Identifying Essential Employability Attributes of MBA Graduates without Work Experience using Grounded Theory

تحديد سمات التوظيف الأساسية لخريجي ماجستير إدارة الأعمال دون خبرة عمل باستخدام النظرية المجذرة

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify attributes that are essential to increasing the employability of a fresh MBA graduate, i.e., those without any work experience, based on the grounded theory approach. Specifically, the purpose is to explore HR managers' perceptions of attributes required by fresh MBA graduates to assess their corporate readiness or employability so that they can join the corporate sector. The study utilized Strauss & Corbin's (1990) method of grounded theory, where 16 human resources professionals at the middle management level were interviewed one by one to get their perspective on the attributes that are essential for MBA graduates without work experience to be ready to join a workplace. These attributes were thematically grouped into five generic attributes. namely, general knowledge, subject/domain knowledge, decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, and operational skills. The implication of this study is that management schools need to update their courses and augment value-added classes that help students develop the five required traits, which will likely make their graduates much more employable.

Keywords: Grounded theory; Expectations; Attributes; MBA; Employability; Fresher.

ملخص

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد السمات الضرورية لزيادة قابلية التوظيف للخريج الجديد من ماجستير إدارة الأعمال، أي أولئك الذين ليس لديهم أي خبرة عمل، بناءً على منهج النظرية المجذرة (grounded theory). على وجه التحديد، الغرض هو استكشاف تصورات مديري الموارد البشرية للسمات المطلوبة من خريجي ماجستير إدارة الأعمال الجدد لتقييم مدى استعدادهم المؤسسي أو قابليتهم للتوظيف حتى يتمكنوا من الانضمام إلى قطاع الشركات. استخدمت الدراسة أسلوب شتراوس وكوربن (Strauss & Corbin's, 1990) للنظرية المجذرة، حيث تمت مقابلة 16 متخصصًا في الموارد البشرية على مستوى الإدارة الوسطى واحدًا تلو الآخر للحصول على وجهة نظرهم حول السمات الضرورية لخريجي ماجستير إدارة الأعمال، والذين ليس لديهم خبرة عملية، ليكونوا مستعدين للانضمام الى سوق العمل. تم تصنيف هذه السمات الى خمس سمات عامة، وهي المعرفة العامة ومعرفة الموضوع/المجال ومهارات اتخاذ القرار ومهارات التعامل مع الآخرين والمهارات التشغيلية. إن الآثار المترتبة على هذه الدراسة هي أن كليات الإدارة بحاجة إلى تحديث مناهجها وإضافة مساقات ذات قيمة مضافة تساعد الطلاب على تطوير السمات الخمس المطلوبة، وذلك من المرجح أن يجعل خريجيها أكثر قابلية للتوظيف.

Introduction

MBA course as an advanced academic degree in management is instrumental in facilitating individuals moving to managerial ranks, accelerating promotional prospects for those already in management, and embarking on a fresh career move, either internal or external to the present employer. Earning an MBA enhances employability and looks good on the CV of those aspiring for a managerial profession (Kane; 1993). MBA has been found to be an exceptionally positive learning exercise, comprising several aspects such as intellectual stimuli and knowledge gains (Dougherty, *et al.* 1993; Ainsworth & Morley, 1995; Baruch and Peiperl, 2000; Woolgrove, 2005). So, it can be said that MBA degree helps to improve career prospects, through gaining knowledge of management, and achieving the competencies needed for success in working life.

Having an MBA degree is considered by many as passport to the managerial job (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000; Carnall, 1992; Luker, *et al.* 1989). Unfortunately, a study by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) on management graduates of India indicated that around 93% of MBA graduates are unemployable (India Today, July 2016). Generally, B schools have failed to develop managers who can

effectively contribute and add value to the business operations amidst vigorously erratic global needs. During the US economic downturn in the 1980s, AACSB (Association of Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) suggested that MBA contents should be revised to impart useful management education in the quick changing world. Management colleges are focusing more on curriculum-based study than practical studies and thus fail to explain the real world to the students and bring down their expectations to match the industry requirements (Sowell, 1997). Bill Whitman, Chief Financial Officer of Ogden Products Inc, a New Jersey-based manufacturer of Waste Energy plants, has voiced that fresher MBA should not be hired directly; some prior experience should be there so that they can make decisions (Ettorre, 1992). It has also been observed that MBA graduates specialized in high demand areas can be put to work immediately without extensive initial training but generalist MBAs must have work experience (Gannon & Arlow, 1985).

