

## Graduates' Competence on Employability Skills and Job Performance

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### ABSTRACT

One critical measure of success in workplaces is an employee's ability to use competently the knowledge, skills and values that match the needs of his job, satisfy the demands of his employer, and contribute to the overall achievement of institutional goals. An explanatory-correlational research design was used to determine the extent of relationship between categories of employability skills (using The Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+) and elements of Contextual Performance adopted from Borman and Motowidlo's Taxonomy. There were a total of 220 respondents representing the groups of employers and employees from 25 government institutions in the south-central part of Mindanao region, Philippines. Inferential analysis shows that fundamental skills had moderate relationship with employees' contextual performance. However, being more competent in thinking and problem solving skills provides employees with more benefits in performing contextual behavior. Findings further revealed that although personal management skills had moderate relationship with employees' contextual behavior, the competence in personal adaptability and learning continuously are contributory across all elements of contextual performance. Finally, the result of the study yielded that teamwork skills, particularly the skills on working with others, were also moderately correlated with employees' contextual performance. This implies that graduates' competence in employability skills could give them due advantage in their respective work settings. Thus, proper attention on developing competence on employability skills by employers, employees, higher academic institutions, labor agencies, and policy makers may help address the problems on job performance.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, just like the rest of the countries in the world, is beset by increasingly uncertain changes brought by globalization. The US Department of Labor [1] noted that "we are living in a new economy powered by technology, fueled by information, and driven by knowledge" (p. 1). The influence of technology will go beyond new equipment and faster communications, as work and skills will be redefined and reorganized.

The current age has created opportunities along with challenges and complexities that affect two of our country's sectors: education and employment. Lasan [2] contended that both have a lot at stake in human resources that could compete successfully in a global economy. The human resource will be graduates of institutions of higher learning whose educational experience will harmonize with the requirements of the

present and future labor market. Hence, the interplay and cooperative endeavor of these two sectors become highly imperative.

In line with this period of globalization, the higher education has been concerned with the development of the whole person as well as knowledge, attributes, and skills which any educated person should expect to have by the time of graduation. It further aims to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life so that they grow intellectually, contribute effectively to society, achieve personal fulfillment and are well- equipped for work.

It becomes essential now for higher education institutions (HEIs) to respond to unpredictable labor market and make parallel adjustments in order to fulfill their mission. One organized way to keep pace with this time of quickening change is for HEIs to provide avenues for the graduates to gain certain general skills and qualities that will make them completely geared up to the real demands of the world of work [3]-[4]. Accordingly, without compromising the academic principles, Abas-Mastura, Imam & Osman [5] argued that “HEIs should demonstrate a greater commitment to develop the generalized expertise that graduates can transfer to whatever working environment they find themselves in after graduation” (p. 151). In other words, they are expected to have developed not only subject specific skills but also employability skills to make them both specialists and generalists. For Bailey [6], teaching and learning these generic skills are consistent with the emerging needs of a world economy in a high performance workplace.

The employability skills refer to attributes of employees, other than technical competence, which make them an asset to an employer [7]. The employability skills have varied classifications like basic academic skills, higher-order thinking skills and personal qualities with more detailed skill sets [8]. These generic employability skills are useful across all levels of positions from job entrants to chiefs of offices [9]. Gregson & Bettis [10] asserted that many employers require applicants to have these skills to be seriously considered for employment. Similarly, these skills are crucial for employment and workplace success and serve as basis for lifelong learning needed by graduates to find a job [11]. The significance of employability skills in work settings is then recognized [4],[12].

The employability skills adopted in the study are categorized into three areas such as fundamental, personal management and teamwork skills. The call of the time now is for employees to enrich and sustain these skills in their work setting and be motivated in lifelong learning. It is important that they are able to upgrade the skills and to anticipate and prepare for the future skills required of the workforce [11]. In other words, they have to achieve competence on the use of employability skills. Such competence on skills denotes the degree to which an employee demonstrates proficiency and mastery on the different acquired employability skills. In addition, according to Weinert [13], competence pertains to “cognitive fitness for a particular class of tasks, a roughly specialized system of abilities, proficiencies, or individual dispositions to learn something successfully, to do something successfully, or to reach a specific goal. This can be applied to an individual, a group of individuals, or an institution” [p. 34]. As such, employers demand that employees acquire a wide range of employability skills and apply competently such skills for better job performance.

