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Digital Skills and Research Methods

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ANALYSIS OF TRANSFERABLE SKILLS IN EDUCATION

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Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to concentrate on transferable skills as learning potential and to analyse these transferable skills gained by a learner from their college or university experience, and how these set of skills could be relevant and important for their future employment. In this essay, I will analyse some transferable skills that a learner may gain from their university education and quest for knowledge.

As a matter of fact, the most important aim of students' college or university experience is the acquisition of knowledge and skills. As it is widely known, the role of higher education is not to merely provide students with knowledge, but also to equip them with necessary skills which will be used to contribute to the global economy. These acquired skills will also be important in the students' social, career and professional developments.

Development / Transferable Skills

Today's difficult job market and the global recession have created an unfair competitive situation in the labour market, where the most skilful, knowledge and job experienced people are more competitive than others. Being well equipped with the right skills required by employers will ensure that people looking for work in a particular organisation would stand a better chance of being hired. As a matter of facts, recent trends in the graduate employment industry around the

world have shown that the traditional positions reserved for graduates in organisations are gradually diminishing over time.

Graduate employees are now expected to perform their work effectively and efficiently as soon as they are hired and into their work positions. This requires them to make use of the skills they gained while they were in higher education. Therefore, it becomes important for them to acquire important transferable skills that will be necessary once they begin working in the corporate world (University of Exeter 2010).

The two types of skills that have been identified to be essential for employers when hiring new people into their companies are what are referred to as the content skills and the transferable skills. Content skills which are also referred to as cognitive or intellectual skills are the skills that a person acquires while they are studying to gain academic mastery of their field of education.

Content skills include computer or IT literacy, reading and writing skills, and foreign language skills. IT literacy or computer skills have now gained a lot of importance and are considered as core skills by most employers who are looking to hire new graduates into their companies (Gardner et al 2007). Content skills related to a person's wealth of academic experience include the type of information the person acquires on the academic field, the rules and principles of the field of education and how the educational information can be applied to the professional context. Certain employers expect new recruits to have extensive knowledge on their academic field of study before they are hired. This applies to fields such as accounting, finance or marketing. Other employers might require content skills based on the fundamental aspects of the academic field of study (Gardner et al 2007).

Transferable skills are defined as the skills and abilities that a person acquires during any activity they perform in their life. These skills are developed in one state so that they can be transferred for use in another situation.

Examples of transferable skills include communication skills, problem solving skills, presentation skills, self- management skills, leadership skills, skills for negotiation, language, computer literacy, interpersonal skills, and multi-tasking capabilities (Foster 1998). The two transferable

skills that will be focused on in the essay will be communication skills which encompass oral and written communication and leadership skills.

Communication skills require an individual to demonstrate a solid understanding of oral, listening, reading and writing capabilities. Communication skills require a person to have presentation skills which involve having the ability to orally justify and persuade people as well as to respond intellectually to questions, criticisms that might arise during the presentation. Communication is viewed to be an important transferable skill as it provides the basic means for relaying one's opinions, ideas and thoughts to other people.

Employers expect their employees to be able to communicate properly both in the oral and written context. Employers normally use the following criteria to assess the communication skills of potential employees; whether they can speak and write effectively, whether they can understand the message that is being relayed, whether they can conduct oral and written presentations to communicate information to other co-workers (Foster 1998).

Leadership skills are the abilities enabling a person to take control or manage the needs of an organisation. Having leadership skills enables an individual to make effective decisions, manage other people to achieve or accomplish a certain range of tasks, encourage other people through motivation and take responsibility for certain tasks.

Leadership skills should bring out willingness and an active interest in individuals when they perform certain tasks, enabling them to progress to another level. Employers who look for graduate management trainees usually consider communication and leadership skills as important transferable skills for any job graduate job seekers who wish to work in these positions (Gardner et al 2007).

