

COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION *

*AND SOME OTHER SKILLS

Exploring Faculty and Employer Perceptions of Graduate Employability Skills

LITERATURE REVIEW

- What is employability? (Yorke, 2004)
- Core function of universities (Boden and Nedeva, 2010; Cai, 2013; Lowden et al., 2011; Tomlinson, 2012)
- HEIs criticized for focusing too heavily on theoretical models (Tomlinson, 2012)



- Employability research gained popularity amidst rising uncertainty in labor markets (Hesketh, 2000; Hinchcliffe and Jolly, 2011; Tomlinson, 2012)
- Skills approach: contested but most commonly used
- Most literature is quantitative; considers one, maximum two stakeholders' views
- No empirical research on this topic found from UAE-based literature

PARTICIPANTS

	Name	Industry	No. of Years in Region	Current Designation	Description of Institution/ Organization
Employer 1	Chloe Reid	Media communications	3 years	Senior HR Manager	A multinational media communications agency with branches worldwide
Employer 2	Sahil Ali	Automotive	17+ years	Human Resource Manager	A local organization, with sole distributorship of a famous luxury car brand and rent-a-car franchises in the UAE
Employer 3	Imtiaz Nabil	Healthcare	20 years	Senior Advisor, Human Capital	A multi-speciality hospital, operating as a branch of a famous US-based hospital
Employer 4	Ammar Mazin	Audit and advisory	3 years	Audit manager, secondary role in recruitment advising	A branch of one of the 'Big Four' multinational accounting firms
Employer 5	Marisha Jibran	Advertising and digital media	5 years	Senior HR executive	A multinational digital media and advertising agency with branches worldwide

	Name	Industry	No. of Years in Region	Current Designation	Description of Institution/ Organization
Faculty Member 1	Naila Ali	Accounting, Finance, and Economics	15+ years	Lecturer Program Coordinator	A small branch campus of a Southeast Asian university, catering to students from a low socio-economic status. The university offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in several disciplines
Faculty Member 2	Celine Simon	Economics	4.5 years	Assistant Professor	A well-known, local university in the UAE. The university offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in several disciplines
Faculty Member 3	Karen Harry	Language and communication studies	7 years	Lecturer	A local university for banking and finance studies. The university offers diplomas and undergraduate degrees
Faculty Member 4	Oliver Arron	Marketing Communications	11+ years	Professor	A well-known, private university offering the American curriculum. The university offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in several disciplines
Faculty Member 5	Mariam Shabbir	Marketing and Advertising	10+ years	Lecturer Program Director	A branch campus of a British university, offering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees across several disciplines

METHODS & ANALYSIS



Participant Narratives
What matters to faculty members: Narratives constructed from concept maps