Moreover, job performance dimensions should generalize across a broad range of jobs. Distinctions may be made between elements of task and contextual performance [14]. With this, it becomes inevitable for the government heads to widen their criteria of job performance, for they need to focus also on its contextual performance and not only on understanding of performance in its traditional concept of specific task behaviors.

Van Scotter and Motowidlo define contextual performance as “behaviours that deviate from an employee’s job description” (p. 16) [15]. It is clear that employees can contribute to their workplaces in ways that go beyond the activities that make up their jobs. Van Scotter postulates that these employees can get involved in contextual performance when they are “voluntarily helping colleagues, putting in extra effort to complete a given task, putting in extra hours to get work done on time and so forth” (p. 16) [15]. In this study, contextual performance involves the five elements identified by Borman and Motowidlo [14] namely volunteering, persisting, helping, endorsing, supporting and defending organizational objectives, and following organizational rules identified.

Based on available studies reviewed [4]-[7], [10]-[12], [16]-[19] almost all regarded the importance of employability skills in work settings. However, these did not focus on correlating the skill competence of employees with their contextual performance. Thus, the present study tried addressing this research gap to add more to a body of knowledge on employability skills and contextual performance of government employees. This study investigated how crucial the graduates’ competence on employability skills is as new entrants to their performance in a government workplace. Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following: (1) How does graduates’ competence on employability skills correlate with contextual performance?, and (2) What do the findings on the correlation of skills and performance imply? To address the first problem, the following hypotheses were set. Ho: The employees’ competence on the employability

skills does not significantly correlate with contextual performance. Ha: The employees' competence on the employability skills significantly correlate with contextual performance.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

An explanatory-correlational research design was employed in the study to explain or clarify the degree of association among two or more variables at one point in time" (p. 343) [20]. The data consisting of competence on employability skills of employees and their contextual performance were identified. A correlation was applied between employee-competence on employability skills and job performance.

Out of 25 government agencies that were surveyed, a sample of 110 employers and 110 employees was selected as the respondents of the study. The employers were composed of section or unit chiefs under the division chiefs of the identified regional offices. But not all section/unit chiefs became part of the survey; those who only qualified have one or more employees whom they directly supervised in not less than one year. Each of these chiefs rated his/her own employee in terms of skill competence and job performance. Then, the qualified employees were subordinates of the sampled employers. Employees referred to the graduates of four-year or five-year degree programs from public and private higher institutions and have served in their present workplace for at least one year. They assessed themselves with respect to their level of skill competence and job performance. The number of employer-employee respondents selected per agency ranged from 1-11. There were an unequal number of respondents because some section chiefs have no employees under them, and all these agencies do not have the same number of sections/units.

The research tools were two sets of survey questionnaires. Employees answered one set and employers had the other set. For the employees' questionnaire, Part I pertained to their personal profile description. Part II was the 50-item Employability Skills Questionnaire which inquired on the level of competence of employees on the said skills and was rated adopting a three-point scale from (1) "not competent" to (3) "very competent". Finally, Part III was the Job Performance Questionnaire which measured the contextual performance of employees in the regional agencies and utilized a three-point scale that ranged from (1) "needs improvement" to (3) "very satisfactory".

Part I of the survey questionnaire for the employers dealt with their personal profile. Part II was made up of two questionnaires. One was the Employability Skills Competence Questionnaire, which ranged from (1) "not competent" to (3) "very competent". This described the level of skill competence of employees as perceived by employers. The other was the Job Performance Questionnaire, which obtained data on employees' contextual performance. The items for every element of contextual performance were rated using a three-point scale that ranged from (1) "needs improvement" to (3) "very satisfactory".

