Development of Soft Skills: Transition from University to the Workplace in ASEAN Community Era

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1. Introduction

Soft skills are increasing becoming the hard skills of today's work force. It is just not enough to be highly trained in technical skills, without developing the softer, inter-personal and relationship-building skills that help people to communicate and collaborative effectively. These people skills are more critical than ever as organizations struggle to find meaningful ways to remain competitive and be productive. Teamwork, leadership, and communication are underpinned by soft skills development. Since each is an essential element for organizational and personal success, developing these skills is very important and does matter... a lot.

To get, and keep, a job you typically need a repertoire of technical skills. Dentists need to know how to fill cavities. Secretaries need to type 100+ words per minute. Accountants need to be certified. Beyond the technical skills, though, which dentist do you go to? The one who is pleasant and takes time to answer your questions; or the one who treats you like a number in a long line of numbered mouths? Which secretary do you retain when times are lean? The one whose attitude is positive and upbeat, and who is always willing to help; or the one who is inflexible and has a hard time admitting mistakes? Likewise, think about accountants. The one who has a great work ethic and encourages his colleagues is the one who will, most likely, excel in his position and organization.

In these situations, and all the others like them, it's the soft skills that matter. While your technical skills may get your foot in the door, your people skills are what open most of the doors to come. Your work ethic, your attitude, your communication skills, your emotional intelligence and a whole host of other personal attributes are the soft skills that are crucial for career success.

With these soft skills you can excel as a leader. Problem solving, delegating, motivating, and team building are all much easier if you have good soft skills. Knowing how to get along with people – and displaying a positive attitude – are crucial for success. The problem is, the importance of these soft

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skills is often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills. For some reason, organizations seem to expect people know how to behave on the job. They tend to assume that everyone knows and understands the importance of being on time, taking initiative, being friendly, and producing high quality work. Assuming that soft skillsare universal, leads to much frustration. That's why it is so important to focus as much on soft skills training and development as you do on traditional hard skills.

2. Graduates Lack of Soft Skills

In today's business environment, soft skills such as leadership, communication, team building, critical thinking and problem solving, entrepreneurial interest have become critical in hiring and promoting employees to key positions [1]. Employers from all over Europe reported that they want their employees to have general transferable skills, and they are less concerned with their knowledge and expertise than with their behaviour [2]. Employers want fast learners who are independent with good communication and presentation skills and who can deliver.

According to Szul [3], employers assert that too many high school, college and university graduates do not possess the skills necessary to perform productively on the job without extensive employer training. Soft skills are practically required in all occupation, especially when one has reached the level of a manager, executive, or agency owner which requires them to work with others. Therefore, in the process of selecting and hiring candidates, organization will look for someone with good people skills and one who is a team player.

In Malaysia, the situation with regard to graduate unemployment has raised concerns among the policy makers and the general public. The Department of Statistics Malaysia [4] estimated the number of unemployed people with a university degree at 31,000 or 8.8% of the 353,000 total unemployed in Malaysia. As of 2010, the figure remained high with 30,000 graduates unable to secure a job 6 months after graduation [5]. Alarmingly, the overwhelming majority of unemployed graduates derive from local public institutions of higher learning. The Malaysian government has ascribed the increasing number of jobless graduates to a low 'product quality' by the country's Institutions of Higher Learning; it has asserted that the new graduates lack 'expertise and skills, especially soft skills, required by employers and competitive job markets' [6].

In an attempt to remedy the situation, in 2006, the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (MOHE), recommended that all public institutions of higher learning in the country incorporate soft skills training into their curricula. In its Soft Skills Development Module for Malaysian Institutions of higher learning, the Ministry of Higher Education [6] has identified 34 soft skills that university students are expected to acquire during their studies.

3. The Soft Skills Gap – Do You Have One?

When your workforce has lots of technical skills but an absence of soft skills, you have a soft skills gap. Soft skills are what accompany the hard skills, and help your organization use its technical expertise to full advantage. Below are a few examples to show that you are having soft skills gap:

- If you are really good at getting clients, and not so good at retaining them, chances are you have a soft skills gap.
- If you have lots of staff turnover and have to keep retraining people, chances are you have a soft skills gap.
- When you have lots of managers but no real leaders – that's a soft skills gap.

