INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS: LEARNINGS FROM A 3-YEAR OJT PROGRAM OF A PHILIPPINE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Objectives of the research are to establish the competencies that influence graduates’ employment success in the labor market and clarify the roles academe and industry respectively play in preparing students for employment. Frame of reference for the paper is based on the constructs of goal rationalities for evaluating the learning potential of the workplace using the concept of preparatory analysis. Panel data from a Philippine HEI’s practicum program covering three academic years, (AY) 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 was used with the latter competency evaluation results used as major data for analysis (n=137 from 72 firms participating in the practicum program).

Twenty four competencies were classified as soft skills and 28 as hard skills. The set of competencies critical for employment recommendation has 31 competencies all significant at .01 level of significance provided by OJT hosts from minimal to highly extensive with 16 competencies classified as hard skills and 15 competencies as soft skills. Set of competencies critical for skills fit for managerial trainee has 17 with 7 competencies significant at .05 level provided by the OJT hosts from extensive to highly extensive with only 5 competencies classified as hard skills and 12 competencies as soft skills.

In general, competencies provided by the industry for student practice vary from minimal to highly extensive. Hard skills or skills in the technical and administrative categories were provided less with 82% than the soft skills provided highly extensively with 98% of the student trainees given opportunity to practice the competencies.

Keywords: Work-based learning, graduate employment success, job related hard and soft skills, job relevant competencies

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Earning a degree in higher education provides graduates both with credentials for entry to the labor market and skills for a gainful employment. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) prepare students for work with their educational service delivery programs supposedly producing graduates with skills matched with industry needs. Graduates are then expected to show that they possess these skills upon entry to the labor market.

Recent developments show that more diverse graduates grow in number faster than the market for graduate jobs for a labor market that is more complex and volatile (Raybould and Sheedy, 2005, p 260). These developments may seem to be favorable since graduate expansion (may) promotes economic and social mobility but, on the other hand, increased supply may not match with (industry) demand (Chillas, 2009, p 156) especially with the kind of skills required. Given this scenario, industry sector end up complaining of shortage of graduates in terms of skills and competencies while many graduates find themselves underemployed (Castro, 2013).

Education to job mismatch is experienced when employees work below their educational level or in a job above their educational level. In both cases this may affect the productive potential of the job since once at work, education to job mismatch is believed to affect a graduate’s productivity, earnings, and work satisfaction, (Allen & de Weert, 2007). Employers demand that competencies achieved by graduates of higher education match company competency needs expecting programs at higher education institutions to optimally stimulate graduates’ abilities to perform in the labor market (Martensen and Gronholt, 2009). Needless to say, returns from the graduates’ educational investment are also compromised by the effects of this mismatch. In the macro-level, economic growth is reinforced by well-trained and highly educated workforce since labor with these skills can be flexible, productive, technology know-how and innovative to increase a nation’s competitiveness and growth (World Bank East Asia and Pacific Regional Report, 2012).

The gap between graduate skills and job requirements is evident in the East Asia region where employers (in East-Asia) complained about skills mismatch with employment candidates which even those with higher educational attainment lacked necessary generic abilities that industries require (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2012, p 7). Daud, Saouan, Abindin & Rajadurai (2011) observed in Malaysia that they find their graduates lacking with the right combination of skills and personal attributes which employers find necessary for employment. In Thailand, gap between the acquired management competencies by graduates and the competencies needed by the business continues to exist (Sudsakorn and Swierczek, 2008, p 570). Likewise, in the Philippines Labor Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz said that the country has abundance of labor supply but workers lack the necessary skills necessary to get jobs (UCAN Philippines, 2012). Companies requires multi-skills from their employees and indispensable for employment security A leading business newspaper in the Philippines reported that according to de Guzman, head of sales of Jobs-DB Philippines, there is an increasing number of jobs in various industries but the lingering problem of mismatch prevails that even if graduates are academically qualified, they lack the soft skills that include good communication skills, problem solving and analytical skills (Business Mirror, 2013).
The higher education services in the Philippines are provided by both private (71.4%) and public higher education institutions (HEIs) (28.6%) for the last 10 years. The total number of HEIs in the country grew by 37% from 1,665 in 2002 to 2,282 in 2012. These HEIs for the last eight years supply graduates for the industry at an average of 461,255 graduates a year and increases at 3% annual average (www.ched.gov.ph/chedwww/index.php/eng/Information, December 5, 2012). Philippines underemployment is posted at an annual average rate of 19.98% for (2006 - 2010) for the CALABARZON region (www.nscb.gov.ph, December 5, 2012).

