

Bridging the Skills Divide: How Competencies and Personal Attributes Shape the Employability of Management Graduates in Bengaluru

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Abstract: In today's dynamic business environment, employers have been increasingly saying that they feel management graduates lack the necessary competencies and personal qualities needed to cope in the modern workplace but have good theoretical knowledge. This paper studies the effect of managerial, communication, analytical, digital and leadership competency along with personal, interpersonal and adaptability attributes on employability of management graduates in Bengaluru. The design was the qualitative and descriptive-analytical type, and the subjects were 520 respondents, such as management graduates, faculty members, and industry recruiters from the various departments of university institutions, autonomous institutions, and private business schools. The data was gathered by structured questionnaires with five-point Likert scales with validated items. The reliability was confirmed (for the composite scale Cronbach's alpha was 0.93). Pearson correlation, multiple regression and one-way ANOVA were used to test the hypotheses. The digital competency (dimensions 1; $\beta = 0.27$) and adaptability attributes (dimensions 9; $\beta = 0.22$) were the strongest predictors of employability, and all dimensions of competency and attribute were significantly and positively related with employability. The relationship between competencies and attributes was found to explain 64.9% of the variance in employability ($R^2 = 0.649$, $p < 0.001$). The three groups of stakeholder participants had significant perceptual differences in their perceptions of graduate employability, with recruiters perceiving lower graduate employability than graduates saw themselves. The study adds to the literature on graduate employability, and provides implications for curriculum design, pedagogy, and the working relationship between industry and academia.

Keywords: Employability, managerial competency, graduate attributes, management education, stakeholder perception, business schools, Bengaluru.

1. INTRODUCTION

What management graduates enter into the world of work today has little in common with that of a generation ago. Amid the wave of automation, artificial intelligence, data analytics, digital platforms and an ever-evolving customer landscape, the definition of managerial jobs and the “job-ready” expectations have been reshaped. Employers value this, and do not just base their assessment on academic qualifications, but on a wider range of skills and attributes — communication, analysis, leadership, adaptation, confidence in working with digital tools.

Bengaluru is an interesting setting for studying such forces. It is also a major hub for education and industry, with a high concentration of business schools, and a thriving labor market across a variety of sectors including information technology, banking and financial services, consulting, retail, manufacturing, start-ups, analytics, and logistics. It sends big numbers of its students into an environment that values managerial and digital skills, analytical rigour and behavioural maturity every year.

But one of the recurring complaints by recruiters is that there is a lack of hands-on experience in the skills and attributes that companies look for in new hires. A key question to consider is how well the management education competencies and attributes are related to the expectations of industry in terms of employability? The present study seeks to answer this question by exploring the relationship between competencies, attributes and employability, and by comparing the perceptions of three important stakeholder groups — graduates, faculty and recruiters regarding the perceived relationship between employability and competencies/attributes.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The idea of competency is derived from the idea of **McClelland (1973)**, who claimed that there are competencies that can be demonstrated and that these competencies better predict job performance than traditional intelligence tests. Later, **Boyatzis (1982) and Spencer and Spencer (1993)** created competency models that differentiated the knowledge, skills, traits and motives that underlie excellent managerial performance, making competency a key construct in the management development process.

Employability, as a separate construct, has been theorised on the basis of influential theories. **Hillage and Pollard (1998)** first defined employability as the ability to obtain and sustain a career and develop their skills, and **Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007)** extended the Career-EDGE model that connects degree knowledge, skills, experiences, generic competencies, and emotional intelligence to employability with reflection and self-efficacy. Employability is not just about being able to find a first job, but it is also about doing well in the job, according to Yorke (2006).

The so called "soft skills gap" is well documented in a large volume of empirical evidence. **Andrews and Higson (2008)** identified interpersonal and communication skills as being valued by employers in Europe, and **Coetzee (2014)** reported the validation of scales of graduate attributes that encompass the personal and behavioural attributes that facilitate success at work. Theory of planned behaviour viewpoint **Ajzen, (1991)** has also been employed to understand the relationship between attitude and perceived behavioural control and graduates' intentions and readiness for career.