In fact, whenever you are unable to capitalize on the wealth of knowledge, experience and proficiency within your team, then you should be assessing the level of communication and interpersonal skills that are present in your organization. The workplace has evolved an interpersonal dynamic that cannot be ignored. The acts of listening, presenting ideas, resolving conflict, and fostering an open and honest work environment all come down to knowing how to build and maintain relationships with people. It is those relationships that allow people to participate fully in team projects, show appreciation for others, and enlist support for their projects.It is important for you to recognize the vital role soft skills play within your team and not only work on developing them within yourself, but encourage their development throughout the organization. Areas to examine and evaluate include:

- Personal accountability
- The degree of collaboration
- Interpersonal negotiation skills
- Conflict resolution
- People's adaptability and flexibility
- The clarity of communications
- Creative thinking
- Inclusion
- Coaching and mentoring

The more of these things you see around you, the better people's soft skills are likely to be within your organization. These all have a significant impact on the attitude a person brings to interactions with clients, customers, colleagues, supervisors, and other stakeholders. The more positive someone's attitude is, the better that person's relationships will be. That's what fosters great team performance, and leads people to contribute strongly to the organization's vision and strategy.

4. How to Improve Soft Skills

Soft skills revolve around personal relationships, character, and attitude. By developing these skills, you can increase your work performance, build stronger relationships, and work toward earning a promotion. If you are finding that some of these soft skills do not come naturally to you, you need to learn how to improve soft skills

so they will become a natural reflex for you in dealing with people every day.

4.1 Developing Communication Skills

Your goal should be to communicate clearly through written, oral, and nonverbal communication. Start simply by being aware of how others feel when they are around you or are talking with you.

- Make eye contact: Acknowledge someone else's presence by looking them in the eye, especially if they just walked into the room or you pass them in a hallway. Look at them when they are talking to you. Do not let your eyes wander around the room.
- Monitor your body language: Show interest by sitting up and leaning forward. Resist the urge to tap your fingers or foot. Mimic the posture of the person with whom you are talking to create a comfortable environment.
- Practice speaking: This includes both public speaking and conversational speaking. Be conscious of your pace and volume when speaking. If you are uneasy in personal relationships, practice with a close friend or family member. If you are nervous about speaking in public, volunteer to give presentations within a smaller group and work your way up to a larger one.
- Develop your writing skills. Proofread your emails, letters, and notes. Learn correct spelling and word usage. Vary your sentence structures. Be concise instead of elaborate.

4.2 Practice Active Listening Skills

Listening requires focus and self-discipline. We listen for many different reasons:

i. To understand instructions

ii. To empathize with another individual, or

iii. To judge whether a plan is good or not.

Regardless of the reason you are listening, there are several things to keep in mind:

- Paraphrase and ask questions to learn more about what someone is telling you. This demonstrates interest and focus. It also helps you understand the situation.
- Take notes when appropriate. This shows that the subject matter is important to you. Practice taking notes in team meetings or staff training sessions.
- Do not interrupt other people. Respect them by letting them finish saying what they are saying.
- Pay attention to the other person's body language. Observe their posture, tone of voice, eye contact (or lack thereof), gestures, and facial expressions.

4.3 Build Relationship

Interpersonal skills are important in the workplace, especially since so many organizations are designed around teams and departments. Seek to build friendships with peers, supervisors, clients, and business partners.

- Befriend colleagues: Greet them when they get to work. Invite them to lunch or coffee. Talk for a few minutes in the break room as you are getting a drink. Participate in work events like softball clubs, staff lunches, and training days. Stay away from gossip. It only destroys relationships.
- Learn to manage conflict in a healthy way: Address issues with the individual(s) involved in a private manner. Approach the discussion in a non-judgmental, but assertive manner. Ask questions and try to understand their side of the story. Work together to find a solution.
- Network with people inside and outside your organization: Ask people about their jobs. Share a bit about what you do. Note connections and ways you could potentially help each other. Exchange contact information and be sure to follow up with them.

4.4 Practice Leading

Leadership is simply influencing other people. As such, leadership skills can be used by any employee at any level in the organization.