1.1 Employment Success

Job mismatch and lack of skills compromise new graduates’ employment opportunities in the labor market. New graduates participate in the graduate labor market seeking for employment appropriate to their credentials or degree qualification and one that fits their skills and knowledge (Nabi, 2003, p 371). However, with issues related to graduate skills and job mismatch, employment after graduation is not guaranteed amid holding necessary credentials compromising an employment position in a preferred organization (Branine, 2008, p 499). This labor market condition determines employment outcomes for the applicant whether he/she becomes employed, remains unemployed or becomes underemployed which also leaves the industry with shortage of qualified graduates for their needs.

1.2 Graduate Employability, Competencies and Skills

Employee performance as a basis for competency is believed to occur when graduates’ assessed acquired capability is consistent with or exceed the requirement of the job (Boyatzis, 2007). Thus, expectations of new graduates’ contribution to the organization depend on the skills and competencies they possess upon entry to the labor market. These skills and competencies are regarded as employability skills and are often regarded as biased toward graduation for graduates to successfully get jobs, develop in their careers and eventually be an asset to their employers (Rasul, Rauf, Mansor, and Puvanasvaran, 2012). Williams (2005) observed that;

“the ‘new economy’ demands new kinds of people (graduates) with new knowledge, skills and dispositions where workers are expected to be more self-directive and take on greater responsibility for planning, executing and improving their work and take responsibility in managing their own learning and development over the course of their working lives”

Thus, graduate employability is defined as having the necessary competencies required to secure, retain employment and improve one’s career within an organization. It is also defined as having the qualities and skills which make an individual attractive to potential employers (Bridgestock, 2009). Krauss (2004) defines employability referring to skills formation to develop a highly educated workforce that is equipped for greater occupational mobility and flexible work patterns. These (generic) skills pertain to particular abilities of a person which the same person takes from one job role to another (Raybould and Sheedy, 2005, p 259). Moreover, management skills as McKeena (2004 p 665) compares it with managerial competencies, are identified and used as inputs through training for improved effectiveness and likewise measure of behavioural output or performance.

The terms hard and soft skills has been used over the years to identify competencies needed to be successful in work especially in management positions (Weber, Finley, Crawford and Rivera, 2009, p 354). These skills are necessary for graduates to be to be successful in the workplace as observed by Robinson, Garton and Vaughn, (2007) from the works of Hofstrand, (1996); Shivpuri and Kim, (2004) and acknowledged as a measure of graduate employability. Hard skills are further identified as business-related knowledge and skills and soft skills as soft business-related skills and competencies as ‘core components’ of graduate employability (Andrews and Higson, 2008, p 420). However, satisfaction over disciplinary understanding and skills developed from higher education is more pronounced over the graduates’ generic attainments (soft skills).

Furthermore, hard skills are considered to be inherent to the person and stay the same regardless of company and or organization one works with. Examples of which are skills related to the application of acquired knowledge to technical aspects of doing a job which is primarily cognitive and subject to an individual’s intelligence quotient source or conceptual skills (Weber, et.al., 2009 p 354, Pazhani and Priya, 2012, p 1896, Poisson-de Haro and Turgut, 2011, p 209).

Soft skills, on the other hand are subject to change depending on the company culture and people one work since these skills are self-management and people skills (Pazhani and Priya, 2012, p 1896). Most soft skills have to be learned on the job by trial and error and referred to as the;

“interpersonal, human, people or behavioral skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace” (Rainsbury et al , 2002 ; Kantrowitz, 2005, cited by Weber, et.al., 2009).

The soft (or people) skills make use of social knowledge, understanding and application of group process and emotional intelligence) under two categories: societal skills and human skills (Poisson-de Haro and Turgut, 2011, p 216).