Attributes required by organizations in their MBAs without work experience varies with their business objective, culture of the organization and recruitment policies. A lot of studies suggest that enhancing the employability skills of recent MBA graduates will help to bridge the skill gap that exists in the industry and academia (Hughes, *et al.* 2011; Taylor and Hooley, 2014; Abrahamson, *et al.* 2016; Agarwal, *et al.* 2019). Few researchers have identified essential skills required by the industry for MBA graduates (Benson, *et al.* 2014; Ayoubi, *et al.* 2017). Several studies have also examined the cause of the skill gap in MBA education programmes of B-schools in India (Pandiyan, 2011; Bansal & Agarwal, 2019; Bhatia & Panneer, 2019). Literature review on the issue has yielded a large number of attributes that have been the key to employability of MBAs during their time. However, statistics show that though popularity for the MBA degree has not dwindled, rate of employability has gone down to 17% (2020) from 24% in 2014 (https://www.statista.com/March 19, 2021). This has laid bare the fact that a wide gap exists in the expectation of industry from Management education and … there is an urgent need of integration of management education and industry to produce fruitful results in India (Sharma & Saxena, 2010). The National Employability Report, 2012

showcased that for functional roles (MBAs with HR/ Marketing/Finance) employability rate is 10%, for business consulting and analyst it is 2.5 - 7.9%, for customer service roles, employability is 16%, in operations it is around 15% and only in BPO/ITES sector, employability is around 33%. Excess supply, poor infrastructural facilities, outdated syllabus, lack of basic skills including soft skills, lack of industry experience including practical industry internship are a few of the reasons cited for this dismal rate in being considered as 'employable'. More emphasis is to be placed on understanding the relevance of professional courses, such as MBA, not only in providing managerial knowledge but also in addressing other priorities that will enable graduates to perform better in their future job roles (Bhatnagar, N. 2020; Baruch, *et al*. 2019).

This gap between the requirement from the industry of the attributes in MBA graduates and what the B-Schools provide them to choose from led to this study to use Grounded Theory. It was felt that the outcome of the studies conducted so far has not been able to give a perfect fit between the requirement and the supply mainly because the MBA graduates have been considered unemployable. The Grounded Theory methodology will help identify the attributes that the industry seeks from its MBA graduates without any work experience, thereby increasing the employability of the MBA graduates in India. The objective is to incorporate the findings from the study in MBA curriculum so that the rate of rejection of MBA graduates in final placement will drastically fall as the gap between the requirement of desired attributes and supply of the same will get reduced.

Literature Review

Every business is affected by the speedy change in today's quick pace and enormously competitive business environment. It had become a key challenge for employers to conquer best talent and superior employment and at the same point sustain profitable growth in the global era. As a result, only graduates with better competencies will be able to meet these challenges and fit in the job market. The employers have concerns on selecting a fresh MBA graduate who has required skills desired by the industry. They not only look for the degree but also what is called 'employ-

ability' attributes, i.e., quality or feature regarded as a characteristic or inherent part of someone or something. These attributes are related to the attitude, nature, or behaviour of an individual, which helps in not only obtaining a job but also in sustaining the job effectively. Employability attributes are also called transferable attributes as these are not explicit to a particular job but can be transferred to other jobs as well. Some experts defined employability as:

–   *Understandi*ng on work customs, career counselling and identification of key competencies necessary at workplace are imbedded in the education system (Berntson, 2008).

–   The occupation prospective to attain, validate the employment and job powerfully with the finest use of capabilities (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

–   An aptitude to be adaptive to job correlated conduct (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004).

–   A set of individual attributes understandings and achievements that elevate the likelihood of persons to get in the skilled world and be unbeaten in their preferred careers (Knight & Yorke, 2004).

–   The prospect for service on the external or internal employment market (Forrier & Sels, 2003).

–   The personnel's skill to efficiently utilize their knowledge, attitude and skills adequately within the definite situation and filling their own service (Hillage & Pollard, 1998).

–   Described in terms of four important skills set: Key skills (presentation, communication, IT, etc.), Knowledge *of Industry and its traditions, Traditional academic skills and Personal attributes (Coopers & Lybrand, 1998).*

These definitions make it clear that MBA is not a mere degree; rather it is a composition of employability attributes that are desired and accepted by the employers to best fit the job requirements.

