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**DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF MANAGEMENT GRADUATES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Employability skills are the skills almost every employee needs to perform any job. They are the skills that make technical knowledge and specific job skills fully productive. Higher education has focussed on employability skills at an institutional level, through graduate attributes or through consideration across specific disciplines. As such higher education does not have a single commonly agreed framework for employability skills. This paper aims at examining factors that influence employability of Management Graduates, the basis of Employability Skills from the requirements in the business world, the models and frameworks of Employability that will help in the development of graduate employability skills. Although there is no consensus on how employability should be viewed, it could be said in general that it reflects people's potential of acquiring employment. The existing frameworks/ models developed by authors, adapted by universities are discussed, are analysed in order to identify the factors influencing employability to synthesize the knowledge on this topic and come out with a practical model to enhance employability of Management graduates. It is found that it is crucial for management graduates to develop the required skills and competencies to primarily get a job, hold the job, to contribute to their organisation and progress in their career. Hence they need Technical and Academic Skills specific to the Job they intend to get which includes numeric capacity, listening, reading, written communication, oral presentation, language, global awareness, critical analysis, creativity and self-management; Process Skills which are problem-solving skills, decision making skills, planning and delegating, teamwork, prioritizing, ethical sensitivity and Personal Qualities such as self-esteem, self-confidence, self-control, honesty, integrity, adaptability, flexibility, willingness to learn, emotional intelligence, punctuality, efficiency social skills and ability to manage stress.*

**KEYWORDS**

employability skills, management graduates.

**INTRODUCTION**

The fast pace at which the business world is changing has changed the way in which organisations hire talent today. Across the globe nations and companies are competing to attract, develop and retain the best and the most highly skilled workers. A post graduate degree from a good institution alone doesn't guarantee a job and employers hire people who have the skills and competencies that are of interest to the organisation. They also provide further training to their employees to enhance employability. Businesses have to grow and adapt and be open to embrace change in order to be sustainable. Hence, they need employees who are ambitious and strive to improve their performance standards because the optimum use of graduate skills enhances the competitiveness of organisations (Nabi, 2003).

Organisations are becoming "lean" and are reducing their unproductive units and less valuable employees. Having employability skills is job security. Today, careers are built around the portfolio of skills we have and our ability to learn and acquire more skills as and when required. They are no longer built on aspirations alone. On the other hand, there is an increasing number of job opportunities across various sectors. However the major problem is the shortage of quality talent in the economy. To employers, a "degree" determines a certain level of competence and it represents a minimum standard they are looking for. Smith and Kruger (2008) proposed that, apart from being skilled, from having the required knowledge in a specific discipline and from having the up-to-date technical skills required in a profession, graduates also need generic skills. Maclean and Ordonez (2007) opine that the required skills set for jobs is changing so rapidly that employers are looking more for "trainable" recruits with generic skills sets, such as flexibility, an ability to learn quickly and communicate well and be good at teamwork, rather than recruits trained for specific employment.

Graduates often assume that they have the skills required for the world of work but are subsequently disillusioned when not appointed. Many companies find that the applicants for various positions lack the basic skills the companies are looking for even though they possess the degrees and diplomas. Also candidates do not have a clear understanding of what companies expect from them, what the job position involves, what they will be expected to do on the job etc. Hence candidates are unable to present themselves well and demonstrate where they have used these skills, how they will use their skills on the job and display the high level of professional standards expected of them.

Nowadays more people want to start their own business, all the more reason to work on developing them. These skills are more crucial for entrepreneurship than they are for jobs. Entrepreneurs need to identify opportunities, create value, develop competencies to be successful, be committed, think creatively and focus on innovation.

In recent years a number of models of employability are discussed to get a comprehensive idea on the subject of employability. Each university/ college has formed its own model of employability incorporating competencies employers required from students. Employability training focuses on a few aspects of employability. Some studies present a broad framework for analysing employability in which there are individual factors, personal circumstances and external factors, and also the supply- and demand-side factors. Employability is an issue of concern in many areas of the economy, but in this context the focus is on Indian students who graduate from the MBA programme.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER**

This paper aims to bring about an understanding of Employability, establish the basis of Employability Skills, identify the KSA's required for employability, review and discuss the existing models and approaches to employability. The objective is to synthesise the frameworks and come out with a model to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It also aims to evolve a list of competencies that could help develop concrete indicators of managerial performance.

**THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYABILITY**

In the past, employability skills were thought to be primarily of a job-specific nature not inclusive of the academic skills that are most commonly taught in the schools. "It is the probability, for a given group, at a given time, of finding a job or emerging from unemployment" (Lefrense, 1999). Current thinking, however, has widened the definition of employability skills to include academic skills, and a variety of attitudes. According to Harvey et al, (1997), employers look for graduates who are proactive, can use higher level skills including 'analysis, critique, synthesis and effective communication to facilitate innovative teamwork and

contributing towards the transformation of their organization'. Employability is a combination of "employment" and "ability", ability here refers to the personal attributes, skills and competencies based on labour market demands. Broadly, it is 'gaining, sustaining and progressing in employment'. In simple terms, employability is the ability to be employed, i.e. the ability to gain initial employment (Qaisar, 2008). Measuring employability on the basis of whether or not a graduate has managed to secure a job within six months of graduating provides a very vague and imprecise indication of what the student has gained from his education. The question is whether the graduate is using the skills, knowledge and understanding gained through education.

## DEFINING EMPLOYABILITY

### CORE SKILLS

An employable individual is a person who can apply for and receive a desirable job in a relatively short period of time when the need arises. Therefore, Employability may be defined as the characteristics that make an individual desirable to organisations. And hence the term "employability" is used to describe the assets, attributes and achievements that make individuals more likely to gain employment and maintain productive work over the period of their working life (Lange and Topel, 2004). Employability skills are not just attributes that employers desire in prospective employees, they are crucial even to be considered for employment (Cotton, 1993). "A person's 'employability assets' (Buck and Barrick, 1987), consists of their knowledge (what they know), skills (what they do with what they know) and attitudes (how they do it)" (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Moreover, it is 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy' (Mantz Yorke, 2004). Brown and Hesketh (2004) define employability as 'the relative chances of getting and maintaining different kinds of employment. It not only depends on whether one is able to fulfil the requirements of specific jobs, but also how one stand relative to the others within a hierarchy of job seekers.' (Forrier and Sels, 2003). While most people view employability in absolute terms, focussing on the need for individuals to obtain credentials and knowledge, the concept of employability can also be seen as subjective and dependent on contextual factors.

### DEPLOYMENT SKILLS

Merely possessing the above employability skills is insufficient to land a job and so the manner in which the job seekers present those assets to employers: the ability to demonstrate the employability assets and present them to the market in an accessible way (Hind and Moss, 2011) is also part of employability. Career management skills and life skills (self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision making skills and transition skills) (Hillage and Pollard (1998), what is required is effective job search skills and a strategic approach to finding a suitable job. Demonstrating employability skills through CV writing, work experience/track record, references, testimonies and giving interviews are what will actually get them the job. And these in fact are even more important in terms of landing a job than the core skills. Many graduates who possess 'deployment skills' may be able to get a job quicker. The context of getting a satisfying job (Harvey, 2001; Arnold, 2007) or 'Chosen occupation' may mean different things to different people. Some people may prefer a part time, a full time job or a portfolio of careers. Employability is also about the ability to make plans for the future, and the skills, knowledge and confidence to progress these plans further. The quality of work the individual gets is important because a person may be able to get a job but it may be below his/her level of skill, educational standard (Dearing, 1997) or in low paid, undesirable conditions for example, financial pressures after incurring educational debts.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

They are not the same as finding employment but it refers to the capacity of keeping a fulfilling job (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Employability skills are teachable (Lorraine, 2007) and are transferable (Yorke, 2006). Transferable skills include the ability to "solve complex, multidisciplinary problems, work successfully in teams, exhibit effective oral and written communication skills, and practice good interpersonal skills" (Schmidt, 1999) (cited in Padmini, 2012). These skills can be learnt. "Skills are malleable individual attributes susceptible of being systematically developed. They are conceived as behavioral procedures aimed at acquiring or applying knowledge to tasks" (Mumford, Peterson, & Childs (1999). Employability skills need to be practiced and the absence of practice leads to a process of decay and eventually lost of skills (Arthur, Bennett, Stanush, & McNelly, 1998). If one wants to remain employable throughout his/her career, he/she must respond to the changing demand of skill sets by acquiring new skill sets hence a work specific active adaptability is required realise career opportunities (Sanders & De Grip, Fugate et al, 2004) being willing and able to manage employment transitions between and within organisations (Qaisar, 2008)