1.3 Role of Higher Education Institutions

Issues about education to job mismatch is supported by a number of research literature which provides evidence and factors to explain imperfect matching between graduates’ acquired competencies from educational degrees and the requirements of jobs, (Allen & de Weert, 2007). The quality of education especially from HEIs matters well in these issues of mismatch as a provider of high-quality skills relevant to current and future labor market needs. Effective higher education systems improve human capital formation and allow entrepreneurs, managers, and skilled workers to perform well, thus supporting technological mastery, productivity, and competitiveness, (World Bank East Asia and Pacific
Regional Report, 2012). Higher education systems including business schools make sure students are employment ready following graduation by providing them with the skills and competencies that they (HEIs) presume that organizations seek in their (potential) employees, (Abraham, S. E. and Kurns, L., 2009). Equipping graduates with skills to be effective member of the workforce is a response to maximize employer satisfaction and a way to realize educational investment outcomes (Jackson, D., 2009). Generic (skills) are important to make sure that learning is transferred from the classroom to the workplace, thus, HEIs need to consider embedding these competencies among students to enable them to meet the demands of the workplace (Quek, 2005 p 240).

Higher education institutions must take greater responsibility for developing their students’ personal qualities in terms of employability by designing appropriate programs in career education to meet the changing needs of the labor market (Nguyen, Yanagawa and Miyazaki, 2005). Key competencies development is integrated into the course contents and teaching processes of HEI’s as foundations of professional learning, continuing learning and lifelong learning (Chen-Jung, Jui-Hung Ven and Chou, 2003). Business education that is responsive to the needs and requirements of the industry produces graduates who are employment-ready and possessing the necessary skills and competencies for employment (Andrews and Higson, 2008, p 419).

1.4 Internship and Learning Potential of Workplaces

Other than alignment of curricula with industry demands, one essential link between the academe and the industry is through experiential learning. It is where theories learned from the academe are put into practical application at workplaces. Both educators and students are aware of the importance of work experience in the over-all education (Toncar and Cudmore, 2000).

Part of the business education curriculum provided by the HEI is the Practicum Program where students are supposed to be immersed in an actual business environment. This is a common practice among HEIs (Rothman, 2007) for a more effective business education delivery. In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher education requires 200 to 400 hours of internships for students in the organization where experiential learning is supposed to take place. Based on the principle of internships, the practicum program is an important part of the business curriculum to make sure students understand the connection between the roles of academe and industry or the “connections between coursework and workplace” (Hergert, 2009, p 12). Foremost objective is to facilitate graduates a smoother transition from school to work by learning through professional experience.

Students experience learning by applying what they have learned in actual business operations which internships programs provide (Alpert, Heaney and Kuhn, 2009, p 37). Application and enhancement of many kinds of knowledge and skills happen and is demanded in workplaces (Berg, Taylor, Hutchinson Munby, Versnel and Chin, 2007, p 210). It is where the theories learned from classroom education are applied in practice.

II. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND DESIGN

Though the main objective of the research is to put in light the competencies that influence graduates’ employment success in the labor market, the paper also tries to discover the roles academe and industry play in students’ lifelong learning. Academe and industry partnership has long been practiced yet, complaints of job mismatch ensuing and efforts had not been so encouraging. Even way back in the 80’s and 90’s the role of both institutions seem to be unclear. Among others, Wexley and Baldwin in 1986 (McEvoy, G., 1998) expressed critics’ arguments that educators focus more on theories rather than practice and that students get too few opportunities to practice and become competent in skills for good management. Rationale for the inclusion of an industrial dimension into the school curriculum has also been emphasized though actual practice was patchy and of variable quality (Bishop, 1997, p177).

Up to this time, there are pressures coming from the industry and government bodies about the type of employee that universities are producing among its graduates which clarifies their (universities) role in terms of the articulation of graduate skills and knowledge they value (Vu, Rigby, Wood and Daly, 2011, p4). On the other hand, young people (especially graduates) believe employers have a strong part to play in developing the skills they need to do their job (Anonymous, 2005) and some believe that industry professionals are best suited to teach technical skills which are job specific (Robinson, Garton and Vaughn, 2007).

In the Philippines, the value of academe and industry partnership in lifelong learning is stipulated in the provisions of RA 7722 or the Higher Education Act of 1994 and as reiterated in Commission in Higher Education (CHED) Memo No. 23 Series of 2009. The act requires linkages between academics (HEIs) and business and industry by promoting and providing students with competitive skills and attitudes for employment through an opportunity to acquire practical knowledge, skills and desirable attitudes and values in reputable establishments and industries in the country or practicum. This provision makes it explicit the role of the industry to provide opportunities for students to practice what they have learned from the academe. This suggests that opportunities of learning happen during the time of students as trainee and regard business establishments as workplaces.