Grounded Theory (GT) evolved in the 1960s with the publication of 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research' by Glaser & Strauss in 1967. The GT theory research is much faceted process. It requires time & theoretical sensitivity to move from the data to the theory and back. This methodology helps to construct a theory from data collected from the respondents which are of importance to them (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher starts the process of data collection with an open mind and without having any bias to support or reject the notion, i.e., by nature it is inductive (Morse, 2001). According to Glaser (1978), the process has three phased:

Input, in this phase the data move as part of the researchers thinking. In the second phase the data are in the researcher's mind. He/She has a lot of different ideas concerning the theory but nothing seems clear. This is called "Drugless" trip. The last phase is Saturation and it is the most important for theory development. In this phase the researcher writes down the results of the analysis and makes his/her conclusions. In 2018, both Battisiti & Deakins and Intezari & Pauleen (2017) stated that the Grounded theory approach is used in qualitative studies in diverse areas including Business and Management. Researchers felt that the best practice in management research, Grounded Theory, should become a common practice (Maital, *et al.* 2008).

There are different schools of Grounded Theory since its first version, varying mainly on the data analysis process. The predominant ones are reflected in the Classic Grounded Theory (Barney Glacer, 1978); Basics of Qualitative Research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990); Dimensional Analysis (Schaztman, 1991); Situational Analysis (Clarke, 2005) and Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006).

In the data collection and analysis step of Grounded Theory, information flows in continuously and data is also reviewed continuously till saturation is reached and theory materializes from this data (Oktay, 2012). Olson, *et al* (2016) suggested that by the use of continuous comparative method and resultant analysed data, more and more interviews can be conducted which will help the theme to emerge. The interviews will generate a lot of raw data. Transcription of the data generated through comparative

method will shed light on the respondents' point of view. Common themes shall emerge from the perspectives of the different respondents. During the step when data is being collected, they are categorised and compared immediately. However, it is very important to handle the data in a fresh mind instead of hurrying through them so that no vital information is missed out and there is clarity in analyzing the varied perspectives. Strauss & Corbin (1998) had specifically mentioned the importance of this detailed analysis – a 'continuous interplay' between collection and analysis of data - which helps the theory to emerge.

Research Gap

Business environment is dynamic and the attributes required by managers to handle the challenges cannot remain static. Input from the corporate regarding the managerial attributes required by them cannot be underestimated, keeping the number of rejections in the recruitment and selection process. The study will identify the attributes that are essential to increase the employability of the MBA graduates, without any work experience, in the new decade (2020 onwards).

Objective

The objective is to develop a theory to identify a set of managerial attributes that will ensure corporate readiness in MBA graduates without work experience from the view point of HR Managers.

Research Methodology

Bhatnagar, N. (2020) observes that there is a lack of good quality academic literature on the topic of employability and skill gap in B-schools across India. The present study focuses on use of Grounded Theory to identify the required attributes to increase employability. It is expected that the attributes thus identified may reduce the gap between the employability requirements of the corporate and those available to be employable (Bhatnagar, N. 2020). The craze for the MBA degree has seen a spurt in the B-schools but due to focus on rote theoretical learning of outdated syllabus - far removed from practical industry-oriented skills and quality faculty (FICCI and Ernst and Young, 2014; Sowell, 1997), huge supply, lack

of soft skills, inexperience, etc. has failed to make the students employable. The topic has been partially presented in the literature review but no specific work has been done in finding employability attributes of fresh MBA graduates based on employer requirements and no work specifies about the gap on the same. Plenty of studies have been done, however, these are from employer's perspective where employer-chosen attributes are focused. None did specific study on fresh MBA graduates' attributes in Eastern India region.

Grounded theory is inductively derived as the process of study and one does not begin with a hypothetical theory and then prove it. It starts when the researcher has already collected the data from field first and then starts analyzing the data using the theory and there comes the Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There has been no conceptual framework construct regarding employability and managerial attributes in any of the literature review done and by introducing Grounded theory perspective some other aspects can be highlight which have not been covered till date in any past research work (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Based on Starussian view (Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the researcher should become familiar with any pre-existing research in order to be able to generate theory (Easterby-Smith, *et al*. 2002). In the present work, based on the literature review done, Grounded theory has been included which helped to identify different perspective to the employability attributes in comparison to what till date has been identified as the study is based and focused on fresh MBA graduates who have no work experience.

In order to generate a theory for the study, Grounded Theory method was used. This study is based on Strauss & Corbin's (1990) method where coding used is of three types:

1. Open: where phenomena are identified

2. Axial: where codes are related to each other

3. Core categories are developed

Grounded Theory helped explore the employability of MBA graduates without work experience. This was based on the views of the HR Managers, who are directly engaged in campus recruitment activities, on the unique attributes required to join an organization as a Management Trainee. The research design encouraged elucidation and absorption of the phenomenon by using the process of theoretical development.