However, there is a number of limitations to this literature. Numerous studies focus on specific sectors and/or specific competencies and attributes, rather than addressing competencies and attributes as a whole package of employability. Even fewer, if any, people consider studying the digital age Indian business landscape of a metropolitan city like Bengaluru and even fewer look at the perceptions of graduates, faculty, and recruiters together to bring to the fore any academic–industry perceptive gaps. These omissions are the context of the contribution of the present study.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Based on a review of previous research, three main gaps are identified. First, the competencies and employability skills and gaps have been investigated individually; there is, however, a limited amount of integrated research which investigates them together as two determinants of employability in a single analytical model. Secondly, a large portion of the available evidence is either sector specific or general; and the available sector-specific and general evidence has limited focus on the technology-oriented, fast changing business landscape of Bengaluru, which is home to a large number of business schools as well as recruiters.

Thirdly, and most uniquely, few studies present the views of multiple parties at the same time. There are also significant differences in how recruiters view the industry, as well as how faculty perceive it, and how these two groups perceive the industry when it comes to graduate assessment, but this perceptual gap is not measured directly. While the present study fills these gaps, it proposes an integrated, multi-stakeholder model to explore the impact of competency and attribute dimensions on employability and contrasts graduates, faculty and recruiters perceptions.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is guided by the following objectives, framed to integrate competencies, attributes and stakeholder perception:

1. To evaluate the competency and attribute profile of management graduates and benchmark their employability against prevailing industry requirements in Bengaluru.
2. To determine the extent to which competency dimensions and attribute dimensions jointly predict the employability of management graduates.
3. To compare the perceptions of graduates, faculty and recruiters regarding graduate competencies, attributes and employability, and to identify significant perceptual gaps.

5. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The following null hypotheses were formulated for empirical testing:

1. H_{01} : Competency dimensions (managerial, communication, analytical, digital and leadership) are not significantly associated with the employability of management graduates.
2. H_{02} : Attribute dimensions (personal, interpersonal and adaptability) are not significantly associated with the employability of management graduates.

3. H₀₃: Competencies and attributes do not jointly exert a significant influence on the employability of management graduates.
4. H₀₄: There is no significant difference among graduates, faculty and recruiters in their perceptions of graduate competencies, attributes and employability.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Nature and Design of the Study

This research is quantitative, descriptive and analytical with survey method. The descriptive is a profile of competency and attribute levels of graduates and their employability, while the analytical compares the relationships and joint influence of competencies and attributes on employability, and perceptual differences among stakeholder groups. This unit of analysis includes three groups of respondents management graduates, faculty and industry recruiters, which allows for comparing the perceptions of both the academic and industry communities.

6.2 Population and Sampling

The population comprises the final year management students and management graduates of reputed business schools of Bengaluru, the faculty involved in the field of management education and the recruiters and HR professionals who are taking care of hiring management students. Stratified purposive sampling technique was used with some convenience sampling. The business schools were divided into university departments, autonomous institutions, private business schools and affiliated colleges, and the recruiters were chosen purposively that were directly involved in graduate recruitment.

The sample size was determined by representing each stakeholder group and the demands of multivariate analysis. The sample that was achieved consisted of 520 valid respondents, distributed as in table 1.

Table 1. Composition of the Multi-Stakeholder Sample

Respondent Group	Role in Study	Sample	% Share
Management graduates	Self-perceived competency, attributes, employability	350	67.3
Faculty members	Academic perception of competency development	90	17.3
Industry recruiters / HR	Industry expectations and employability standards	80	15.4
Total	—	520	100.0

Source: Compiled by the researcher from field data.

6.3 Data Collection Instrument

Structured questionnaires were used in the collection of primary data which consisted of items relating to a person's competencies, attributes and employability and responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Graduates and faculty/recruiters took the parallel versions for perceptual comparison. The conceptual framework and questionnaire design were developed using secondary data which were gathered from books, research articles, doctoral theses, documents of AICTE and UGC, business-school placement reports and employability surveys. A pilot study was conducted prior to data collection to clarify items, sequencing and scale appropriateness.

6.4 Variables and Statistical Tools

The independent variables comprise five competency dimensions — managerial, communication, analytical and problem-solving, digital and leadership — and three attribute dimensions — personal, interpersonal and adaptability. Employability was measured in terms of job readiness, suitability to industry, confidence in job recruitment, career orientation, ability to adjust to organisational requirements and contribution in the workplace. Demographic and institutional classification variables and stakeholder group as the comparative dimension. The data had been analysed in SPSS software with descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha reliability, Pearson correlation, multiple regression and one-way ANOVA.