Based on the preceding discussion, the frame of reference used in the study was based on the precepts of workplace learning. Workplaces provide an environment for learning since these (workplaces) can possibly facilitate formal and informal learning, opportunities to do individual and team work and the transfer of expertise from industry practitioners to student trainees (Loek and van Woerkom 2007, p 65). Individuals do more than merely deploying capacities when engaging in workplace activities since reinforcement of what is already known or honing takes place and produces a cognitive legacy or learning (Billet 2004, p 315)
Since learning is formalized in education, learning as a natural process and situated in daily practice has been narrowed down to programs of internships and learning takes place in formal workplaces. The learning value of internships should be viewed more than a program to prepare students for work. In this regard, the frame of reference for the paper is based on the constructs of goal rationalities. The construct is used for evaluating the potential of workplaces as learning environment discussed by Loek & Van Woerkom, (2007) inspired by works of Lave and Wenger (1991).

Drawing from the goal rationality construct, four types of rationalities are identified. The concept of preparatory analysis was selected as most appropriate to support the research framework since the concept suggests learning prior to one’s first job. It suggests that learning prepares students for work and designed intentionally to meet job related goals and targets. Learning is supposed to happen in workplaces or business establishments open to accept trainees for practicum or institutions prepared to provide learning environment.

However, more than the learning that takes place in workplaces, assurance of quality learning is supported by the readiness of firms/establishments in the industry to afford opportunities for student trainees to participate in work activities and access direct and indirect support (Billet 2001). Loek, et. al. (2007) further observes separation of work and learning as inevitable and makes the transfer of what has been (and should have been) learned as extremely low. This observation is also supported by Billets (2001) identification of factors that weaken workplace learning such as inappropriate learning strategies, how students are made to participate in work practices, access to company information for task accomplishment, withholding expertise from practitioners and trainee reluctance to participate in learning.

In view of the preceding discussions, the major goal of the research is to identify first, competencies and skills relevant to a graduate’s employment success (Figure 1) and establish how the industry contributes in developing relevant skills and competencies. The paper sought to answer the following questions:
1. What are the competencies that affect graduates’ recommendation for employment?
2. What are the competencies that affect graduates’ skills fit for managerial trainee position?
3. What is the extent of industry’s participation in developing graduates’ competencies in terms of Company OJT Hosts’ provision of opportunities to practice these competencies during student training

III. METHODS

The study involves the practicum program of the Business Administration program of an HEI from the Philippines. Under the program, each student is required to undergo 400 training hours or practicum in business establishments that will provide them opportunity to practice relevant discipline. Firms that participate in the program are selected by the students and approved by faculty in charge of the program and college administrators.

For the research, the panel data from the practicum program’s competency assessment tool covering three academic years, (AY) 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 was used. The tools lists the competencies as part of an evaluation tool for student competency assessment to determine how they performed during their on-the-job training or practicum. The evaluation tool was developed in 2009 (Castro, De Silva & Lucasia, 2010) based on the work of Jackson, (2009) profiling industry-relevant competencies based on literatures across countries. The work provided definitions assigned to graduate competencies and used in the work of Castro, et. al. (2009) for graduate competency tool development exploring which competencies were required and necessary from the industry point of view. The competency tool was developed and used for the purpose of assessing students’ acquired skills and competencies from the school’s academic program based on the evaluation of practicum hosts or immediate head/supervisor of the student trainee.

The evaluation tool has a total of 52 specific competencies grouped by 17 general competencies. The data for research included:

a. Competency assessment of student trainees by their immediate supervisor from the practicum host using the programs official Competency Assessment Tool.
b. Derived percentage of student trainees per batch/year who were given opportunity to practice a particular skill or competency by the practicum host where they were assigned.
c. Competencies assessment form for AY 2012-2013 included hosts’ remark for their intention to hire or recommend student trainee for employment if a vacancy exists and perception on skills fit for managerial trainee position. This data set served as the variables for students’ employment success.