Additionally, Part II items for both groups of respondents were derived from the Employability Skills 2000+ that was conceptualized by members of the Conference Board of Canada [16]. It was then modified in order to yield the needed data for the study. Thus, the final list of employability skills used in the present study only included 50 skill items out of 56 descriptions in the original document. The skills were further categorized into three; each category had skill areas. These were Fundamental Skills (communicate, manage information, use numbers, and think and solve problems), Personal Management Skills (demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, be responsible, be adaptable, learn continuously and work safely) and Teamwork Skills (work with others and participate in projects and tasks). The same employability skills items were used to measure all the level of skill competence of employees as perceived by them and their respective employers.

In the case of contextual performance, the factors developed were drawn from the concepts of the organizational psychologists, Borman and Motowildo [14]. Hence, the Job Performance Questionnaire used in this study consisted of 20 contextual performance items which involved five elements: Volunteering, Persisting, Helping/Cooperating, Endorsing, Supporting and Defending Organizational Objectives and Following Organizational Rules.

All the scale values of the different questionnaires were given the corresponding weights of 1.00-1.49 for 1; 1.50-2.49 for 2, and 2.50-3.00 for 3.

Content validity in the aspects of adequacy of items, relevance and format of the said instruments were obtained through an assessment of five education experts. Validators recommended that the names of categories of employability skills and their corresponding skill areas should be explicitly written instead of just enumerating the skills from 1-50. Each 50-item employability skills test for skill competence was then clearly categorized into: (a) Fundamental, (b) Personal Management, and (c) Teamwork. Every category indicated also its two or more skill areas (e.g. communication, responsibility, working with others, etc). This was done so that respondents can easily identify and understand the skills they are to rate.

In like manner, the job performance elements composed of 20 descriptions were also arranged. Hence, headings for each element were spelled out in the questionnaire. There was also a slight change in the

instructions specifically in the Employability Skill Competence Questionnaire distributed to the section chiefs and in the Employability Skills Questionnaire given to the employees.

To assess the reliability of the questionnaires, the test-retest technique was employed. Such questionnaires were administered twice within a period of three weeks to the two groups of non-participating respondents; each group had five respondents coming from Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) regional line agencies. The result yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88 for the employers' questionnaire while the corresponding reliability for employees' questionnaire was 0.71. The coefficients indicate that the two sets of instruments are reliable. These values are comparable to standardized measures for non-ability test [21].

Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation ( $r$ ) was computed to determine the correlation of competence on employability skills categories and areas with contextual performance. In interpreting the value of relationship between variables, Dancy and Reidy's [22] "illustration of the strength of positive and negative correlation coefficients" was adopted as follows:  $+/-1.0$  (Perfect),  $+/-0.7 - +/-0.9$  (Strong),  $+/-0.4 - +/-0.6$  (Moderate),  $+/-0.1 - +/-0.3$  (Weak), and  $0$  (Zero) (p. 175). All statistical tests were set at 0.05 level of significance.

### 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

On the basis of the study conducted by Abas-Mastura, Imam, & Osman [3], it was reported that the employer-employee assessment of the competence of new entrant graduates in both employability skills namely Fundamental Skills and Teamwork Skills was described as moderately competent. However, competence on Personal Management Skills was rated differently; employers perceived the employees to be moderately competent while the employees perceived themselves as very competent. Moreover, it was presented also in this study that same group of employees demonstrated a satisfactory contextual performance. These findings served as empirical data in determining if such level of competence in three categories of employability skills is associated with satisfactory contextual performance.

As shown in Table 1, the Fundamental Skills ( $r=.48^{**}$ ), Personal Management Skills ( $r=.62^{**}$ ) and Teamwork Skills ( $r=.60^{**}$ ) were all correlated with Contextual Performance of employees at .01 level of significance. Table 1 also shows that correlation values between individual skill area and element of contextual performance range from weak (.1 to .3) to moderate (.4 to .6) relationship.