Research Sample

Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection whereby the researcher simultaneously collects, codes and analyses the data in order to decide what data is to be collected next (Strauss & Corbin,1998). Theoretical Sampling is a type of purposive sampling (Ritchie, J. *et al.* 2013), mainly linked with Grounded theory. Based on the likely contribution to theory, units are selected, data collected, analysed; new samples collected based on emerging theories till data saturation is reached. Purposive sampling that is "used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" (Kelly, 2010:317) has been used in this research. Purposive sampling is often used in grounded theory research to select participants who have experience or knowledge relevant to the research question (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Robinson, 2014; Mason, 2002). According to Moser & Korstjens (2018), purposive sampling is used at the initial stage of Grounded theory and theoretical sampling is used later for participant selection who can contribute best by adding more information and refining in theory development.

For this, Pan-India based recruiters who offer multiple roles to management graduates and hires from management colleges or B Schools were contacted. The researchers connected with 100 such recruiters who focused on hiring the specified group, i.e., MBA graduates without any work experience. The recruiters were selected based on two criteria, one the job description and other was the pay package they offered to the aspirants. Out of these 100 recruiters, 52 recruiters were identified using random number table and again systematic random sampling technique was used and 16 HR managers were identified. Two stages of sampling had been undertaken to neutralize any bias.

The HR Managers who participate in the campus placement drives of management institutes on a regular basis, hiring students with Marketing, Human Resources and Finance specialization. Organizations coming for minimum three years for campus placement (in a span of five years) are considered as regular employer, that is, they come for campus placement on a regular basis. These HR Managers fulfilling the criteria formed the population. In Grounded Theory and in qualitative research, generally it is recommended to have sample size that is determined based on reaching theoretical saturation and the type of research. There is no definite number of samples, each project is different and in Grounded Theory the average of about 30 interviews (or cases/ informants) should work for most projects (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Sim, *et al*. 2018; Thomson, 2010). Glaser argues that "all is data" (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Holton, 2004; Holton, 2008), and researcher should make the best of whatever data is available and accordingly we selected 16 HR's for our paper.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted on two HR Managers to fine tune the interview questions and provide clarity to them. Minor modifications were made to the construction of the interview questions based on the feedback received.

Interview

There are different ways a researcher can collect data, like structured interview, semi-structured interview or unstructured interview (in-depth), depending on type of research problem and research questions (Saunders, *et al*. 2009). According to Silverman (2010), using open ended questions can uncover a lot of elements that were not covered or considered previously. Methods such as in-depth interview would have come out with certain biased observation or opinion of the interviewees. At the same time, a completely structured interview would have compromised the flexibility of the whole concept and the possibility of identifying new attributes would have been jeopardized. So, semi-structured interview method was used for collecting data from different employers from different sectors. Bhatnagar, N. (2020) mentions the lack of enough good quality academic

literature on employment and skill gap in B-school. The response was collected wherein it had a pre-defined guide although open ended questions were also asked that allowed the flexibility to improve them or change directions as new themes emerge and the research progresses (Jamshed, 2014). This helped in gaining new insights and relationship between the emerging themes (Saunders, *et al.* 2009).

The HR Managers were informed previously about the interview dates and time. A comfortable place was decided which was convenient for the respondents. Before the interview, permission was taken from the respondents for recording their audio. For maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, a code was used for each of the respondents. During the interview, the respondents were given sufficient time to respond to the questions. Efforts were put to minimise external disturbance to the extent possible. The open-ended questions were asked in sequential manner, but wherever required to match the flow of thought, sequence was broken. The respondents expressed their views freely and shared their thoughts and ideas very openly. They had the opportunity to elaborate their responses. The interviews were taped and transcribed in full, for analysis. These transcripts were provided to the respondents for validation and maintaining accuracy.

Triangulation

Marcyzk, *et al.* (2005) stated that respondent or participant selection may be a threat to internal validity which in turn can have an impact on the research study and research design. Potential bias of the researcher and diverse corporate requirements from different HR managers may be two such validity threats. Data triangulation (Halcomb & Andrew, 2005) can reduce bias by integrating different groups of data so that various responses regarding the phenomena can be obtained. Triangulation is a technique to analyze results of the same study using different data collection methods. It is used for three main purposes: to enhance validity, to create a more in-depth picture of a research problem, and to interrogate different ways of understanding a research problem. Triangulation helps validate research findings by checking that different methods or different observers of the same phenomenon produce the same results. It can also be used to interrogate inconsistencies and data that are not expected to

align. The methodological framework used determines how the degree of overlap between methods is conceptualized (Nightingale J. Andrea, 2020). So, overall, the requirement of specific attributes may vary depending on the specialization of the MBA graduate, the corporate culture, etc. which may be very unique and not related to other corporate houses. This triangulation involving person and space contributed in adding value in comprehending the real meaning of the topic. (Lewis-Pierre, *et al*. 2017). There are 04 types of triangulations in research:

1. Data triangulation, using data from different time, spaces, and people.

2. Investigator triangulation, involving multiple researchers in collecting or analyzing data.

3. Theory triangulation, using varying theoretical perspectives in research.

4. Methodological triangulation, using different methodologies to approach the same topics.

The first type, i.e., data triangulation, has been used as responses have been collected from HR managers located at different parts of the nation and from different sectors who hire freshers from management colleges at various managerial roles over around twenty-four months period.

In order to find out the attributes, Data triangulation involved gathering data from a variety of sources such as:

1. Surveys: Surveys forms were sent to these 16 HR's in various industries to gather information about the specific attributes they value in MBA graduates.

2. Interviews: Interviews with these 16 human resources professionals provided in-depth information about the attributes they look for when hiring MBA graduates.

3. Job postings: We analyzed job postings for MBA-level positions that provided insight into the skills and experience that employers are seeking in applicants.

4. Secondary research: Researching articles, reports, and studies about the employment outcomes of MBA graduates provided additional information about the attributes that employers value.

Data Triangulation has been done based on responses from 16 HRs of different designations from different organizations across pan-India locations. These organizations were part of different industries and they offered different job positions to the fresher management graduates. Interviews were conducted in different locations in Kolkata on different dates and time which was convenient for the respondents (Ref. Annexure 1).

By using data triangulation, more comprehensive and reliable understanding of the attributes could be collected that employers are looking for when hiring fresh MBA graduates.

The study revealed that despite the differences, there are significant similarities in attributes that all the corporate houses look for in their new recruits with MBA degree without prior work experience. Different locations of the corporate houses contributed in triangulating the broad topic of employability of MBA graduates without work experience. The similarities highlighted the requirement to understand the broad topic of transitioning fresher MBA graduates to the dynamic corporate environment such that there is a proper person-job fit that will ensure productivity for the organization. The process of triangulation allowed cross-checking and confirming the findings and gain a more complete and accurate understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied.

Transcription

The transcripts of the 16 respondents were analysed, keeping the following four purposes in focus:

1. Data understanding

2. Data organization, comparison and classification

3. Data reduction for improvement in interpretation and comprehension

4. Understanding the underlying essence of phenomenon under investigation

The expertise of the researcher as Training and Placement Officer of a B-School and the views of the respondents ensured the data validity – data collection was accurate and consistent. In order to understand the data, an unbiased, fast, first reading of the transcripts were done. This was followed by a line-by-line attentive reading of the transcripts and marking of the key words, i.e., the attributes in this case. Care was taken to free the data from any preconceived notions or assumptions about the objective. Attributes which were repeated by the respondents were marked as important but care was taken to avoid duplication of attributes from the list of attributes created. The first review made it very clear that more detailed study was required for labels, categories and themes to emerge.

Next, attributes which belonged to the same concepts were labeled together for data organization, comparison and classification.

In order to improve interpretation and comprehension, data was reduced by grouping labels with same concepts to create label categories. The iterative Grounded Theory process, data comparison and relating of categories enabled the core categories to emerge. Core categories developed from similarities in the perspectives of the respondents, e.g., communication skill has been reiterated by most of the respondents.

Lastly, themes were created to identify major attributes so that the underlying essence of phenomenon under investigation could be understood. Strauss & Corbin's (1990) open, axial, selective coding and the constant comparative method was applied to achieve this. The analysis resulted in identifying five attributes that are considered essential by all recruiters. A flowchart of the process followed is given in Figure -1.

A sample of the interview transcript is given in Annexure - 2.

Purpose	**Step**
Data understanding	Unbiased, fast, first reading transcripts
	⇩
	Attentive line by line reading of each transcript
	⇩
	Marking of Key words (attributes)
	⇩
	Marking attributes repeated by respondents as very important
	⇩
	Deleting repeated attributes from list to avoid duplication
	⇩
Data organization, comparison and classification	Labelling of attributes belonging Labelling of attributes belonging concepts
	⇩
Data reduction for improvement in interpretation and comprehension	Creating label categories by grouping labels with same concepts
	⇩
Underlying essence of phenomenon under investigation	Themes created to identify major attributes
	⇩
	Five Attributes identified that are required by all recruiters

Figure (1): Grounded Theory Method: Steps followed for Analysis of Interview Transcripts.