The research takes into account the new graduates’ employment success in terms of:

a. Potential employment based on the research respondents’ preference for hiring or trainee employment recommendation.
b. Practicum hosts’ perception on the graduates’ skills fit for staff and management trainee position.

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Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

http://repository.widyatama.ac.id
Job assignment takes into consideration the wage or earnings possibilities for the graduates as determined by the positions held upon employment, thus, underemployment illustrates failure in employment especially for graduates or degree holders. Graduates or applicants’ success in employment depends on the decisions made by the organization on the notion that employers choose applicants based on skills fit. Graduates are considered to be in jobs for which their degree is required (appropriately employed) or not (underemployed) (Nabi, G., 2003, p 371).

To determine the competencies relevant to employment success, a correlation test was used to identify statistically significant relationship between competencies and employment success, specifically host’s intention to hire and perceived skills fit for management trainee position. Ranking of these competencies will be done by arranging the coefficient of determination ($r^2$) from highest to lowest.

To identify the predictors of employment success, multiple linear with backward integration was used regression was used. The procedure involves removing the weakest predictor variable among the set entered then regression re-calculated. During the process some variables are deleted especially the variable that significantly weakens the model. This procedure is then repeated until only useful predictor variables remain in the model. To determine which predictor variable influenced the criterion variable most, beta coefficients were computed. These statistical techniques allow us to predict value on one variable on the basis of their value on several other variables.

Contribution of the industry in training students by AY was determined by computing the percentage of students who were given opportunity to practice the competencies over the total number of student assessed for practicum performance for each year. This percentage represents a firm’s participation in training students with their firm as provider of the learning environment for training (workplace training). The higher the percentage for each competency means the more they participate in training students to develop work relevant skills and competencies.

Percentages of participation or provision for training from the 3-year panel data were averaged and associated with the ranked competencies.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Predictors of Opportunities to Work

The use of multiple linear regression with backward integration to determine the determinants of employment success (trainee recommendation for employment) yielded two sets of competencies (predictor variables) both perfectly accounting for the variance in the criterion variable. Both sets as model are also statistically significant at .01 level (Table 1).

| Model Summary for Competencies (Predictor Variable) and Trainees’ Employment Recommendation (Criterion Variable) |

<table>
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<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
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Soft Skills

Professionalism and Work Ethics. Trainee demonstrates personal accountability and effective work habits such as punctuality, and works productively with others.

Ethics and Responsibility. Trainee manifests possession of basic values, including honesty and respect for diversity, which guide managerial behavior.

Ethics and Responsibility. Trainee demonstrates understanding of and commitment to professional values in practice, through the implementation of anti-discriminatory/anti-oppressive/anti-racist principles.

Operating in Organizational Environment. Trainee shows ability to fit in with corporate culture.

Operating in Organizational Environment. Trainee shows willingness and ability to understand and adapt to firm values and culture; possesses the right attitude.

Operating in Organizational Environment. Trainee shows appreciation of one’s role in the organizational environment and understand workplace relationships, dynamics and interdependencies.

Coaching. Trainee shows ability to help others learn in the workplace.

Coaching. Trainee effectively coaches peers and clients.

Self-Efficacy. Trainee possesses self-awareness, confidence in dealing with the challenges and the disposition to reflect evaluatively on the performance of oneself and others.

Self-Efficacy. Trainee possesses an accurate understanding of one’s own identity and personal capabilities.

Interpersonal Skills. Fostering cooperation and collaboration by building and maintaining rapport, consultative style and the ability to resolve conflict.

Interpersonal Skills. Trainee shows ability to communicate and resolve conflict, and the ability to give and receive feedback effectively.

Team Working. Trainee contributes to complete group tasks and development of a supportive group climate.

Team Working. Trainee shows ability to work constructively with others on a task.

Team Working. Trainee shows ability to resolve conflict and possesses collaborative problem-solving skills.

Initiatives. Taking responsibility, showing initiative and thinking things through ahead of time.

Hard Skills

Disciplinary Expertise. Trainee possesses technical skills in corporate, industry and technical knowledge, product knowledge and has ability to understand clients’ needs.

Written Communications. Trainee has a command of basic English, writing style suitable for professional contexts and structures information in a clear and effective manner by creating appropriate and effective messages.