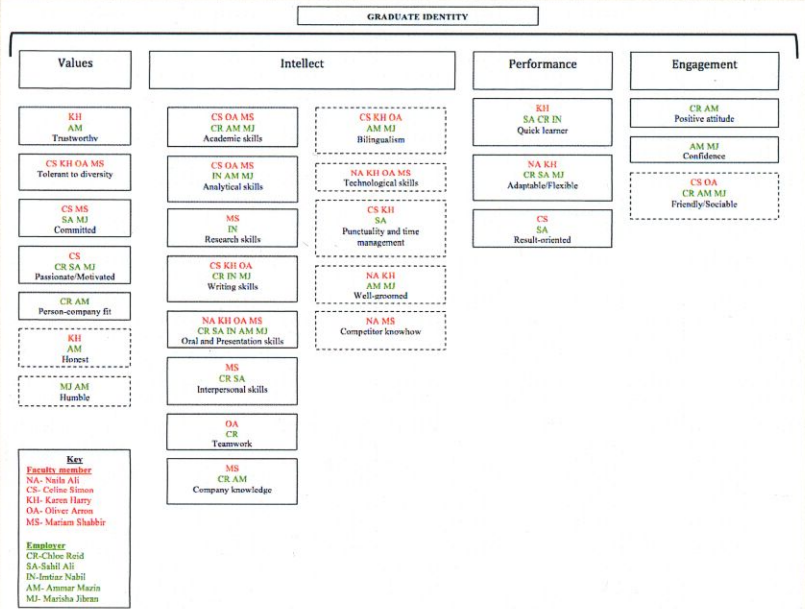
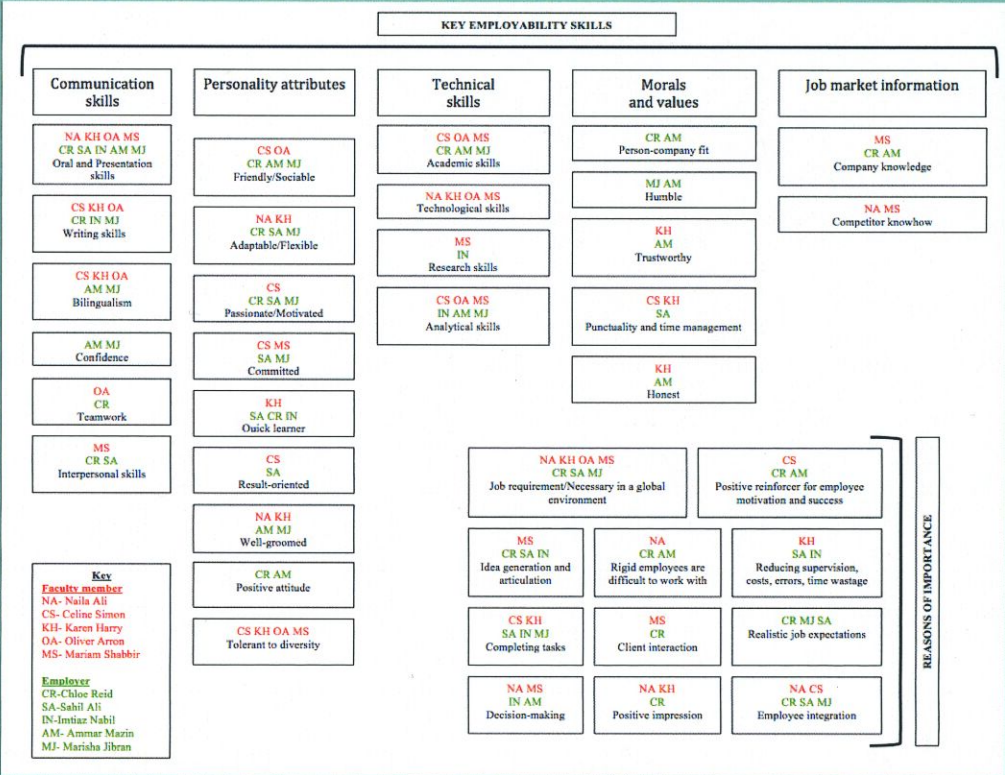
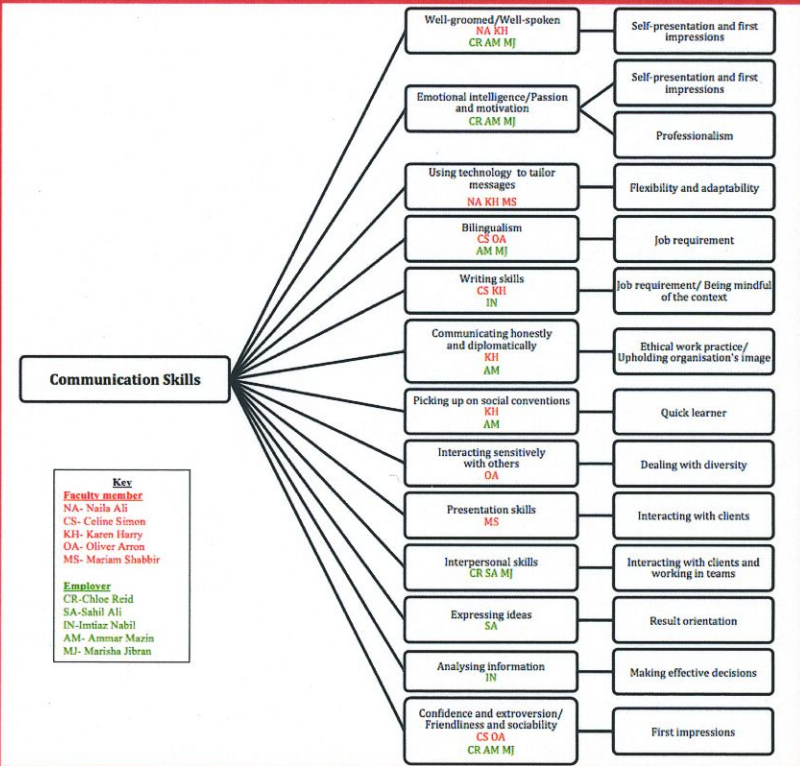
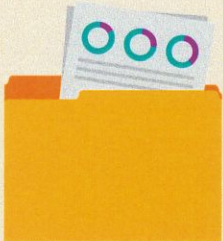
1. Naila Ali
Naila believes graduates must possess 'excellent' communication skills in order to create lasting first impressions on employers and help candidates understand their role better, personal hygiene and presentation. IT skills because workplaces expect graduates to apply them in the workplace; they must be flexible and adaptable because businesses find it hard to work with rigid employees, and possess knowledge about the economy and the competition in order to enhance decision-making.

Interestingly, Naila linked excellent communication with every skill she found important. She believes that a graduate's overall personality is shaped by the combination of communication skills and personal presentation, but that their personal circumstances such as family backgrounds affect their personal grooming. Overcoming communication helps graduates incorporate and apply technological skills to the workplace, making them more flexible. Since technology is rapidly changing, this is important so that graduates keep themselves up to date. In reverse, having technological know-how and choosing the right technology in a work situation, enhances communication and responsiveness. Being flexible will allow graduates to adapt their messages to different audiences and situations. Help them incorporate knowledge about the economy and competition into their suggestions when they attend meetings, communicate well with peers, and make better decisions by doing so. Each of these are marked as two-way relationships between communication skills and all the others, except Naila believes that being flexible and adaptable influences better communication and presentation skills, and acceptance of organizational culture, and not vice versa. She believes that while graduates can compensate on knowledge about the economy and competition, IT and communication skills are absolutely essential and employers expect these when graduates enter the organization.



KEY FINDINGS

- Communication skills were the most sought after skill group
- The term 'communication' is ambiguous, precise skills are dependent on the work context
- Overall, participants highly value academic and related skills
- Faculty members did not thoughtfully reflect on academic or discipline-specific skills
- Employers seemed to think that fresh graduates have unrealistic expectations with regards to salary and work demands
- Employability skills considered important because they are either required by a job, or help graduates in a global context
- The findings were remarkably similar to the concept of a graduate identity proposed by Holmes (2001) and later Hinchcliffe and Jolly (2011)



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