- Observe your own supervisor and note how that individual leads your team. Find positive things that person does and emulate them in your own work.
- Practice leading in small group discussions by asking your teammates questions and bringing quieter members into the conversation.
- Set the example for others by displaying a positive attitude in difficult situations. Remain calm in moments of crisis. Talk about concerns one-on-one with your supervisor instead of in front of the entire team.

4.5 Take Initiative

Demonstrate responsibility and enthusiasm for your job by striving to go the extra mile. This starts by finishing work without constant reminders from your supervisor.

- Do tasks without being asked by someone else: Look around, see what needs to be done, and do it. If a co-worker has a large project and you have some time on your hands, volunteer to help.
- Seek more challenging work: Strive to develop your technical skills. Learn more about your organization. Ask a co-worker about their department. Take a

class, read a blog, or subscribe to a magazine in your field of work.

5. Relationship between Soft Skills and Employability

Achieving the goals of enhanced student learning and job readiness is always subject to review from all levels. Research shows that affective skills such as to communicate effectively, to demonstrate a positive work ethics, to solve problem and able to work in a team are the soft skills demanded by the employers [7]. Concentrating on soft skills as well as academic and technical skills, requiring our students to demonstrate leaning mastery in a variety of venues will enhance their workplace readiness. Job-related social skills, is increasingly relevant to occupational sphere [8], owing to the development of service industries and their growing importance in the system of post-industrial economies. Interpersonal skills become highly relevant for employment and job performance [9]. Teamwork, problem-solving skills, communication or personnel initiatives are determinant factors in the job market of the service economy.

However, the lack of soft skills seems to be an affliction among high school and university graduates [10-11]. According to past researchers, graduates now are lacking in both technical knowledge and soft skills [12-14]. BERNAMA, The Malaysian National News Agency, reported that

"Some university graduates are unemployed because they do not possess the soft skills required by employers in the country. Apart from their week command of the English language, the graduates were found to be narrow-minded, lacking leadership, spirit de corps and unable to communicate well" [15]

The former Higher Education Minister, DatukMustapa Mohamed in the year 2007 made a statement after his dialogues with employers in the country. The statement claimed that the university graduates were unemployable because they have no soft skills [15]. The government has realized that to decrease the unemployment rate and to achieve sustainable development require the economy to be supported by highly trained people, able to rapidly meet the needs of the market [6,16]. Therefore, the need in understanding soft skills of employees at the workplace has become the main concern and interest of educational researchers. The supply of our nation future workforce comes from schools and universities. Studies is a preparatory education for tertiary education. Students before enrol to study have acquired hard skills and soft skills in secondary school studies.

6. Relationship between Education and Soft Skills

In the process of learning knowledge and competencies in educational institutions, students acquire certain values enabling them to perform various tasks. When the students graduate with the added values, they become

products of the institution or human resource at the job market. Equipped with the knowledge and competencies they learnt in educational institutions, they apply the knowledge and competencies in the workplace [17].

The nation future workforce is the output of educational institutions. As nation envisions the move towards the information era, the key challenge of our education today is building knowledge-based and skilled workforce for the future. Precisely, the crucial role of education is building a workforce with the competencies required in our future workplace [18-19].

The world is moving towards a knowledge-based workforce. Malaysia's economy changes towards more knowledge- and service-based industries, so does the landscape of the employment market [20]. New jobs require the ability of individual to interpret as well as absorb complex information. Individuals are required to consistently perform at the highest levels of cognitive domain. Systematic and abstract knowledge is a necessity for successful career and academic performance. The ability to extract and apply new information from ever-changing experiences appears to be one of the most important skills an employee will need in order to effectively confront new technological advancements.

Integrating marketable workplace skills into a core curriculum is a way for educators to serve all students from those who work directly after high school graduation to the college bound [21]. Preparation of students to become competent workers in a new competitive environment shifts the emphasis of teaching and assessing from routine procedural task to a higher level of thinking and behaviour patterns.

