

Enhancing Graduates Competitiveness through Industrial Networking

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The competitive key factor of a nation is having human resources that have competencies and ability to compete globally. Widyatama University has stated in its Strategic Plan that the increase of graduate quality can create sustainable growth. One of the requirements from ISO 9001:2000 is the obligation of management to regularly monitor and evaluate stakeholder perception to the products and services as the key to create sustainability. Develop external networking especially with Industry is one important things must to do by Widyatama University to get link & match their graduates with Industry. This study wants to measure and analyze the ability of Widyatama graduates to compete with others. This research has been conducted since 2006 and used exploration study to explore what exactly the competencies should have by graduates. The result shows that there's significant influence between graduates that have better soft skill to compete in Industry. The study expects to be more clarified and the result is needed to improve the quality continuously.

Keyword: Graduate Competencies, Industrial Networking, Competitive Advantage

1. Introduction

In the resources system of economic organizations the human factor is getting more and more significance is the efficiency of the enterprises greatly depend on the effectiveness of people operating it. Human resources have an important role in work of organizations and the human factor itself is often the key to success (Koscir, et al). Any existing institution cannot avoid mutual relationship with its external and internal surroundings. Only the institutions that have capability in fulfilling the hopes and needs of their surroundings are able to uphold their existence and attain their missions and goals. (Mame S.Sutoko : 2008). Facing an increasingly competitive environment of private education sector in Indonesia, Widyatama University commit to embedding methods of achieving quality in its practices to ensure that the University performs at the highest levels of teaching and learning, research, community service and management. Widyatama University has had a Strategic Management Plan since 2003. The plan is based on the principles behind the operation of a learning organization, which include the presence of quality management processes, programs which allow for evaluating improvement continuously, staff development and empowerment, benchmarking, networking and good practice.

The Strategic Management Plan was developed in the context of the University's Vision, Mission Statement and the values, goals and objectives which support it. Its clearly stated that education system in Widyatama has its own purpose to create a profile of graduate which has competitive and adaptive competencies as employee or entrepreneur (figure 1).

Focusing on an effort to create graduate which is employability (relevancy and employability), has good relationship/networking related with industry is the key to win the competition. To achieve it, Widyatama University has to monitor and evaluate the performance of graduation in the field of work. The focus of this paper is the profile of graduate, which is also the key to the value creation. If the performance of the graduate is improving, it can influence significantly to industrial satisfaction (trust and respect).

The objective of this study is to explore what exactly the competencies should have by graduates. Such measurement has been conduct during the Academic Year 2006/2007 until now. The result expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the academic concept through Quality Assurance as well as the need to conduct inspections for inspections corrective and preventive action.

2. Institutions of Higher Education and Industrial Networking

Institutions of higher learning not only provide the private sector with skilled human resources, but also support the sector in many other ways, including research and development (Rizvi et al., 2005). Fostering private sector competitiveness in human capital development through both indirect and direct knowledge transfer is a crucial plays by collaboration between the institutions of higher education and industry plays. The indirect knowledge transfer is achieved through such activities as industrial training, using members of the academia as consultants in the private sector, holding joint workshops and conferences, and journal publications. On the other hand direct knowledge transfer is achieved through collaborative research and/or purchases of patents. It should be

noted that in both types of knowledge transfer, knowledge flow is in both directions. That is, knowledge flows from the academia to industry and from industry to the academia. (Wanyama et al.,).

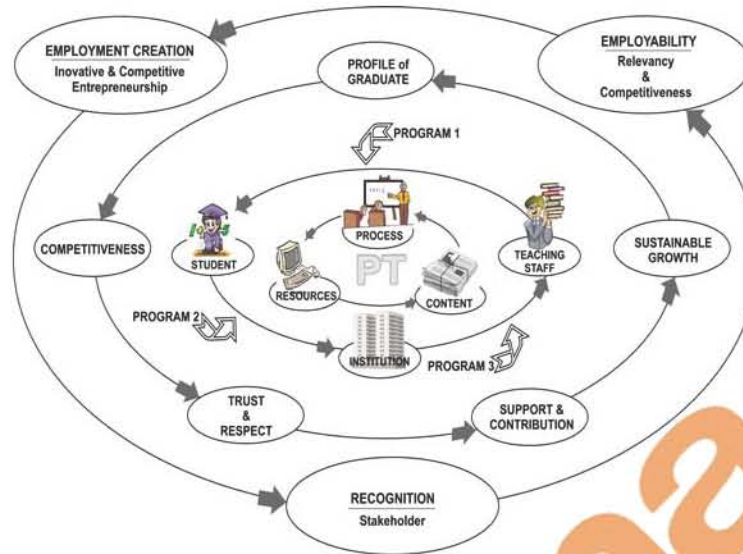


Figure 1 Widyatama Growth Circular

3. Review of Literature

The same program already conducted by Griffith University in UK, since 1993. They have instituted a program of research and development to identify underlying reasons for current GDS outcomes and improve its further study and employment rates. Many courses are developing strategies to embed industry links within their curriculum to strengthen the interface between students and potential employers of graduates. Business, engineering, information technology and science courses are developing existing internship and work placement opportunities for students, and applying strategies derived from the best-practice examples of education and law. Incorporation within existing curricula of more specific skills for gaining employment, following good international practice, also already done (www.Griffith.uk).