### OTHER FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE EMPLOYABILITY

Employability is not limited to individual attributes, other within-organisation factors such as the current and predicted states of internal labour markets may affect employability (Arnold, 2007). The individual's ability to find work is also affected by external factors such as the national economy, level of opportunity within the market, regional variations, other personal constraints such as geographical mobility, family responsibilities etc. As such employability is affected by both supply-side and demand-side factors which are often outside of an individual's control (Hind and Moss, 2011). A good knowledge of these factors too enables a person to make the most of his/her employability assets.

External Employability refers to the ability and willingness to switch to other (or similar) jobs in other organisations and therefore reflects the value of workers' human capital in the external labour market while Internal Employability refers to a worker's ability (and willingness) to remain employed with the current employer, which is the value of a worker's human capital in the internal labour market. Perceived employability refer to individuals' beliefs about his/her possibilities of finding new or better employment. How people perceive their possibilities of getting employment reflects how they efficiently search for a job. The combination of situational and individual factors were identified as important for employability perceptions (cited in Bertson, 2008). National economic prosperity, living/working in metropolitan areas, poor physical and good psychological work environments, formal education and competency development were found to be positively associated with perceived employability (cited in Bertson, 2008).

It is arguable that specific definitions are less important than a focus on approaches to promote transferable skills and developing attributes that will enable graduates to find suitable employment, excel in their work and contribute to the success of the organisation. Peter Hawkins (1999) summed this up: 'To be employed is to be at risk. To be employable is to be secure.'

### EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Employability Skills is not a new concept. They describe technical skills and competencies that have always been an important part of effective and successful participation in the workplace. What is new about Employability Skills is the emphasis it is being given. Employability has become a major concern nowadays with the uncertain economic conditions that expose employers and employees to ambiguities. Employability skills or competencies encompass the abilities, aptitudes, achievements and qualities developed by an individual that can be applied to an occupation or career. These help an individual to get a job as well as hold the job and succeed at a career of his/her choice. They are also referred to as core skills, generic skills, transferable skills, career skills, catalytic skills, soft skills, career readiness skills, work-readiness skills, job skills, life skills, foundational skills, essential skills, enabling skills or key competencies. These are non-technical skills and they are required across all organisational levels and in all functional areas. These are the foundational skills upon which job specific skills should be built.

### DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY

Developing employability skills includes developing employability attributes, developing self-promotion and career management skills, developing the willingness to learn and reflecting on learning. The onus for managing and developing one's employability lies with each individual (Nilsson, 2010). Hence if students take the responsibility to develop these skills, they will be able to get the jobs they seek. The educational institutions facilitate the development of these skills by providing a suitable learning environment where these skills can be acquired and honed and a culture that promotes life-long learning. Merely teaching the skills required

won't be enough, institutions have to develop the students' aptitude to learn, they need to reflect upon situations in order to learn from them, and developing expertise in self-improvement. These initiatives will produce graduates who are ready for the future.

## MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS OF EMPLOYABILITY

Whilst these models are able to capture to some extent the meaning of this elusive concept of employability, they are either too elaborate to be practically used or too simple to do justice to this multidimensional issue. Hence a more comprehensive model is developed.

Several models on employability used by various governments and formulated by numerous universities were analysed and

**DOTS model** developed by Bill Law and A.G. Watts (1977) has 4 dimensions of employability Self awareness, Option awareness, Decision learning and Transition learning.

Another model, **USEM** (Knight and Yorke, 2004) classifies employability as four broad and inter-related components; Understanding (appropriate subject knowledge, apprehension and applicability), Skills (subject specific and generic abilities including the deployment of skills), Efficacy beliefs (awareness and understanding of one's self and one's abilities) and Meta-cognition (the ability to reflect on and regulate one's own learning and behaviour). This approach, strongly links the graduate attributes frameworks and assumes that these qualities which enable a graduate to complete a degree would also help him to be successful in his/her chosen career. However, this is not the case. Many graduates who perform well in academics find it difficult when they have to demonstrate their employability in (for example), interviews. Employers in many fields look for candidates who are self starters and can take charge of their own development. But these models don't really take into account some of the important factors that often have a significant impact on an individual's real chances of getting a job: social class, age, gender and ethnic background and fluctuations in the job market.