7. Definition of Soft Skills

7.1 General Definition

The term 'soft skills' to several synonyms such as personal transferable skills, key skills, common skills and work or employment related skills [22]. Based on the common terms as reported by NCVER [23], the definition found are shown in Table 1

Table 1 Definition of Terms

Terms	Definition	Reported by
Employability skills (generic skills, capabilities, or key competencies)	...skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia [24]
Employability skills	The possession by an individual of the qualities and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers thereby help to realise his or her aspirations and potential at work.	Confederation of British Industry [25]
Key competencies	...competencies essential for effective participation in the emerging patterns of work and work organization. They focus on the capacity to apply knowledge and skills in an integrated way in work situations. They apply to work generally rather than being specific to work in particular occupations or industries. They are not only essential for effective participation in further education and in adult life more generally.	Australian Education Council [26]

Table 2 shows a compilation of the various elements of soft skills or generic skills gathered from several literatures.

Table 2 Dimensions of Soft Skills

Terms	Dimension	Researchers/Authors
Generic skills	-Basic/fundamental skills -People-related skills -Conceptual/thinking skills -Personal skills and attributes -Skills related to the business world -Skills related to the community	NCVER [23]
Employability skills	-Basic skills -Oral communications, reading, basic arithmetic and writing -Higher-order thinking skills -Problem solving, learning skills, creative, innovative thinking, decision making -Affective skills and traits -Dependability/responsibility, positive attitude, conscientiousness, punctuality, efficiency, interpersonal skills, cooperation, teamwork, self-confidence, positive self-image, adaptability, flexibility, enthusiasm, motivation, self-discipline, self-management, appropriate dress, grooming, honesty, integrity and ability to work without supervision.	Cotton [27]

Table 2 Dimensions of Soft Skills (Cont.)

Soft skills	-Communicative skills -People development/coaching -Leadership ability -Teamwork/collaboration -Initiative -Personal effectiveness/personal mastery -Planning and organizing -Presentation skills	Crosbie [28]
Competencies	-Analytical skills -Communication skills (Persuasion, listening and reporting) -Motivational skills -Self-management -Emotional intelligence -Time management skills	McGregor, Tweed & Pech [29]
Core/Key/Generic skills	-Communication -Critical thinking -Teamwork -Problem solving	Billing [30]

7.2 ***Specific Definition in Malaysian Context***

Soft skills is generic skills that included the cognitive elements associated with non-academic skills [6]. Though there are no specific soft skills, however majority of these skills are associated with positive values, leadership skills, team work force, communicative skills and life-long learning. Soft skills are identified to be the most critical skills in the current global job market especially in a fast moved era of technology [6].

Vast research and expert opinions were sought in the effort to determine the specific soft skills to be implemented and used in higher institutions of learning in Malaysia. Based on the research findings obtained, seven soft skills have been identified and chosen to be implemented to all institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. They are:

i. Communicative skills.
ii. Thinking skills and Problem solving skills.
iii. Team work force
iv. Life-long learning and Information Management
v. Entrepreneur skill
vi. Ethics, moral and professionalism
vii. Leadership skills

[6]

Each of the above soft skills comprised of several sub-skills. These sub-skills are divided into two categories of implementation. The first category delineates the soft skills that every individual **must have** and the second category represents soft skills that are **good to have.** Despite the emphasis being put on the soft skills that must be present (**must have**), it is also encouraged to inculcate the soft skills that are **good to have.** All elements of soft skills that have been suggested by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia must be acquired by each student and evaluated effectively and comprehensively.

The **must have** (MHSS) soft skills must be acquired by each and every individual in the institutions of higher learning without which, the student is regarded as incompetent in the above skill. The **good to have** (GHSS) soft skills can be regarded as the additional generic skills and a bonus to the student. These skills are expected to be acquired by the students together with the **must have** soft skills. Table 1-7 gives a detail description of the different categories of implementation for each of the sub-skills for the respective seven soft skills.

Whatever the term used, and in whichever country the term is used, the primary purpose is to provide students with the skills that will enable them to be hired and to survive in the workplace as well as in their life. According to Dench [31], all the terms used implied certain aspects of those skills and somewhat related to a person's behaviour. They are not specific to particular occupations, they are not transferable between employers and between occupation, and they are not central to a person's ability to operate in employment. In conclusion, industries need graduates who seize relevant soft skills to survive in the competitive human capital environment, locally and internationally.