Analysis and Findings

Grounded Theory, specifically Straus & Corbin's method, has the capability to capture meaning. The focus of the study was on collecting perspective of the HR Managers into the true meanings associated with the fresh MBA graduates' transitioning into the corporate sector from being a B-school student. Hence, Grounded Theory proved to be useful. Interaction between people leads to a search for social processes present therein. Fresh Management Trainees can contribute to the existing corporate objectives and have the potential to lead the organization if the seeds of becoming a successful manager in the form of attributes are either implanted or nurtured during the B-school days.

Transcription and analysis of the data showed that employers seek some specific attributes in the fresh MBA graduates to hire them. In order to identify the attributes required for the employability of the MBA graduates without work experience, the transcripts of the 16 respondents were analysed. Labels, Label categories and Themes emerged from the transcripts of the qualitative data.

Attributes belonging to same concepts were clubbed together to form labels. 86 labels were identified. Labels with same concepts were grouped together to form label categories. 13 such label categories were formed with the 86 labels. Close examination of the pattern of labels and the label categories have resulted in five themes which are the major attributes required by the employers. These five themes are General Knowledge, Subject Knowledge, Decision making skill, Interpersonal skill and Operational skill, i.e., there is a combination of both Knowledge and skill requirement in would-be managers. Therefore, labels led to label categories and themes emerged from them, as shown in Tables 1 to 5.

Table (1): Identification of Labels, Label Categories & Theme (1): General Knowledge.

Labels	Label categories	Theme
– Eagerness to learn – Integrative Thinking – Inquisitiveness - Asking appropriate questions – Interest in research and innovation – Foreign language	Alacrity to learn	General Knowledge
– Global mindset – International business outlook – Global orientation – Business awareness – Cultural sensitivity	General Awareness	

Table (2): Identification of Labels, Label Categories & Theme 2 – Subject Knowledge.

Labels	Label categories	Themes
– Strong academic result – Clarity in subjects learnt in graduation courses – Core business knowledge – Strong inter disciplinary knowledge	Intellectual Domain	Subject Knowledge
– Good subject knowledge in – General Management – Strategic Management – Specialization papers – Financial Management/ – Marketing Management/ – Human Resource Management – Relevant industrial training – Job knowledge – Skill to apply knowledge	Functional Knowledge Base	

Table (3): Identification of Labels, Label Categories & Theme 3 – Decision Making.

Labels	Label categories	Themes

– Data analysis
   – Quantitative analysis
   – Qualitative analysis
– Competitor analysis
– Financial analysis
– Computing & logical skill
– Clarity of thought
– Critical thinking
	Analytical Skill	Decision Making

– Strategic vision – Planning & Controlling – Objective – Strong Personality – Ability to work under stress & pressure – People management skill – Multitasking skill – Creativity – Initiative – Sense of Responsibility – Emotional Stability – Emotional Intelligence	Leadership Skill	
– Flexibility – Reasoning – Ability to suggest solutions – Result-oriented – Hands-on approach – Original thinking – Strategic thinking – Innovative – Out of the box thinking ability	Problem Solving Skill	

Table (4): Identification of Labels, Label Categories & Theme 4 – Inter-personal Skill.

Labels	Label categories	Themes
– Clarity of speech – Good written and oral expression – Comprehension skill – Report writing – Negotiation skill – Designing research proposals – Netiquette – Telephonic skill – Presentation skill – Listening skill	Communication Skill	Inter-personal Skills
– Punctuality – Ethics & compliance – Sincerity – Honesty – Time management – Grooming – Self-motivated	Self-Management Skill	
– Integrity – Commitment – Perseverance – Aligning with company culture – Enthusiastic – Interest in work & organisation	Soft Skills	
– Adaptability – Positive attitude – Social skills – Openness – Behavioural flexibility – Delegation – Peer culture – Team spirit – Cooperation – Role clarity – Ability to value opinion of others	Team Building Skill	

Table (5): Identification of Labels, Label Categories & Theme 5 – Operational Skill.

Labels	Label categories	Themes
– Adherence to Standing Operating Procedures (SOP) or departmental procedures – Coordination with different stakeholders – Inventory management – Attention to detail	Organising & Coordinating Skill	Operational Skill
– MS Office applications – Knowledge in ERP, SAP – Technical ability	Information & Communication Technology (ICT)	

From the above five tables, it is clear that *Interpersonal skill* (Ref Table 4) has the highest number of labels - 34 - with communication skill under it being the most sought-after attribute. 11 out of 16 respondents have considered the requirement of sound communication skill as the most important attribute. Interpersonal skill also has the highest number of label categories (4), covering communication skill, self-management skill, soft skills and team work.