The **CareerEDGE model** of employability attempts to incorporate elements from both DOTS and USEM. It comprises of Career Development Learning, Experience, Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills, Generic skills like adaptability/flexibility, willingness to learn, working in a team, good communication (oral and written), numeracy and finally, Emotional intelligence. This model clearly articulates what employability is theoretically and in a simple manner for practitioners and students. The framework also opens up new opportunities for the development of assessment tools and research into the impact of various employability interventions.

A **psychosocial model of employability** developed by Fugate et al. (2004) emphasizes the interactions between Career identity, Personal adaptability and Social and Human capital. Employability has a unique influence on job search behaviours, job choice and job search outcomes. Thus, Employability is synergistic collection of individual characteristics that is energised and directed by an individual's career identity. This person-centred focus emphasises the major shift in responsibility for career management and career development from employers to employees. In short the responsibility is on the job seekers to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) valued by current and prospective employers. Fugate et al. (2004) demonstrated that employability is particularly beneficial to employees in transition – coping with job loss and job search. For such employees, employability facilitates identification of potential jobs and realisation of occupational opportunities quickly.

A very useful insight into determining what employability is in today's work environment is the **Emotional Intelligence model** developed by Daniel Goleman (1998). EI is 'the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships'. Research has shown that people with high levels of emotional intelligence motivate themselves and others to achieve more, enjoy greater career success, build lasting personal relationships and enjoy superior health than those with low levels of emotional intelligence (Cooper, 1997). Jaeger (2003) demonstrated that emotional intelligence can be improved through teaching and learning in a higher educational setting and is positively correlated with academic achievement. Moynagh and Worsley (2005) suggest that in the future knowledge-based economy, emotional intelligence will become even more relevant. If the large amount of research looking at the academic and life success of people with high levels of emotional intelligence is taken into account (Qualter et al., 2007,) it is difficult to see how any model of graduate employability would be complete without Emotional Intelligence.

However, Mantz Yorke argued that Employability 'is a curricular process that aids the student in the development of appropriate skills and learning.' It also represented the attainment of achievements in specific areas that are relevant to a particular job. Higher education is much more than a production line for employment-ready graduates. Nevertheless, people see higher education (or in this context, management education) as a stepping stone to a lucrative job. Education plays an important role in acquiring human capital, improving labour productivity, and hence determining one's future income path (human capital theory). The Employability of management graduates depends on the quality of the instruction they receive in business school and how well they meet employers' requirements and match industry expectations. (Andrews & Higson, 2006). In combination with the time, energy and involvement the individual puts into learning, the characteristics and quality of the education influences the levels of competencies the graduate acquires.

## PROCEDURE

The above theories and frameworks were studied and the following Framework on employability was arrived at based on interviews with recruiters (at Tier 2 Tier 3 institutions offering management education), consultation with experts on skills, academicians and placement officers. They were asked to mention specific skills and qualities they expect students to possess, and the level of the same, in order to develop concrete indicators of employability.

The study also analysed secondary data from books, periodicals, journals and previous research conducted in this field.

## FRAMEWORK

The four dimensions of the Framework are Self-Management Skills, Communication Skills, Social Skills, Placement Skills and Deployment Skills.

### SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS

**Self-Awareness:** This includes awareness of one's strengths, weaknesses, drives, personality type, habits and values; being able to manage his/her emotions and also seek feedback from others to improve oneself.

**Confidence:** This refers to maintaining optimism regarding one's own ability, feeling and displaying a high level of confidence that others sense his/her capability without having to rely on others to boost his/her confidence. Candidates who possess the attributes of Self-efficacy and confidence are proactive in their career development, open to learning opportunities and also adapt to changes easily.

**Motivation:** It involves knowing what motivates you, feeling that you are responsible for your success and creating opportunities for your own growth, taking initiative consistently and being proactive, even when things get difficult.