Findings from doctoral thesis confirm the widely-held views that the graduate workers do contribute significantly to enhancing the competitiveness of manufacturing industry. Evidence also supports the significance of quality university education in developing better-educated graduates to improve industrial competitiveness. Quality university education also improves significantly graduate employment prospects with manufacturing companies. A closer relationship between universities and industry can therefore be a key in promoting the development of quality academic courses, work experience placements, and career and labour market information to produce graduate workers who ultimately contribute to improving industrial competitiveness (Badaruzaman, 1993). Distinct from earlier studies, this thesis examined both the industry and university sectors to achieve a more comprehensive view of the relationship between university education and industrial competitiveness. The investigation of quality university education comprised of the examinations of the relevance of academic courses, the provision of work experience placements, and the dissemination of career and labour market information in all nine Malaysian universities. This line of investigation is supported by the views that quality education is defined not only by the academic credentials criteria, but also the development of personal transferable skills. These skills can be developed through better exposure to the world of work via work experience placements in industry, and career and labour market information.

Recent study done for World Bank (2007) said that in China, students are not getting an education most relevant to the needs of employers, who complain that graduates are too academic, without appropriate practical work skills. Unemployment among tertiary graduates has been rising in recent years with the rapid ramp-up of tertiary enrollment rates. Many tertiary graduates are finding that the skills acquired at university are not relevant to the needs of the market. Other countries show that beyond literacy and numeracy, the market is looking for computer, problem-solving, and communication skills and the ability to work in groups. Content thus has to be updated, and new skills have to be taught, including learning how to learn, because everyone needs to become a lifelong learner. Also, because many of the new skills are best learned outside the school environment and in the work environment, teaching has to change.

Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada said that today's fiercely competitive global economy, merely being good is not good enough. The marketplace for graduate students and professors is both highly

competitive and global in nature. Universities across the country know that they must constantly compete and improve if they are to succeed.

The study performed by Carl Dahlman, et al (2007) said that education is the fundamental enabler of the knowledge economy. The increasing importance of knowledge has made investments in education and skills more critical for countries' growth and development.

Reports by the CIHE on international competitiveness have all stressed that our economic future rests on innovation and delivering high value-added goods and services. Graduates will play vital role in creating wealth and underpinning the UK's international competitiveness. Research done shows that almost a third of employers (30%) have problems with graduates' generic employability skills such as team working, communication, and problem solving. Employers are also disappointed with graduates' attitude to work (25%), self – management (33%), business awareness (44%) and foreign language skills (49%).

4. Research Method

Research methodologies used in this study are explorative method. Explorative method is a method that describes the study systematically, factual and accurate concerning facts, behaviors and relationship between the phenomenon being study that can give suggestions for the future (Sumadi Suryabrata, 2003).

Data collection method is through field research directly to the object of study by interview, observe, focus group discussion and questionnaire. Survey provides insight into the needs and perceptions recruiters by monitoring the opinions of employers across a range of sectors. Its methods which skills employers value most highly among graduates including soft skills and hard skills.

Research Variables

The employed variables in this research are about:

1. Learning
2. Problem Solving Analysis
3. Personal Strength
4. Risk Taking
5. Visioning
6. Oral Communication
7. Listening
8. Personal Organization & Time Management
9. Creativity, Innovation & Change

The variables are taken from soft skills attributes of Widyatama University graduation.

5. Results

From surveys and focus groups discussion held with industry, it can be conclude that:

1. most of employers said with this following results for each attributes :

1.	Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ understand problems from multidisciplinary perspective ○ apply appropriate professional skills
2.	Problem Solving Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ think precisely and critically when identify and find solutions ○ link experience, formal knowledge and theory to make decisions ○ evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions
3.	Oral Communication, Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ read, write, speak and listen capability ○ able to use and express idea and information visually (information technology, data, graphics and other media competently ○ able to explain, interesting when held dialogue with audiences / lobbying
4.	Personal Strength, Personal Organization & Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ find, use and evaluate a variety of information quickly and effectively ○ willing to learn and experiment with ideas ○ adaptability, innovation and have entrepreneurial skills ○ committed to lifelong learning, intellectual development, and improving their personal effectiveness
5.	Risk Taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ understand and work effectively to make decision ○ know how to find out the views of others and get things done ○ manage projects to achieve outcomes

6.	Visioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ understand and work effectively within different cultures and economic systems ○ act with other community and global affairs
7.	Creativity, Innovation & Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ appreciate the relations between creative, practical and theoretical activity ○ recognize and respect different value systems.

2. Many of employers are dissatisfied if graduates having no experience on professional work experiences so than makes them unemployable, and difficult to had teamwork.
3. Hard skill (computer literature and English language) is basic skill that industry expected from graduates.

6. Conclusions and Recommendation

1. It is very important for Universities and industrial to build strong collaborative networking. Such networking should not be limited to industrial attachment/training, research and development, and focus group discuss but should also include other important areas, such as curricula development, business proposal writing, improvement of business processes, and continuous training of industrial workers. Widyatama Universities has put mechanisms through Consultation and Communication Forum to boost industrial competitiveness in business and commerce development. This program should include development of internationally recognized curricula which take into account the local and regional needs of the industry, running short courses and certificate that needed and provide continuous training professional.
2. Universities should assist student through raise their awareness of what industry seek in graduates, such as helping them acquire their skills through university placement office. Such effort like give them training for "how to make CV", and other things useful for make career in industry. Deliver course/training for student to ensure that they have some description how to have team work, creative thinking, negotiation/lobbying, presentation, etc.
3. It's recommend that further study must be undertaken for gain more input in order to develop education system especially at Widyatama Universities. Develop this research through finding other model and variable that applicable and easy to use. Longitudinal study, used other models and variable, will enable a more accurate analysis as well as strategy of improvements to be taken by the institution.

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