Communicative skills involved effective communication in National (Malay) and English language under different contexts and with different communicative participants. There are eight communicative skills as stated in Table 3

Table 3 Description on Communicative Skills

Level	Skills	Description
CS1	MHSS	Ability to deliver idea clearly, effectively and with confidence either orally or in writing.
CS2	MHSS	Ability to practice active listening skill and respond.
CS3	MHSS	Ability to present clearly and confidently to the audience.
CS4	GHSS	Ability to use technology during presentation.
CS5	GHSS	Ability to discuss and arrive at a consensus.
CS6	GHSS	Ability to communicate with individual from a different cultural background.
CS7	GHSS	Ability to expand one's own communicative skill.
CS8	GHSS	Ability to use non-oral skills.

Thinking skills and problem solving skills (CTPS) involved the ability of thinking critically, creatively, analytically, and ability to apply understanding and knowledge into new and different problems. Description for seven level of CTPS skills as in Table 4 below:

Table 4 Description on Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills

Level	Skills	Description
CTPS1	MHSS	Ability to identify and analyse problems in difficult situation and make justifiable evaluation.
CTPS2	MHSS	Ability to expand and improve thinking skills such as explanation, analysis and evaluate discussion.
CTPS3	MHSS	Ability to find ideas and look for alternative solutions.
CTPS4	GHSS	Ability to think beyond.
CTPS5	GHSS	Ability to make conclusion based on valid proof.
CTPS6	GHSS	Ability to withstand and give full responsibility.
CTPS7	GHSS	Ability to understand and accommodate oneself to the varied working environment.

Team work skills involved the abilities to cooperate with other people from various socio-cultural background to achieve the same goal. Description on the five level of team work skills (TS) as in Table 5 below:

Table 5 Description on Team Work Skills

Level	Skills	Description
TS1	MHSS	Ability to build a good rapport, interact and work effectively with others.
TS2	MHSS	Ability to understand and play the role of a leader and follower alternatively.
TS3	MHSS	Ability to recognize and respect other's attitude, behaviour and beliefs.
TS4	GHSS	Ability to give contribution to the planning and coordinate group work.
TS5	GHSS	Responsible towards group decision.

Life-long learning involved learning independently while gaining the new skills and knowledge. Description on the three level of LL as in Table 6 below:

Table 6 Description on Life-Long Learning & Information Management Skills

Level	Skills	Description
LL1	MHSS	Ability to find and manage relevant information from various sources.
LL2	MHSS	Ability to receive new ideas to perform autonomy learning.
LL3	GHSS	Ability to develop an inquiry mind and seek knowledge.

Entrepreneurship skills involved ability to explore opportunities and develop risk awareness. Creativity and innovations in activities related to business and career. Description on the four level of KK as in Table 7 below:

Table 7 Description on Entrepreneurship Skills

Level	Skills	Description
KK1	MHSS	Ability to identify job opportunities.
KK2	GHSS	Ability to propose business opportunity.
KK3	GHSS	Ability to build, explore and seek business opportunities and job.
KK4	GHSS	Ability to be self-employed.

Ethics, moral professional involved ability to practice high moral standard in professional practice and social interaction. Below are the descriptions for three level of EM:

Table 8 Description on Ethics, Moral & Professional Skills

Level	Skills	Description
EM1	MHSS	Ability to understand the economy crisis, environment and social cultural aspects professionally.
EM2	MHSS	Ability to analyse make problem solving decisions related to ethics.
EM3	GHSS	Ability to practice ethical attitudes besides having the the responsibility towards society.

Leadership skills involved ability to practice leadership characteristics in various activities. Description on the level of LS as shown in Table 9 below:

Table 9 Leadership Skills

Level	Skills	Description
LS1	MHSS	Knowledge of the basic theories of leadership.
LS2	MHSS	Ability to lead a project.
LS3	GHSS	Ability to understand and take turns as a leader and follower alternatively.
LS4	GHSS	Ability to supervise members of a group.

8. The Importance of Soft Skills

In order to understand the importance of soft skills, it is necessary and relevant to look at the needs of employers including soft and hard skills, the nature of labour markets, and the trends in employment.

