

Industry Concerns on Graduates' Recruitment!



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When hiring fresh graduates, I use a simple model to guide: “AAA” model.

I believe this simple model is useful for explaining what the industry expects from fresh graduate.

First ‘A’ is for Attitudes because finally, attitudes matter the most

“Good Attitudes” is about personality traits or qualities such as integrity, initiatives, enthusiasm, passion for work, persistence, endurance, resourcefulness and so on, but not merely “Yes” or “Can do” attitude. The significance of these traits for the success of organizations as well as individuals is well researched and documented.

Attitude is something impossible to change, if not at least difficult to change. Attitudes are strongly

connected to values, belief, social and cultural systems of people. The attitudes have developed over a long period. Attitude is a highly subjective area and therefore not possible to measure rationally, but “Good Attitude” is the most sought from any employees irrespective of the type of job or discipline. The research say that teaching attitudes, particularly for adults is not easy. Therefore, industries prefer to hire fresh graduates who can demonstrate right attitudes believing that they can be trained and nurtured according to the requirements of the job and the company culture.



Second ‘A’ is for Ability without which, nothing can be done

To perform any sort of a job or task (s) people should have some sort of “Ability”, in other word “Capability” (physical and mental). Ability is all about skills and knowledge that are required to perform a particular task (s) or job. This is often discussed as “Hard Skills” and “Soft Skills”.

Hard skills refer to the technical aspects/techniques/ technical knowledge that require performing a particular task(s)/job. These are

often teachable, measurable and easy to check by asking equations and through a test, etc. The degree/professional/vocational certificate is a fine testimony to prove that they have gained a reasonable level of hard skills in their respective areas.

Soft skills on the other hand, non-technical, less measurable, and attributed to social skills. Examples of soft skills are interpersonal skills, communication skills, team skills, and leadership skills etc. Both ‘Hard Skills’ and ‘Soft Skills’ are vital for the

success of organizations as well as individuals. Sometime attitudes are also considered as soft skills because these are closely related. Skills can be distinguished further as “Generic Skills” and “Specific Skills”. Examples of generic skills; English language skills (because it’s the working language in most of the private sector corporation), IT literacy, basic numerical skills, basic analytical skills etc. Examples of specific skills; Working knowledge of a special software package, operating knowledge of special machine etc.



Third 'A' is for Application, without which, everything is just concepts

Application of Knowledge and Skills to overcome organizational challenges and issues is another critical area. One can say this is also a part of soft skills, but for me this is a combination of both first two 'A's. I take this as a separate area due to the significant nature of the matter. This is one of the areas that the industries worry about. We often hear managers' criticisms about the fresh graduates' lack of practical knowledge. What they mean by that is the application of knowledge into practical problems. This is also a special and vital skill. Therefore, recruiters need to think of this area when hiring people. Those who can apply their knowledge into the work settings and solve problems can help organizations better and they have better chances of progressing in the career.

According to the industries and types/nature of job, level of emphasis over various Attitudes, Abilities and Applications may vary, but often some are equally important across industries and jobs. This AAA model provides basic but logical approach to guide industry recruiters. The potential graduates can use this model as a basis for understanding industry requirements and plan their development. Need not to explain how competitive the employment market is today and how competition will be in the future. The industry is well aware that the contribution of fresh graduates is very limited in their early stage of career. Still, they are willing to spend additional time and money on fresh graduates due to their vision for



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the future. Employers recruit fresh graduates not only for a current routine type of a job, but with a vision to groom them for a future job. Because of that reason, the most of the big companies recruit fresh graduates under Management Trainee programmes. When selecting candidates for these programmes, priority is given for attitudes and soft skills because if attitudes are right, other problems can be fixed. Therefore, famous quote of “Hire for Attitudes Train for Skills” is very valid for graduate recruitments.

Identifying where the problem is important

Our graduates are generally well equipped with subject/technical knowledge and IQ because of our education and examination system aiming in that direction. Often employers / managers criticise about graduates’ attitudes and soft skills not hard skills. Employers can quickly improve hard skills that have already gained from graduate studies, through experience and workplace training programmes, but not so for attitudes and soft skills. Large stable organizations have budgets/resources for employee development programmes, but SMEs does not have that capacity. SMEs cover the largest part of the employment market of Sri Lanka.

Researchers find that demand for soft skills is increasing. Employers seek soft skills than hard skills. The reason for that is, that most of the workplace issues when analyse, deep rooted in employees’ attitudes and soft skills. This does not mean that hard skills are not important, but it indicates the Gap: the deficiency of our graduates. However, assessing attitudes and soft skills are always difficult and challenging. Recruiters often say; how can we

judge persons’ Attitudes and soft skills in a 15-20 minute interview? Recruiters are often pressurised to fill the workforce shortages within a short notice.