Written Communications. Trainee writes clearly by forming and articulating logical arguments and appropriately sequencing and presenting information in appropriate formats.

Problem Solving. Trainee uses knowledge, facts, and data to solve workplace problems; applies math and science concepts to problem solving.

Problem Solving. Trainee analyzes facts and circumstances and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.

Application and Use of technology. Trainee shows familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.

Application and Use of technology. Trainee uses new technology interactively that contribute to effective execution of tasks.

Oral Communications. Trainee shows ability to perform presentational speaking, creates and develops presentation appropriate to the audience by structuring and developing information clearly and effectively delivering ideas with impact.

Oral Communications. Trainee demonstrates ability to communicate effectively and professionally, communicates clearly, sensitively and appropriately according to particular audiences and purposes.

Critical Thinking. Trainee has the capacity for critical, conceptual and reflective thinking in all aspects of intellectual and practical activity.

Decision Making. Trainee demonstrates decisiveness combined with sensitivity in making difficult judgments in response to complex situations.

Decision Making. Trainee makes decisions using available information and in a business context; bringing a multidisciplinary approach to decision making.
making and making decisions under pressure

Multi-tasking. Trainee shows ability to process more than one task at the same time
Creativity. Trainee demonstrates originality and inventiveness in work by communicating new ideas to others
Creativity. Trainee has ability to be original or inventive

4.2 Predictors of Skills Fit for Managerial Trainee Position

The test for predictors of skills fit for managerial trainee position resulted to 25 sets of predictors. Of all sets, model 15 registered the highest coefficient of determination (R2) and significant at .05 level (Table 4). This implies that the set (predictor variables) has the most influence over the student trainee’s skills fit for managerial trainee position (criterion variable) where the variance on the latter is explained 60% by the former.

Table 4
Model Summary for Competencies (Predictor Variables) and Trainees’ Skills Fit for Managerial Trainee Position (Criterion Variable)

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With model 25 as reference, there are 17 competencies in the set with 5 competencies significant at .05 level (Table 6) to predict skills fit for managerial trainee position. This number is considerably less than the predictors for trainee’s recommendation for employment. These competencies are as follows:

a. Operating in Organizational Environment. Trainee shows appreciation of one’s role in the organizational
environment and understand workplace relationships, dynamics and interdependencies
b. Operating in Organizational Environment. Trainee shows willingness and ability to understand and adapt to firm values and culture; possesses the right attitude
c. Team Working. Trainee contributes to complete group tasks and development of a supportive group climate.
d. Team Working. Trainee shows ability to resolve conflict and possesses collaborative problem-solving skills
e. Self-Efficacy. Trainee possesses an accurate understanding of one's own identity and personal capabilities

Moreover, all predictor variables in the set showed significant relationship with skills fit (Table 7). The competency where trainee demonstrates personal accountability and effective work habits such as punctuality, and works productively with others, registered the most influence explaining 22% (R2) of the variance of skills fit. The competency showing trainee’s ability to communicate and resolve conflict, and the ability to give and receive feedback effectively least explains the variance in skills fit at 5% (R2).

Students given opportunity to practice the competencies in the set vary (SD .08) from moderately extensive (78%) to extensive (100%). This again implies that not all students were given opportunity to practice the competencies.

For skills fit, soft skills outnumber hard skills as predictors. There are 12 soft skills and 5 hard skills predicting skills fit as follows;

**Soft Skills**

- **Professionalism and Work Ethics.** Trainee demonstrates personal accountability and effective work habits such as punctuality, and works productively with others

- **Ethics and Responsibility.** Trainee manifests possession of basic values, including honesty and respect for diversity, which guide managerial behavior.

- **Ethics and Responsibility.** Trainee demonstrates understanding of and commitment to professional values in practice, through the implementation of anti-discriminatory/anti-oppressive/anti-racist principles

- **Initiatives.** Taking responsibility, showing initiative and thinking things through ahead of time.