**Attitude & Enthusiasm:** This consists of looking at the positive side of things, having enthusiasm to do things, being open to learning and quickly reorienting negative to positive outlook.

**Discipline & Punctuality:** This is reflected in having self-discipline, being on time always, being well organised, completing work on time and within deadlines.

**Ambition & Goal Setting:** This involves being ambitious, setting goals for oneself regularly, prioritising work, evaluating and monitoring one's own performance.

**Adaptability:** This refers to being able to confidently, competently and easily adapt to changing environments.(also ideas and technology) This enhances employability significantly.

**Resilience:** This consists of being strong, able to spring back from difficulties without getting discouraged easily. And also consider setbacks as learning opportunities.

**Problem Solving:** This involves the ability to identify problems, look at them objectively, decide based on facts, develop practical and creative solutions and follow a process to solve them without being overwhelmed by them or being dependent on others to solve them.

**Decision Making:** It involves being objective, using one's own judgment, following systematic steps, considering one's inner voice, and accepting responsibility for one's decisions.

Learning: This includes being open to learning, setting aside time for learning, looking for opportunities to continuously learn and improve oneself. The ability to keep on learning influences how fast and how well we acquire knowledge and skills.

### COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Active Listening: This involves the ability to listen carefully, understand, interpret, evaluate, accurately recall and summarise information.

Reading Comprehension: This includes the ability to read fast and comprehend well. This is the result of reading regularly and widely on several topics and it enriches knowledge, skills and attitude.

Written Communication: This refers to being able to write letters, reports and other communication effectively and without errors.

Speaking Skills: This refers to being able to stand in front of others and articulate one's ideas effectively, clearly, and confidently in public.

Body language: This is being aware of appropriate body language, being comfortable and confident in interacting with others in all professional and other situations.

### SOCIAL SKILLS

Empathy: This reflects the ability to perceive, understand and respond to the emotions and needs of others in most situations.

Leadership: This involves being willing to take on leadership roles, being persuasive, assertive, able to motivate oneself and others, translate ideas into action, lead a team towards a goal, get things done and take responsibility for the results.

Team Work: This refers to the being efficient, able to relate to different kinds of people, being comfortable and able to work well with others, collaborate and contribute to team results.

Conflict Management: This includes knowing what to do in conflict situations, knowing the basics of negotiation, being able to negotiate and resolve conflicts as they occur without complicating them further.

### PLACEMENT AND DEPLOYMENT SKILLS

Self-Introduction: This refers to the ability to highlight one's strengths, establish a "fit" between one's skills and the skills required for the job, ability to confidently give an impressive self-introduction.

Self-Presentation (Appearance, Dressing): This involves appearing confident and comfortable, maintaining good hygiene and being neat and presentable, and having a professional manner in presenting oneself.

Manners and Etiquette: This refers to the impressive manner in presenting oneself and dealing with others. It requires awareness of social etiquette, polite behaviour and good manners.

Group Discussion: This includes the ability to speak fluently, confidently, logically, with clarity and consistency relevantly and lead and encourage discussion and interact effectively in a group.

Resume Writing: This involves being able to write an impressive, winning resume to suit the job position one has applied for. It includes highlighting one's achievements, skills and qualifications and presenting in a professional manner.

Facing Interviews: This refers to being well prepared for the interview, the ability of candidate to face any type of interview (technical, stress etc) and comfortably answer questions and show that he has the capability to perform the job and the interest to excel at it.

Case Studies: This involves the ability to read and understand the case well, analyse it systematically and thoroughly, apply concepts and answer questions based on the case.

Making Presentations: This refers to the knowing how to make a good presentation, ability to prepare meaningful presentations and deliver them effectively and professionally.

Subject Knowledge: This includes having a thorough knowledge of one's subject and confident of being able to apply it in the context of work and also being able to share on this knowledge.

Current Affairs: This involves reading regularly and widely being update with what is happening around the world, in many important fields.

Business Awareness: This refers to having a good knowledge of how business is influenced by local, national and global politics and economics, and also what the job position one is interested in involves, skills and attributes needed to be successful.

Quantitative Ability: This includes knowing how to use the relevant formulae appropriately and being able to quickly solve problems.

Verbal Ability: This involves having a strong command of English, understanding the question well and being able to identify the right answers.

