

Bridging the Employability Gap: Skill Development and Industry Readiness among MBA Graduates

Mr. Mir Faizan Hussain

Assistant Professor, Primus School of Management Studies, Bengaluru, India.

ABSTRACT

This case study examines the growing challenge of employability among management graduates in India and the role of employability skill development programs in bridging the gap between academic learning and industry expectations. While higher education institutions continue to produce a large number of graduates every year, employers increasingly report concerns regarding communication abilities, analytical thinking, adaptability, teamwork, and professional behaviour among fresh recruits.

The case focuses on introducing an intensive pre-placement training and employability enhancement program for MBA students. The initiative aimed to strengthen aptitude skills, communication, group discussion performance, interview readiness, digital competency, and corporate etiquette. Despite these interventions, the institution faced challenges such as inconsistent student participation, varying learning abilities, low confidence levels, and resistance toward continuous skill-building activities.

By analysing the institutional efforts, student attitudes, recruiter expectations, and placement outcomes, this case study explores whether employability can be developed through structured interventions alone or whether students must take greater ownership of their professional growth. The case highlights the broader question of how educational institutions can align academic delivery with rapidly changing industry requirements.

INTRODUCTION

India produces millions of graduates annually, yet employability remains one of the most significant concerns in higher education. Employers today seek candidates who possess not only technical and academic knowledge but also strong communication skills, problem-solving abilities, adaptability, leadership qualities, and emotional intelligence. In management education particularly, organizations expect students to demonstrate professional behaviour, decision-making capability, teamwork, and business awareness from the beginning of their careers.

However, many graduates struggle during recruitment processes due to gaps in aptitude, verbal communication, presentation skills, confidence, and practical exposure. The mismatch between industry expectations and student readiness has created a growing employability crisis, especially among fresh MBA graduates.

Recognizing this challenge, an Institution introduced a comprehensive Employability Skill Development Program for MBA students. The program included resume building workshops, quantitative aptitude training, verbal ability sessions, mock interviews, group discussions, business case analysis, corporate

grooming, and industry interaction activities. The objective was to improve placement readiness and ensure that students could transition effectively from classroom learning to professional environments. The initiative received positive initial feedback from recruiters and students. However, the institution soon observed that while some students actively engaged and improved significantly, others remained disengaged, lacked discipline, or underestimated the importance of continuous skill development.

KEY ISSUE

The Institution faces a critical challenge in improving the employability of MBA graduates while ensuring active student participation and accountability. The institution must decide whether employability development should primarily be driven through structured institutional training programs or whether students themselves should bear greater responsibility for their career preparedness.

The central dilemma remains:

Should management institutions intensify compulsory employability training programs to improve placement outcomes, or should students be given greater autonomy and accountability for developing their professional competencies?

CASE NARRATIVE / SITUATION ANALYSIS

The placement team at the educational institution observed a recurring trend during campus recruitment drives. Despite students performing reasonably well academically, many struggled during aptitude assessments, group discussions, and personal interviews. Recruiters frequently highlighted deficiencies in communication, critical thinking, confidence, and workplace etiquette.

To address these concerns, the institution designed a structured 40-day pre-placement employability training program for MBA students. The program covered multiple dimensions of professional development:

- Resume writing and LinkedIn profile optimization
- Quantitative, logical, and verbal aptitude training
- Communication and presentation skills
- Group discussion and business case analysis
- Mock interviews with industry experts
- Corporate etiquette and professional grooming
- Team-building and leadership activities
- Time management and workplace professionalism

The program was designed not only to improve placement success but also to prepare students for long-term career growth.

Initially, participation levels were encouraging. Students appreciated mock interviews and corporate interaction sessions because they provided practical exposure and real-time feedback. Several students showed noticeable improvement in communication and confidence after repeated practice sessions.

However, the institution also encountered major challenges:

1. **Inconsistent Participation:** Many students attended sessions irregularly, particularly aptitude and communication workshops, believing that academic scores alone would secure placements.
2. **Resistance to Feedback:** Some students struggled to accept constructive criticism during mock interviews and group discussions. Trainers observed that students often lacked self-awareness regard-

ing their skill gaps.

3. **Diverse Learning Levels:** Students came from varied educational and linguistic backgrounds, making it difficult to design a uniform training approach. While some students adapted quickly, others required additional mentoring and support.
4. **Placement Pressure:** The institution faced increasing pressure from stakeholders to improve placement percentages. Recruiters expected industry-ready candidates, while students expected guaranteed job opportunities.
5. **Changing Industry Expectations:** Companies increasingly demanded digital literacy, adaptability, analytical thinking, and problem-solving abilities in addition to academic qualifications. Traditional classroom teaching alone was insufficient to meet these expectations.

The placement department also noticed that students who consistently participated in employability activities performed better during recruitment processes. These students demonstrated stronger confidence, communication, professionalism, and adaptability during interviews.

At the same time, some faculty members argued that excessive focus on placements could shift attention away from academic depth and conceptual learning. Others believed employability skills should be integrated into the curriculum rather than delivered separately through training programs.

The institution now faces an important strategic decision: how to create a sustainable employability development model that balances academic excellence, skill enhancement, student accountability, and industry expectations.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do many management graduates remain unemployable despite having academic qualifications?
2. Should employability skill development be the responsibility of educational institutions, students, or employers?
3. How can institutions motivate students to actively participate in skill development activities?
4. What are the most critical employability skills required by organizations in today's business environment?
5. Should employability training be integrated into the academic curriculum or conducted as separate placement preparation activities?
6. How can educational institutions balance academic learning with industry-oriented skill development?

TEACHING / LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To understand the importance of employability skills in management education and career development.
- To analyse the gap between academic learning and industry expectations.
- To evaluate the role of institutions, students, and employers in enhancing employability.
- To examine the challenges involved in implementing employability development programs.
- To develop strategies for improving placement readiness and professional competencies among students.

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