Table 1. Correlation between Level of Competence on Employability Skills and Contextual Performance

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (Categories/Areas)	Contextual Performance					Overall r
	VOL	PER	H/C	ESDO	FOR	
<u>Fundamental</u>						
Communication	.30**	.33**	.25**	.26**	.21**	
Management of Information	.31**	.34**	.29**	.29**	.12	
Use of Numbers	.41**	.38**	.34**	.36**	.32**	
Thinking and Problem Solving	.41**	.46**	.37**	.44**	.27**	
*Overall r						.48**
<u>Personal Management</u>						
Positive Attitudes and Behaviors	.43**	.40**	.37**	.37**	.28**	
Responsibility	.48**	.46**	.45**	.42**	.37**	
Adaptability	.51**	.58**	.50**	.46**	.41**	
Learning Continuously	.53**	.58**	.48**	.44**	.41**	
Working Safely	.53**	.44**	.49**	.38**	.40**	
*Overall r						.62**
<u>Teamwork</u>						
Working with Others	.56**	.61**	.53**	.50**	.51**	
Participation in Projects and Tasks	.30**	.34**	.34**	.37**	.35**	
*Overall r						.60**

Note: VOL= Volunteering; PER = Persisting; H/C = Helping/Cooperating; ESDO = Endorsing, Supporting and Defending Organizational Objectives; FOR = Following Organizational Rules

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

This present findings revealed four significant skill-performances in workplaces. First, one skill has weak relationship across all contextual behaviors (e.g. Communication, Management of Information, and Participation in Projects and Tasks). Second, another skill has moderate relationship across all contextual behaviors (e.g. Adaptability and Learning Continuously). Third, while one skill has weak relationship with a particular behavior, it has more moderate relationship with the rest of contextual behaviors (e.g. Working

Safely, Responsibility, and Thinking and Problem Solving). Fourth, while one skill is moderately correlated with particular behaviors, it has more negligible relationship with the rest of contextual behaviors (e.g. Use of Numbers, and Positive Attitudes and Behaviors).

Looking closely at individual category of employability skills, Fundamental Skills registered two sub-skills such as Communication and Management of Information that had weak correlation with all contextual elements which means that employees do not need to be good in the four macro- communication skills and use of technology in order to act on contextual behaviors like compliance with organizational rules and acceptance of new procedures even if there are changes in work duties. Though it is viewed as among the primary basic skills, number skills are only moderately correlated with Volunteering ( $r=.41^{**}$ ) while they have negligible correlation with other contextual behaviors. Then, the skills on Thinking and Problem Solving had moderate relationship with the three elements of contextual behaviors such as Volunteering ( $r=.41$ ), Persisting ( $r=.46$ ) and Endorsing, Supporting, and Defending Organizational Objectives ( $r=.44$ ). This means that employees who possess these skills would have greater chances of performing well their contextual behaviors. These findings imply that Fundamental Skills are not greatly applied in performing the extra-role tasks and behaviors of public workers; thus, their level of skill competence may just be moderately improved. These workers may be doing the five contextual elements without necessarily effectively applying the various communication skills and competencies.

On the Personal Management Skills category, it can be observed that among its five sub-skill areas, only Adaptability and Learning Continuously had relationship across all contextual elements. This implies that employees' competence on carrying out different tasks, accepting feedback, coping with uncertainty (Adaptability), learning and growing, achieving learning goals and addressing areas for development (Learning Continuously) can help them perform contextual behaviors. On the other hand, Positive Attitudes is moderately correlated only with Volunteering ( $r=.43$ ), and Persisting ( $r=.40$ ) which creates an impression that employees' honesty, integrity, ethics, interest, efforts, confidence, care and concern for their own and others' rights have a moderate effect on their behavior when welcoming newer employees in the group, showing concern even during business and personal pressures and offering ideas to improve the organization (Volunteering). Positive attitudes can propel their motivation to act voluntarily and persistently. Also Responsibility and Working Safely provide more moderate correlations indicating that these Personal Management Skills can boost employees' morale in demonstrating positive contextual behaviors. These findings suggest that competence on the use of Personal Management Skills may influence the performance of non-job specific functions among employees. All skill areas are essential in the improvement of their contextual performance in workplaces. Having right behaviors to lifelong learning and adaptability skills [11] are vital in adjusting to the organization's culture, carrying out tasks, building up ideas, fostering initiative and responsibility and facilitating adaptability to organizational change [23].