Decision making skill (Ref Table 3) with 3 label categories, namely, analytical skill, leadership skill and problem-solving skill has 27 labels. Analytical skill has emerged as an important attribute with six of the respondents stressing their requirement for it.

The other three themes (Ref Tables1, 2 & 5) - *General Knowledge, Subject/Domain Knowledge and Operational Skill* - have two label categories each and ten, eight and seven labels respectively. 50% of the respondents have felt Eagerness to learn and Skill to apply knowledge as the most important aspect of General Knowledge and Domain Knowledge respectively. Four out of the 16 respondents also consider strong academic result as an important constitute of Domain Knowledge. Proficiency in MS office applications is the important attribute required by recruiters with

seven of them considering it as an important component of Operational Skill.

Therefore, based on the consensus of the respondents, five attributes have been identified that deals with the principal research question.

Conclusion

This paper uses grounded theory to identify the essential employability attributes of MBA graduates, although the extant literature mentions a large number of attributes. However, there still exists a chance to miss some of the factors as mentioned by Neha Bhatnagar in "Employability and skill gap among MBA graduates in India: a literature review" (2020). Using grounded theory, the present paper identifies a number of new attributes that have not been found in the past literature. Identification of these attributes may help to redefine the construct of employability and revise the existing theory.

The present paper will also help the recruiters to search for new employability parameters that have been identified through empirical investigations using grounded theory. In the same way, the paper will also help the B schools to restructure their curriculum and co-curricular activities so that such attributes can be inculcated among the fresh MBA graduates.

The downtrend in employability of MBA freshers makes it very clear that the attributes considered essential by management institutes were not sufficient to meet the expectation of the industry. The importance of an updated vibrant MBA curriculum that concentrates on the innovative skills and capability of the students to support the organization in sustaining its growth and the employability attributes that are considered essential by the organizations which enables these students to do so, cannot be ignored. There is always a significant connection between academics and industry in terms of capacity building of the graduates in continuing education. It is imperative for both businesses and educators to widen their vision of what is required of a high performer (Jackson, 2009). To this end, the research showcases how a definite set of attributes are required to be present in all fresher MBAs to be considered employable by the organizations. Attributes required, as referred before, will depend on a number of factors

and a set of attributes is usually chosen that will be beneficial for that organization. Hence, there is no fixed set of attributes and there is a variety in the attribute-mix. The objective of the research was to identify a set of attributes that will be required by all organizations while recruiting fresher MBAs and classify them, so that the organizations can chalk out their job specifications accordingly.

The identified attributes are the major factors for selection of the management graduates and the institutes should focus on developing them for better employability and to make the recruiters satisfied with the hiring process of fresh MBA graduates, such that the overall employability of the nation increases. Therefore, the *practical implication* of this research is to increase the employability of MBA graduates without any prior work experience. It will help management institutes to develop these sought-after attributes in their management students so that they become employable.

The research conducted also has *social implication*. Students seeking professional degrees also dream of a lucrative job besides the knowledge that they gain. The professional courses are generally of high cost compared to the general courses, especially in private institutions. Most of the students go for educational loans to finance their higher studies. Therefore, it is imperative that at the end of MBA degree the students get employed which not only takes care of their financial liability but also enhances the social prestige of the MBA graduate and his family.

Scope for further research

The five generic attributes identified by the recruiters comprise a large number of knowledge and skill requirements. While the attribute-mix requirement may be universal for all Management Trainee (MT) posts across organizations, the combination of these knowledge and skill requirements will vary with the job specification and organization. This research paper limits itself to the generic MT post and does not cover organization or industry-wise attribute-mix requirement of the MTs.

To reiterate, this research has focused on fresh MBA graduates as a whole assuming that irrespective of their area of specialization, all new recruits will go through the same induction training and then on-the-job

training to have a job-role fitment. However, further research can be done to assess the ranking of factors in an attribute group for each specialization of MBA. For example, the weightage of communication skill under Inter-personal skill attribute category will not be the same for a HR/Marketing/Finance/Production Manager. Communication skill has ten factors under it, like, clarity of speech, report writing, negotiation skill, telephonic skill, presentation skill, etc. which combined makes the Communication skill. But the weightage of each of the factors will vary, depending on the job profile, viz., oral Communication skill requirement of a HR manager and Marketing Manager will have more weightage than that of a Finance Manager. Hence, recruitment strategies including job specification will vary according to specialization area and selection will be more focused, cutting down on failures, i.e. picking up the wrong MBA Graduate.