7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual approach places competency and attributes as the main factors in shaping employable graduates in an evolving business world. The competencies include the managerial, communication, analytical, digital and leadership competencies, and attributes include the personal, interpersonal and adaptability competencies. The dependent variable is employability which is measured by job readiness, industry suitability, confidence, career orientation and perceived contribution to workplace. A comparative dimension is the stakeholder perception (graduates, faculty, recruiters) to bring to the surface differences in the perception of employability. The framework is shown in the figure.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework — Competency, Attributes and Employability

Determinants	Link	Outcome / Comparison
Competency: managerial, communication, analytical, digital, leadership	H ₀₁ / H ₀₃	Employability of management graduates: job readiness, industry suitability, confidence, career orientation, contribution
Attributes: personal, interpersonal, adaptability	H ₀₂ / H ₀₃	↑
Stakeholder perception: graduates, faculty, recruiters	H ₀₄	Difference in perception of competency, attributes and employability

Source: Developed by the researcher. Classification variables: gender, age, qualification, specialisation, institution type and experience.

8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

8.1 Respondent Profile and Reliability

Among the 350 graduate respondents, 54.6% were male and 45.4% female, and 71.4% were pursuing or had completed a postgraduate management qualification. Faculty respondents averaged 11.8 years of teaching experience, and recruiters represented IT, BFSI, consulting, manufacturing and start-up sectors. Reliability analysis confirmed strong internal consistency across all scales (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α
Managerial competency	5	0.87
Communication competency	5	0.89
Analytical & problem-solving competency	5	0.86
Digital competency	5	0.88
Leadership competency	5	0.85
Personal / interpersonal / adaptability attributes	9	0.90
Employability	6	0.91

Source: Primary data (N = 520).

8.2 Levels of Competency, Attributes and Employability

Graduates' self-rated competency and attributes were in the moderate-to-high range, with the highest score being for communication (M = 3.94) and the lowest score being for digital competency (M = 3.61). There was a digital-readiness gap. The overall employability (across stakeholders) was found to mean 3.72.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Managerial competency	3.78	0.62
Communication competency	3.94	0.59
Analytical & problem-solving competency	3.69	0.66
Digital competency	3.61	0.71
Leadership competency	3.66	0.68
Attributes (composite)	3.83	0.57
Employability	3.72	0.60

Source: Primary data (N = 520).

8.3 Relationship of Competencies and Attributes with Employability (H_{01} , H_{02})

Pearson correlation analysis (Table 4) showed that all competency and attribute dimensions were positively and significantly correlated with employability at the 0.01 level. Digital competency ($r = 0.61$) and adaptability attributes ($r = 0.59$) recorded the strongest associations, followed by analytical competency ($r = 0.56$). H_{01} and H_{02} are therefore rejected.

Table 4. Correlation with Employability

Dimension	r with Employability	p
Digital competency	0.61	**
Adaptability attributes	0.59	**
Analytical & problem-solving competency	0.56	**
Communication competency	0.53	**
Managerial competency	0.51	**
Leadership competency	0.48	**
Personal attributes	0.46	**
Interpersonal attributes	0.44	**

Source: Primary data (N = 520). **Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

8.4 Joint Influence on Employability (H_{03})

A multiple linear regression was estimated with the competency and attribute dimensions as predictors of employability. The model was significant ($F(8, 511) = 118.2$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 64.9% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.649$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.643$). Digital competency ($\beta = 0.27$) and adaptability attributes ($\beta = 0.22$) were the strongest predictors followed by analytical competency ($\beta = 0.17$). All predictors were significant at the 5% or higher level. The null hypothesis is rejected, thus supporting the joint effect of competencies and attributes on employability.