On the other hand, we experience that most new recruits struggle due to issues of their attitudes and soft skills even they were somehow selected. Either they leave the company shortly or they stay with frustration and dissatisfaction. The majority of graduates rejected at the interview stage or terminated or resigned in their often 1st year of career. There is also a kind of negative opinion about graduates coming from the government university system because of their attitudinal issues. On the other hand, there is a general belief that private sector graduates/foreign graduates perform better than public sector graduates do. Therefore, there is a predisposition to recruit graduates from foreign universities / professional bodies than from local universities. From one hand, industries always complain that there is a shortage of professionals and skill people. From the other hand, we see young graduates struggling in finding job opportunities. Finally, these situations may lead to economic and social crisis.

All should work together to find solutions

Succi & Canov (2020) identify top 20 soft skills that are required to enhance graduate employability in selected European contexts based on the perceptions of industry and students. According to this study, top 20 skills were ranked based on the mean values (Graph 1). These studies provide valuable insights and learning opportunities. Those who can demonstrate the highest level of

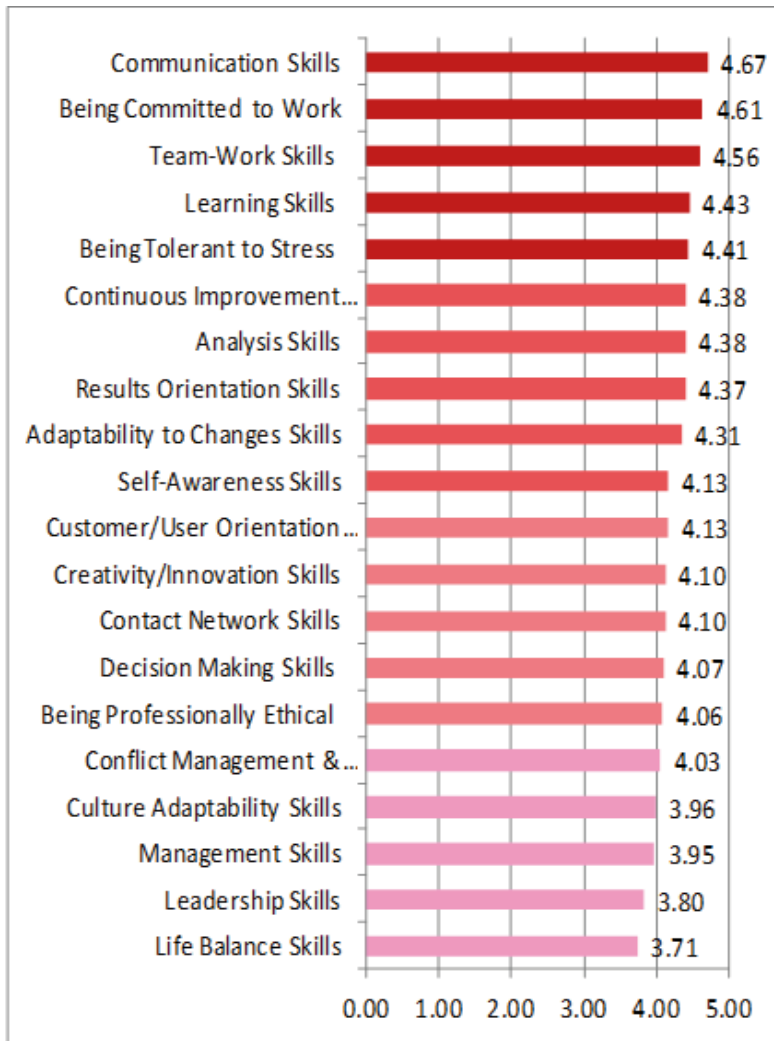


Figure 1: Soft Skills to enhance graduate employability
 Source: Succi & Canovi (2019)

needed to be taken care of. If our education system can give better room for development of required attitudes and soft skills, employability can be further improved. Anyway, these soft skills have become life skills more than ever and need for survival. The success rate of the graduate can also be increased and they will be able seek foreign opportunities and survive in any difficult situation.

Evaluating attitudes and soft skills are vital for organizations as well as individuals, but it is always challenging. The research indicate that rigorous recruitment strategy is associated with firms' success and effectiveness. Successful companies follow a rigorous recruitment mechanism in order to scrutinize and select the candidate with the right attitudes and skills, especially for the categories of executive, management and fresh graduate who will be taking over higher responsibilities in future.

Employers usually like to invest in specific skills, but not in generic skills and believe that education system of the country should address these issues. On the other hand, some scholars believe that industry need to take care of skills required for their industries. We need to understand these gaps & mismatches and find remedies. For this, industry, academics and policy makers all should work together according to a national policy.

Reference

Succi, C., & Canovi, M. (2019). *Soft skills to enhance graduate employability: comparing students and employers' perceptions. Studies in Higher Education, 45(9), 1834-1847.*

soft skills and good attitudes get the preference in the interviews, and there is a higher chance of being successful in the future.

Our parents also need to understand this and put extra effort to develop these areas starting from the young age. The students during their stay at universities, they need to further sharpen and develop them. Our university system is doing a great job and our graduates and scholars are performing well in foreign contexts. However, there is a larger crowd that