8.1 Meeting the Needs of Employers

Every employer is demanding for a specific set of skills from job-seekers that match the skills necessary to perform a particular job. Most job-seekers possess the skills required by employers to some extent. However, there are some job-seekers who are lack of skills needed by employers. A gap between those soft skills demanded by today's employers and those skills provided by educational institutions seems to exist [32-33]. For decades, employers as well as educators frequently complain about a lack in soft skills among graduates from tertiary education institutions [34]. In a highly competitive economy, unprepared graduates stand very little chance to be successful in obtaining employment and performing their jobs. It is therefore imperative to strengthen the soft skills to ensure adequate preparation of graduates [35].

In today's knowledge economy, it is not sufficient for a worker to possess adequate basic cognitive skills and discipline-specific competencies [36]. The nature of work also requires that the person be able to work in teams, be a creative problem solver, and communicate with a diverse set of colleagues and clients. Employers, colleges and universities have become more cognizant of the role that such so-called 'soft' or non-cognitive skills play in successful performance in both academic and non-academic arenas. The measurement of skills and traits such as creativity, teamwork and persistence has become a major focus in applied areas such as human resources and industrial-organizational psychology.

Excellent soft skills are necessary requisites for success [37]. Soft skills fulfil an important role in shaping an individual's personality. It is of high importance for every student to acquire adequate skills beyond academic or technical knowledge [10]. Graduates whose skills and attitudes are highly valued by employers would definitely succeed in paving their way into the labour market. It is, however, not the case for those whose skills possession is not up to the mark, thus driving up the unemployment rates drastically. Employers have long been concerned that they are not getting recruits with the skills they want [38]. The National Employers Skills Survey [39] reported that employers regard shortage in soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and customer focus and responsiveness, as far more crucial than 'hard' or technical skills [40]. These skills are found wanting in all sectors, at every level, including graduates at entry level. Those who are just leaving education system may have technical or knowledge skills, but are lacking the skills they need to thrive in today's world.

Graduate recruiters want a variety of other skills, personal and intellectual attributes; rather than specialized subject knowledge. Oral communication, teamwork, self-management, problem solving and leadership [7] are all important. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills [41] identifies team working, communication, active listing, an interest in learning, problem solving, numeracy, literacy and taking criticism as the employability competencies which 'make the difference between being good at a subject and being good at a job'.

Education process cultivate soft skills, workplace enhance soft skills. Research suggests the skills employers value - the so-called soft skills such as interpersonal skills and communication skills - are more readily developed within the workplace [42]. Workplace adaptation is an important part of the assimilation process for a new worker. It is the process by which a person learns the values, norms and required behaviours [43] to explore on work-related competencies that relate best to the successful workplace adaptation of recent engineering graduates. The findings of the research 17 work-related competencies are related to workplace and demonstrate the need for engineering programs to produce graduates with these competencies. The study also suggests that

Human Resource Development professionals have a powerful influence on workplace assimilation and performance by facilitating interpersonal and technical competency improvement through training and development activities.

Workforce investment boards must play a major role in forming local educational partnerships and connecting stakeholders promoting school-to-work/work-to-school initiatives; teacher certification requirement and pre-service or in-service training must be improved to reflect the new workforce readiness agenda; and curricula must reflect customer needs more fully [44].

8.2 The Nature of Labour Market

A labour market is an economic system based on economic system based on the voluntary exchange of labour for income and benefits. In a competitive labour market, the needs of two customers (employers and workers) may conflict [35]. Workers want greater pay, benefits, and job security. Employers seeking to maximize profits want to pay lower wages and provide fewer benefits and less security to workers. As employers and job seekers finding each other, they must satisfy both parties. At the same time, labour markets are generally based on competition among workers for the best jobs and among employers for the best workers.

The labour market is turbulent and changing constantly, often in ways that are not easy to predict. Because of job market is continually shifting, people need the agility to repeatedly and re-evaluate their strategies, their resources, and their prospects. It is time for employers and universities to re-conceptualize the kinds of generic skills and abilities that are considered necessary for the new graduate [45].

8.3 Trends in Employment and the Economy

As the world has changed over last century, so has the world of work. Workers of yesterday were asked to carry out repetitive tasks [32, 46]. Today's knowledge workers need to work with much more autonomy, fewer individual repetitive tasks and required of non-supervisory working environment [35, 47-48].