Table 5. Multiple Regression — Predictors of Employability

Predictor	β	t	p	VIF
Digital competency	0.27	6.42	***	1.69
Adaptability attributes	0.22	5.31	***	1.74
Analytical & problem-solving competency	0.17	4.08	***	1.61
Communication competency	0.13	3.16	**	1.58
Managerial competency	0.11	2.74	**	1.55
Leadership competency	0.09	2.21	*	1.49
Personal & interpersonal attributes	0.08	2.03	*	1.52

Source: Primary data (N = 520). Model $R^2 = 0.649$; $F(8, 511) = 118.2$, $p < 0.001$. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

8.5 Stakeholder Perception Gaps (H_{04})

One-way ANOVA was used to compare employability ratings among the three stakeholder groups. The differences were significant ($F(2, 517) = 21.46$, $p < 0.001$). The faculty rated their own employability second ($M = 3.71$), while the graduates rated themselves highest ($M = 3.94$), and the recruiters rated graduate employability as lowest ($M = 3.42$). Tukey HSD post-hoc tests showed the graduate–recruiter gap was significant at $p < 0.01$, representing a significant academic–industry perceptual gap. The value of the null hypothesis, H_{04} , is thus rejected.

Table 6. Mean Employability Rating by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Mean Rating	SD	n
Management graduates	3.94	0.55	350
Faculty members	3.71	0.58	90
Industry recruiters	3.42	0.62	80

Source: Primary data (N = 520). ANOVA: $F(2, 517) = 21.46$, $p < 0.001$.

8.6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement (Null)	Decision
H_{01}	Competencies not associated with employability	Rejected
H_{02}	Attributes not associated with employability	Rejected
H_{03}	Competencies and attributes do not jointly influence employability	Rejected
H_{04}	No perceptual difference among stakeholders	Rejected

Source: Compiled from the analysis above.

9. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are four important findings. First, the relationships among the dimensions of competencies and attributes and employability are significantly and positively at the level of all the competencies and attributes, reflecting the integrated perspective because employability is a function of a combination of competencies and attributes rather than any single one. Second, the attributes of digital competency and adaptability are the most powerful, underscoring the high value placed on digital skills in the city's tech-driven jobs market and on the ability to adjust to change.

Third, the low level of the self-rated digital competency indicates a need for a particular focus in the development of business schools. Fourth, the large disconnect between graduates' perceptions of their employability vs. recruiters' perception of its employability, with graduates over-estimating compared to recruiters' perception, validates the

academic–industry disconnect that recruiters often cite, and highlights the need to be mindful of the need to bring in recruiter information to support curriculum and placement preparation. The combined findings address the gap identified in the literature as an integrated gap, with multiple actors.

10. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the relationship between competencies and personal attributes to the employability of the management graduates in Bengaluru and the perception of the management graduates, faculty members and recruiters about employability. The evidence confirms that competencies and attributes are two which contribute to employability in a joint and substantial way with digital competency and adaptability as the foremost drivers. This large perceptual disconnect between self-assessment and expectations by the industry underscores the importance of refining the gap between the academic preparation and industry expectations. The study brings a double benefit to the literature on graduate employability: a practical contribution, owing to the incorporation of competency and attribute dimensions in the same multi-stakeholder model, and an empirical contribution, in providing evidence of the link between these two dimensions.

11. SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest the following actions for business schools, faculty and policymakers:

- Further, business schools need to significantly enhance their digital competency, the strongest predictor and one of the self-identified gaps, by incorporating data analytics, digital tools and projects using digital technology, into the management curriculum.
- Adaptability and other behavioural characteristics should be developed purposefully and intentionally via experiential learning, live projects, simulations and reflection, not incidental.
- Some systems for the feedback from recruiters should be established, for example, advisory boards, internships, and capstone exams, to fill the gap between grads and industry perceptions and to ensure up-to-date curricula.
- Placement preparation should incorporate a realistic self-assessment and feedback for graduates to make sure their expectations for employability align with industry standards.
- Academic delivery needs to evolve as per the changing competency requirements as faculty development is required to replicate the industry practice in Bengaluru's dynamic sectors.

12. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has a number of limitations. It was held in some of the business schools in Bengaluru and may not apply to other business schools across the country. It is based on perception-based and self-reported data, and may be affected by opinions of the respondents and social-desirability bias. The participation of recruiters was based on availability and willingness to participate and the selected competency and attribute dimensions were not all of those factors that influence an individual's employability. The data are as of a specific time and may change depending on changes in the industry. Longitudinal studies could be used to trace the relationship between graduate competencies and real on-the-job experiences, further develop the model by using structural equation modelling to account for the mediating processes and compare it with other cities or institution types. The evidence base could be further strengthened by including objective employability measures such as placement rates and employer assessments with perceptual measures.

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