about and explore all the possible solutions with their respective pros and cons and develops and improves the problem solving skills of the individuals.
- Team building exercises can also be arranged frequently in order to make students good team players.

Hence, the involvement based learning with the help of mentioned activities can help the students improve upon their confidence and initiating skills. The ability to influence, leadership ability, interpersonal skills and ability to perform in team are also improved greatly. Apart from this, the students' ability to demonstrate and presentation skills, decision making ability and analytical and critical thinking can be significantly enhanced.

3. Experiential based activities

Experiential skill enhancement occurs through individual's direct experience. This is related to a meaning making process of the student's direct experience wherein the students learn from the observations and experiences rather than reading and classroom instructions.

- The action or adventure learning and sports events make the students competitive and can help the students learn the ability to work in teams.
- Offsite visits, that is, field visits, industry visits etc. augment the ability to understand the work practices. The students can learn how the tasks are being carried out in various industries and make them aware of the new developments in industries.
- The internships and trainings can help the students in enhancing on the corporate etiquette. The students get exposed to the profession practically and understand how the jobs are carried out precisely. This exposure is very different from the bookish knowledge and helps the students greatly.
- Research projects and business plans enhance the technical know-how, analytical and critical thinking, risk taking ability and entrepreneurship spirit. They make a student work on, study and explore the various facets of the businesses and critically think and analyse the same. Making business plans can develop the risk taking ability and entrepreneurial spirit.

Therefore, the experiential learning makes a student competitive. These activities such as those mentioned above enhance the technical knowhow and ability to understand the work processes and analytical and critical thinking ability. They give chance to the students to perk up their risk taking ability, corporate etiquette and entrepreneurial spirit.

The institutes and students both should therefore take keen interest in all the above mentioned activities in order to enhance the employability of the MBA graduates.

Conclusion

It is clear from the findings of this study that employers placed high emphasis on quality MBA graduates with good attributes and work values in their hiring and selection process.

The communication skills and interpersonal skills have topped the list of expectations of employers from the new MBA graduate and are considered to be extremely important in the selection procedure. Among the other very important attributes are leadership skills, decision making skills, presentation skills, ability to work in team, entrepreneurial spirit, analytical and critical thinking, corporate etiquette, business acumen/domain knowledge, creativity and innovation, basic educational background, previous work experience, and ability to understand global business practices.

Subsequently, lower on the list, some other attributes such as MBA result, aptitude for research, extra-curricular activities and exposure to ERP/CRM/IT/Business applications were also considered by the employers but judged to be less important than the above mentioned attributes.

Amongst the work values, the positive work attitude, ability to work under pressure and highly motivated values topped the expectations of employers and were judged as extremely important while selecting a MBA. Other work values that employers believe as very important are drive for achievement, openness for change, ability to influence, being competitive, perseverance, and pace and independence. The ethical values were also considered as important by the respondents.

Right cultural fitment and multi-tasking skills were amongst other important aspects that employers consider while evaluating and judging a candidate.

In this case, implications exist for both MBA students and MBA provider institutions.

MBA students should strive to understand the contents and curriculum of the MBA programs and put in place the criteria for employment selection in order to reflect desired outcomes of the MBA programs.

However, it is pertinent to understand that the quality of graduates largely depends on the effectiveness of the MBA programs. Therefore, graduate business schools or MBA program providers, play a critical role to ensure high quality MBA programs that could support the needs of the organizations/industry.

Having now understood the expectations from some of the employers on the work attributes and values that are desirable, graduate business schools or MBA program providers may need to study and revamp their procedures and syllabus where necessary. Improvement in the behavioral and work-related attributes of executives must remain the focus of all MBA business schools. Current or potential MBA students should take the opportunities to reevaluate and improve on their weaknesses to meet the employers' requirement and thus becoming more employable.

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