Analytical Skills: This refers to knowing what to look for, how to analyse data, visualise, articulate, make inferences and draw conclusions based on data. This skill is crucial to making sound management decisions.

MS Word: This involves being able to type fast, align well, use commands, and make the document error free and presentable.

MS Excel: This includes the ability to create, type, use commands and formulae, analyse data, present data in charts etc. and comfortably use all the functions on Excel.

MS PowerPoint: This refers to knowing the commands and the ability to create original and effective presentations using all the features of PowerPoint.

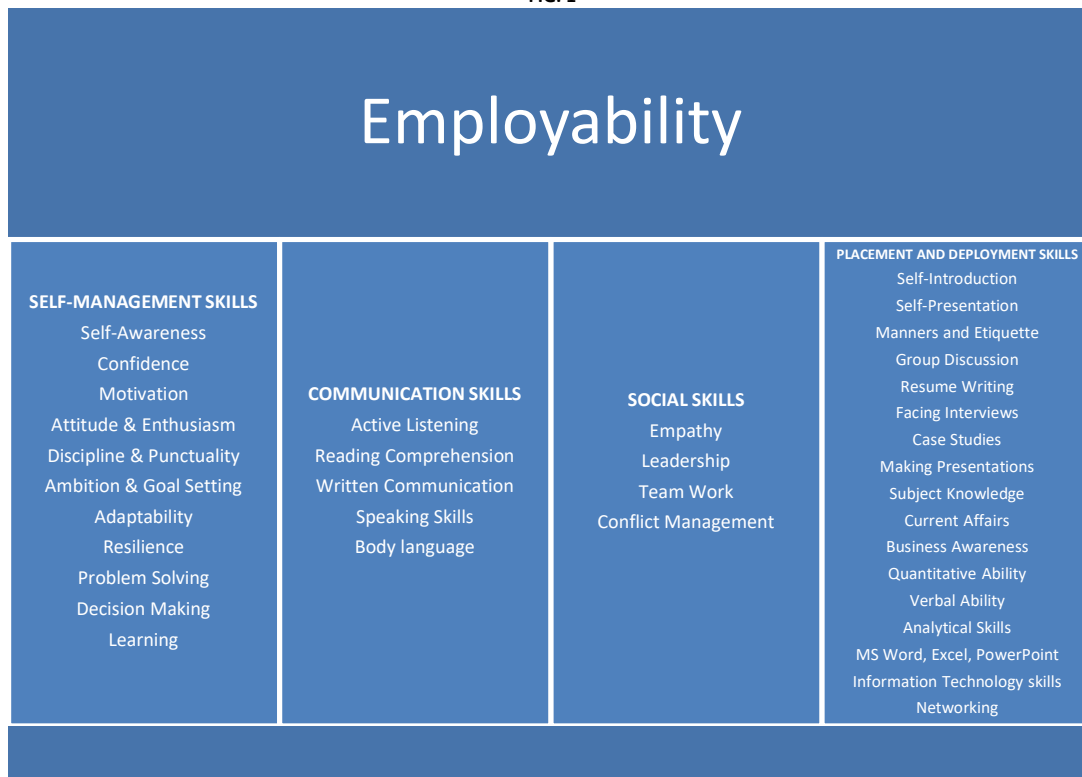
Information Technology skills: This includes being able to operate a computer, send/receive emails, effectively use search engines to access relevant resources.

Networking: This refers to knowing where to find out information about jobs he/she is interested in, getting references, building and nurturing contacts and utilising them to source opportunities. The students who are good at networking have an edge over the others because this is crucial to actually land a job. Students who aren't so good at networking rely entirely on campus placement and many of them are dissatisfied with the companies or the salaries offered. However, there are several factors which influence campus placements every year.

### CONCLUSION

This framework incorporates the important features of the other frameworks along with other relevant contemporary features mentioned by recruiters and skill experts and serves to bridge the gap between industry expectations and university output. This knowledge will be invaluable to develop Employability and hence the quality of Management Education. Management Education is required to contribute towards the success of the workforce and also to the personal fulfilment of the individual's goals, and so job-skills, career advice and an understanding about the working of the business world should be embedded in the academic programme. Hence job seekers, academicians and organisations can focus on these aspects and enhance their productivity.

FIG. 1



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