Industry employment trends and prospects are influenced by overall economic growth, structural change in the economy, new technology, industry-specific factors (such as the impact of the drought on employment in agriculture) and international trade. Due to the need to increase productivity at a minimal cost, employers do not have much time to train or retrain graduates from higher institutions. They need people who are 'work ready' in terms of their generic skills [49]. Graduates whose skills are highly valued by employers would succeed in paving their way into labour market.

As companies alter the way their organizations are structured (flatter, non-hierarchical, team based, multi-skilled) in order to compete more effectively, so do workers have to obtain a more complex range of cognitive and intellectual resources. This involves a change in the types of skills required, with a rise in the importance of generic skills, including the ability of

individuals to work more autonomously; be self-managing, work as part of flexible teams, adapt to change, solve complex problems, think creatively and engage with innovation as a continuous process [50]. These skills are now seen as crucial factors for social and economic development.

Historically, soft skills have been less important in many technical disciplines [51]. In today's fast paced, global marketplace, they are more important than ever. Companies are using technical capabilities not only to operate more efficiently, but their strategy is derived from, and integrated with, their technical competencies. Increased global competition and the changing nature of most technical jobs have made soft skills more than simply a 'good to have' and these skills are 'must have' [52]. Employers and business leaders are demanding that technical professionals not only master their technical disciplines, but participate as full partners in the mission of the organization.

People think hard skills like technical competence, domain knowledge, knowledge and qualifications as employability skills. In fact, hard skills help individual to pass out with degree but it is the soft skills such as interpersonal skills, communication skills, social grace, etiquette, team building and leadership skills that provide employment [53]. In brief, hard skills qualify an individual for a job while soft skills make an individual get employed. Thus, we can call these soft skills as employability skills [54].

Things are changing rapidly due to globalization. The domain skills are fast getting defunct. It appears that ultimate what wound survive in the long run are the soft skills which seem to be permanent. It is also possible that the so-called soft skills may become hard skills over a period of time. The changing nature of workplace organization and the skills now required for effective working in all sectors, propelled in particular by technological development and application, and combined with the continuing shift toward service rather than traditional manufacturing activity [49, 55]. These developments are increasing the importance for sustained economic growth of a labour force equipped with a set of skills that are generic and essential for employability.

8.4 Soft Skills Versus Hard Skills in Labour Market

Employability includes both hard and soft skills [56]. Hard skills are skills associated with technical aspects of performing a job and usually include the acquisition of knowledge [57]. Hard skills thus primarily cognitive in nature, and are influenced by an individual's intelligence quotient (IQ). Spencer & Spencer [58] described technical skills and knowledge as being a threshold in that they represent a minimum level necessary to be able to perform a job with basic competence. Hard skills are essentially equivalent to cognitive skills as categorized by Birkett [59].

In contrast with hard skills, soft skills which are normally referred as 'people skills', are not easily taught although they are very much needed in the working life. These skills can be typically categorized namely,

personal attributes, interpersonal skills, and problem solving and decision making skills [12]. In the working environment, hard skills normally refer to technical procedures or practical tasks that are typically easy to observe, quantify, and measure. Training of such skills for fresh graduates is relatively easy given that they have acquired the necessary knowledge in college [12].

Hard and soft skills are now regarded by many authors as being complementary, with successful individual performance in the workplace seen to require both types of skills, and superior performers having high EQ as well as high IQ ratings [60-61]. For example, research by Spencer & Spencer [58] suggests that superior performers are not distinguished solely by the technical skills, but by the demonstration of certain motives, values, traits and attitudes. In other words, by manifestation of good behavioural skills in addition to their technical ability.

Employability includes the ability to find employment and remain employed [56]. There is growing emphasis in the literature on the importance of 'soft skills' which are now seen as complementary to 'hard skills and required for successful workplace performance [62-66]. A perfect blend of personal qualities, soft skills and hard skills will definitely contribute to enhancing graduate employability [67]. Hard skills tend to be specific to a certain type of task or activity, soft skills are broadly applicable. It is often said that hard skills will enable individuals to obtain an interview but soft skills enable individuals to secure a job.

In conclusion, trends in employment and economy as well as demands in labour market have shown soft skills are necessary and vital to employees. The opportunity to secure a job depends on the soft skills possess by an employee.

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