Some students acquire both communication and leadership skills when they participate in class assignments, group assignments or oral presentations within the class context. Most university

and college courses incorporate such approaches into their learning modules as a way of preparing students to be effective writing and oral communicators as well as leaders in both class and work context. Students who have good communication and leadership skills are most likely to be identified by employers as potential management material. Acquiring these skills while in school is seen as important, given the ever changing and competitive labour market (Ingebrigtsen 2009).

The Importance of Transferable Skills to Employers

Transferable skills are regarded as very valuable to all kind of employers within various types of professions and in the business enterprise world. Transferable skills ensure that potential employees are well equipped when in a new employment and help them show flexibility which is a good skill to have when they plan to develop their careers as well as develop career progression activities.

Developing student's skills through higher education involves fostering the development of transferable skills which could be used in different work situations. Students could gain transferable skills if they participate in volunteer works, if they get to study in a foreign country, if they get involved or work as trainees in professional organisations while in college. According to Gardner, students can also develop transferable skills as and when enjoying their hobbies and interests that develop their interpersonal, communication and leadership skills (Gardner et al 2007).

The results of a study conducted to determine what transferable skills employers look for in graduates, showed that most employers looked at the graduate's personality and their enthusiasm for work in their company. Whereas other employers looked at the work experience and academic records of the graduates before they decided on whether to hire them or not. These were mostly employers who wanted to develop the graduates' transferable skills once they were hired for the position. Other employers who were surveyed in the study showed that they choose transferable skills such as oral communication, teamwork and time management skills, which they saw as important for employees to deal with multiple tasks (Curry et al 2003). The study also surveyed employers who had recently recruited employees who were third level

graduates. When asked if they were satisfied with the transferable skills that these graduates had, most of the employers showed that they were satisfied with the IT and numeric skills that recent graduates demonstrated in their work. These employers were also satisfied with the oral communication, teamwork and customer service skills that were demonstrated by these employees.

The skills that the employers were least satisfied with included time management, written communication such as reports and proposals, the ability to cope with multiple tasks, planning and presentation skills. The surveyed employers did not view foreign languages as an important transferable skill when it came to employing third level graduates into their companies (Curry et al 2003).

The principal methods that were used to determine and assess the transferable skills of the graduates during the selection and recruitment process included face to face interviews, with job seekers resumé, involving aptitude tests, psychometric testing and reference checks. This indicated that these techniques were commonly used in the recruitment methods and processes by most companies.

The indications that the employers gave out would be used by higher education institutions to improve the transferable skills of graduates and to conduct supervised work placements, to use for industry specific workshops, to use in case studies in order to develop the transferable skills of graduates and learners. The employers also offered suggestions on the use of transferable skill courses in college education particularly in group work and class presentations (Curry et al 2003).

When recruiting graduates and other job seekers, employers viewed transferable skills as the third highest priority in a group of nine performance factors. These transferable skills were ranked higher in the record and their work experience. Academic records and work experience were ranked lower than transferable skills in the criteria used for evaluating the graduates' transferable skills. This means that the academic record and work experience were only considered important when they revealed the transferable skills of the students.

In other cases, employers in some organizations hired graduates based on their work attitude instead of their transferable skills which they would later develop during the training and development stage. This particularly applied in cases where the graduate employees were book smart, meaning they had the necessary knowledge to perform the job, but they lacked the transferable skills needed for the position (Curry et al 2003).

Conclusion

What transpires from the transferable skills analysis is the evidence that many of the employers in profit as well as non-profit organisations would rather have employees who are multitaskers and able to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently. Employers look for people who can communicate properly and clearly and aim to thrive into leadership positions in the course of their employment.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance that graduates, and job seekers work hard on their communication and leadership skills as well as other transferable skills while looking and applying for jobs. So, to help graduate in their search for employment, it would if universities and higher education institutions place more emphasis on career training and progression programs that will see the graduates developing the necessary transferable skills.

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