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Annexure - 1

Data Triangulation: Time, Space, People

TIME		SPACE		PEOPLE
Date of Inter-action/ Inter-view	Interview Start Time	Industry	Location	Designation
2018/04/25	4:30 PM	Manufacturing (Construction)	Mumbai	GM - HR
2018/06/12	4:00 PM	FMCG (Fast Moving Con-sumer Goods)	Gurgaon	Manager - HR
2018/07/19	9:45 AM	Healthcare	Kolkata	Manager - HR and Admin-istration
2018/09/20	12:30 PM	FMCD (Fast Moving Con-sumer Durables)	Howrah (West Ben-gal)	Manager - HR
2018/11/23	7:45 PM	Travel & Tour-ism	Pune	CEO
2019/01/25	6:50 PM	BFSI (Banking, Financial Ser-vices and Insur-ance)	Pune	HR - Campus Head
2019/03/15	7:30 AM	Telecom	Mumbai	GM - HR
2019/04/02	1:55 PM	Hospitality	Delhi	Head - Opera-tion and HR
2019/06/28	3:45 PM	Manufacturing (Tyre)	Chennai	Manager - HR
2019/09/30	8:00 PM	FMCD (Fast Moving Con-sumer Durables)	Mumbai	Head - Talent Acquisition
2019/10/02	8:15 AM	Consulting (En-gineering)	Orissa	GM - HR
2019/11/04	8:15 PM	Consulting - Information Technology ena-bled Services (ITeS)	Bangalore	Lead - Talent Acquisition

TIME		SPACE		PEOPLE
2019/12/06	1:55 PM	EdTech (Education Technology)	Bangalore	HR Specialist
2020/01/09	3:30 PM	FinTech (Financial Technology)	Pune	HR Business Partner
2020/02/20	12:40 PM	Manufacturing (Pipelines)	Mumbai	Manager - HR
2020/03/31	12.50 PM	Consulting (FinTech Software)	Chennai	HR Business Partner

Annexure – 2
Sample Interview Transcript

Qs.1)   For which job position do you hire MBA freshers?
         Ans.1) The hiring is done for the post of Management Trainee (MT) for MBA
         fresh graduates.
Code: Management Trainee

Qs.2)   What are the attributes that you look for when recruiting MBA freshers?
         Ans.2) The major attributes that we look into while hiring fresher MBA graduates
         are clarity of thought, ability to analyse data, sense of responsibility, initiative and
         skill to apply knowledge.
         Code: Analytical skill, Leadership skill and Functional knowledge base

Qs.3)What are the technical skills you desire from a MBA fresher having Marketing or
         Sales specialisation?
         Ans.3) We generally look for negotiation skills, convincing skills, and assertiveness
         in Sales candidates.
         Code: Communication skill

Qs.4)   What are the technical skills you desire from a MBA fresher having Finance
         specialisation?
         Ans.4) Whenever we hire Finance Specialisation fresher candidate we look for
         whether he or she has Job knowledge and abilities to address financial problems.
         Code: Functional knowledge base, Analytical Skill

Qs.5)   What are the technical skills you desire from a MBA fresher having HR spe-
         cialisation?
         Ans.5) The skill that we look in HR fresher candidate is that he or she should have
         people management skill and knowledge on labour laws as mostly in our company
         the hiring is done for factory location.
         Code: Leadership skill, Functional knowledge base

Qs.6)   List the Soft Skills that you expect from a MBA fresher candidate.
         Ans.6) The soft skills we majorly look for are presentation skills, innovativeness and
         out of box thinking abilities. The preference of these skill sets make the MBA fresher
         candidates we recruit distinctly apart from those we don't.
         Code: Communication skill, Problem solving skill

Qs.7)   Do you have any other additional requirements?
Ans.7) Yes. We prefer to recruit Management Trainees who exhibits eagerness to learn and proficiency in using MS office.
Code: Alacrity to learn, Information and Communication Technology

Attributes identified after deleting repeated ones:
Analytical skill, Leadership skill and Functional knowledge base, *Communication skill,* ~~*Functional knowledge base, Analytical Skill, Leadership skill, Functional knowledge base,*~~
~~*Communication skill*~~*, Problem solving skill, Alacrity to learn, Information and Communication Technology*

Most Important Attribute*: Functional Knowledge base*

Important Attributes*: Analytical skill, Leadership skill and Communication skill*