- **Coaching.** Trainee effectively coaches peers and clients

- **Self-Efficacy.** Trainee possesses self-awareness, confidence in dealing with the challenges and the disposition to reflect evaluatively on the performance of oneself and others

- **Self-Efficacy.** Trainee possesses an accurate understanding of one’s own identity and personal capabilities

- **Team Working.** Trainee contributes to complete group tasks and development of a supportive group climate

- **Operating in Organizational Environment.** Trainee shows willingness and ability to understand and adapt to firm values and culture; possesses the right attitude

- **Operating in Organizational Environment.** Trainee shows appreciation of one’s role in the organizational

- **Problem Solving.** Trainee uses knowledge, facts, and data to solve workplace problems; applies math and science concepts to problem solving

- **Application and Use of Technology.** Trainee shows familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines

- **Critical Thinking.** Trainee has the capacity for critical, conceptual and reflective thinking in all aspects of intellectual and practical activity

- **Oral communication.** Trainee demonstrates ability to communicate effectively and professionally, communicates clearly, sensitively and appropriately according to particular audiences and purposes

- **Multi-Tasking.** Trainee shows ability to process more than one task at the same time

The results further show that opportunities to practice hard skills were provided by industry (Practicum/Internship/OJT hosts) considerably less than soft skills for the last three years of the program. Provision of competencies ranged from minimal where only 49% of the student trainees were given opportunity to practice a competency to very extensive at 99%.

Competencies that were least provided by the hosts wereoral and written communications skills together with some particular skills in decision making skills, project management, problem solving and disciplinary expertise. Most provided hard skills for practice were creativity, multi-tasking and application and use of technology. Some particular competencies for practice of intellectual ability, problem solving and disciplinary expertise were provided extensively.

It is quite obvious the disregard of the hosts to provide honing opportunities for student trainee’s hard skills and the very extensive provision of opportunities to practice soft skills. Opportunities to practice soft skills ranged from extensive (80%) to very extensive (100%). Mean provision was at 97% or very extensive (SD .05).

Least provided opportunity to practice competencies were coaching and a competency in team working. All the
rest soft skills competencies were very extensively provided including interpersonal skills, ethics and responsibility, initiatives, professionalism and work ethics, self-efficacy, some team working competencies and operating in organizational environment.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The role of the industry in students’ lifelong learning is explicit in the provisions of (Phil.) higher academic policy which is in terms of business establishments providing opportunities for practice of competencies developed in school. Thus, readiness of workplaces (business establishments) to provide opportunities for student trainees to participate in organizational activities especially in relevant operations and guidance and support from the firm’s management and employees are expected. This opportunity to practice acquired competencies from the academe is also a way to assess the quality of learning of the student and subsequently the quality of the educational services of HEIs. However, results show that opportunities for competencies to be further learned or enhanced by trainees in workplaces depends on its (competency) type. Opportunities to practice hard skills are less provided while soft skills are extensively provided in the workplaces.

Set of competencies as predictors for employment recommendation is different from the set of competency predictors for fit for management trainee position. Soft skills matter in the success to get a managerial trainee position, especially that of possessing the right attitude. The trainee is supposed to show appreciation of one’s role in the organizational environment and understand workplace relationships, dynamics and interdependencies and willingness and ability to understand and adapt to firm values and culture. Team working is equally important especially the ability to contribute to complete group tasks and development of a supportive group climate and resolution of conflict and possession collaborative problem-solving skills. Lastly trainee should possess an accurate understanding of one’s own identity and personal capabilities.

Moreover, for employment recommendation regardless of position, hard skills are as important as soft skills. This suggests that both technical aspect of the job or discipline and the relational competencies should be learned and developed by the trainee.

The industry is quite vocal about their expectation needed to be learned at workplaces by trial and error if the preceding discussions suggest that opportunity to practice soft skills is inevitably provided in workplaces while opportunity to practice hard skills is selective then this calls for an emphasis on the use of competencies in curriculum design which will increase the possibility of learnings from actual work experiences as foundations for relevant competencies (Seung Youn, Stepich and Cox, 2006, p. 307) producing employment ready graduates. In this regard, the competencies established as predictors of employment success in this study should be taken into consideration in the curriculum design, practicum program and student competency evaluation tool. This effort will set criteria on which competencies the institution should value and prioritize. This is supposed to reflect on the criteria for the selection of practicum hosts and the agreement between parties (academe and industry) regarding the competencies to be provided for practice. Likewise, the set of competencies will be the same set to be used as tool for evaluating the level of students’ acquired learning from the institution. This in turn will reflect the effectiveness of learning and the quality of education from the HEI.

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