For Teamwork Skills category, it is shown in Table 1 that while Working with Others indicated moderate correlation (with all values within the range of .40-.60) across contextual behaviors, the other skill area which is Participation in Projects and Tasks registered weak correlation (with all values within the range of .10-.30) across all elements of contextual behaviors. On one hand, this result reveals that employees' skills in understanding individual differences, accepting constructive feedback, and leading or supporting a group can highly influence their behaviors to withstand problems and challenges, and to continue a tedious task despite difficulties (Persisting). On the other hand, the competence on project-based skills is a negligible factor that facilitates employees' performance of contextual behavior. The results reveal that employees' contextual performance was better when they showed competence on skills in Working with Others than in skills in Participation in Projects and Tasks. These also suggest that employees' competence on the use of skills in Working with Others may help them perform competently their extra-role behaviors and functions in their work settings.

On the basis of the hypothesis put forward in this study, the present findings reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between the competence on employability skills and contextual performance of employees.

### 3.1. Implications of the Findings

Our world in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is a picture of a revolution of rising skills. This call of time eventually requires matching the skills levels of graduates of higher education institutions (HEIs) and the employability skills requirements of the present and future workplace environments. This suggests that a proactive partnership between the government agencies and the education sector should be strengthened. With this, HEIs should maintain developing in their students the employability skills and help them become competent in applying such skills even before their graduation and entry to a workplace. The government employers should also create relevant intervention activities to continuously enhance the graduates' acquired competencies and skills which are needed to stay and progress on their jobs.

The present findings offer other implications on both respondents of the study. On the part of government employers, they are made aware of which employability skills can have a significant bearing on employee's contextual performance, thereby giving more opportunities to job entrants to hone these skills. Though some skills can be disregarded in as far as the contextual behaviors are concerned, the continued development of these skills may be useful in some aspects of job performance such as task performance. It would be ideal if employers may consider more flexibility by balancing the skills development needed for both task and contextual performance of employees. On the part of government employees, they may be properly guided on what employability skills are necessary to facilitate effective and efficient performance of their functions that require extra-role behaviors contributory to the welfare of their workplace.

Job performance in government agencies involving non- job specific roles is linked to employees' competence in using employability skills in the fundamental, personal management and teamwork categories as revealed in the present findings. It becomes imperative to sustain proficiency and mastery in the application of all skills to achieve a much higher level of contextual performance among employees. With skill competence, they could easily anticipate, adjust to and act on the present and future changing needs, conditions and demands of employers and workplaces. For this reason, employers and employees alike should give adequate attention in the upgrading of skills for fulfilling the contextual dimension of job performance. In this way, it becomes a two-way traffic where both of them value employability skills and contextual behaviors especially those that are not highly performed by employees in their workplaces.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The increasing demands of labor market in this technologically-driven work setting on one side and the mushrooming of ill-prepared graduates creating higher statistics of underemployment and unemployment especially in third world countries on the other side are continuing concerns to be addressed. It is believed that the positive effects of seamless societies and ASEAN integration have created job opportunities both local and abroad beyond one's imagination. Employers are undoubtedly in continuous search of employable graduates who are not only ready to demonstrate employability skills but are competent in using these skills to create positive working environment for the overall higher performance of the organization. While employees are expected to maximize their potentials to become successful in their jobs, it is essential to ensure that what they do in the organization will lead to produce positive impact. The present study has unearthed that not all categories of employability skills are relevant to the employees to advance their contextual performance and become successful in work place. However, employees who have competencies in specific employability skills that are aligned with their contextual behaviors will put them in an advantageous position to stay and progress in workplaces and become attuned to the challenging demands of different work situations.

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