

## Guest Editorial

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### Employability in a knowledge-driven economy

Employability refers to a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required. In other words, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. Employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the job market to realize potential through sustainable employment. For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and abilities they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers, and the context within which they seek work.

Employability is a two-sided equation and many individuals need various forms of support to overcome the physical and mental barriers to learning and personal development.

Employability is not just about the academic skills. Individuals need relevant and usable job market information to help them make informed decisions about the job market options available to them. They may also need support to realize when such information would be useful, and to interpret that information and turn it into intelligence. Finally, people also need the opportunities to do things differently, to access relevant training and, most crucially, employment. Both the supply and demand of labour need to be taken into account when defining employability, which is often dependent on factors outside of an individual's control.

For individuals, employability depends on:

- their assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess
- the way they use and deploy those assets
- the way they present them to employers
- crucially, the context within which they seek work.

We the teachers want our graduates to be employable, so we cannot ignore the employability issues. Some programmes lead directly to employment in a specific profession while in other programmes value addition is very much essential.

Some of the employability skills expected from the students are:

1. Information technology
2. Numeracy
3. Learning to learn
4. Team working
5. Problem solving
6. Oral and visual communication
7. Written communication

Current political and economic scenarios place employability as the responsibility of higher education, which sets up mechanisms for employability skills development into the undergraduate curriculum.

The recent developments on employability lies on the assumption that the economic welfare of individuals and the competitive advantage of nations have come to depend on the knowledge, skills and enterprise of the workforce. Those with degree-level qualifications are seen to play a particularly important role in managing the 'knowledge-driven' economy of the future.

In a context of considerable changes in the job market and higher education sector in the country, a discourse of employability has become increasingly dominant. In Indian education system, Universities

have to ensure that they produce 'employable' graduates, and graduates themselves are urged to continually develop their personal skills, qualities and experiences in order to compete in the global job market.

**Prof. Shrinivasa Mayya**

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## From Chairman's Desk



### Concerns about the Employability of Our Engineering Graduates

Recently, the Wall Street Journal (India) has carried an article entitled *India Graduates Millions, but Too Few Are Fit to Hire*. It starts by saying : "Many recent engineering grads in India say that after months of job hunting they are still unemployed and lack the skills necessary to join the workforce. Critics say corruption and low standards are to blame".

In particular, the article quotes the experience of the Bangalore-based Call-center company 24/7 Customer Pvt. Ltd., which seeks "to find new recruits who can answer questions by phone and email".

"So few of the high school and college graduates who come through the door can communicate effectively in English, and so many lack a grasp of educational basics such as reading comprehension, that the company can hire just three out of every 100 applicants".

Business executives seem to say "schools are hampered by overbearing bureaucracy and a focus on rote learning rather than critical thinking and comprehension"; "the curriculum in most places is outdated and disconnected from the real world". According to results from assessment tests administered by NASSCOM ( National Association of Software and Services Companies), as many as "75% of technical graduates and more than 85% of general graduates are unemployable by India's high-growth global industries, including information technology and call centers".

"Another survey, conducted annually by Pratham, a nongovernmental organization that aims to improve education for the poor, looked at grade-school performance at 13,000 schools across India. It found that about half of the country's fifth graders can't read at a second-grade level".

"More than half of India's population is under the age of 25, and one million people a month are expected to seek to join the labor force here over the next decade, the Indian government estimates. The fear is that if these young people aren't trained well enough to participate in the country's glittering new economy, they pose a potential threat to India's stability".

The WSJ article quotes one Engineering student as saying "The faculty take it very casually, and the students take it very casually, like they've all agreed not to be bothered too much," He said "he routinely missed a couple of days of classes a week, and it took just three or four days of cramming from the textbook at the end of the semester to pass the exams".

"How are you able to change the mind-set that knowledge is more than a stamp?", asks Saurabh Govil, senior VP, HR, at WIPRO Technologies. The average graduate's "ability to comprehend and converse is very low," says Satya Sai Sylada, 24/7 Customer's head of hiring for India. "That's the biggest challenge we face." The IT majors have had to increase the duration of pre-job training, about double of what was being done earlier, in order to bring the graduates up to speed.

In the Engineering Colleges also, the Teaching-Learning processes are moving from rote learning to active hands-on learning and more engagement in the class-rooms. Many Colleges are employing Bloom's Taxonomy as the basis for class-room teaching and assessment.

Let us hope the situation will improve in the near future.

**Prof. R. Natarajan**

## Workshop on CII's Employability Bridge Initiative

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> February 2011  
Venue: MCA Seminar Hall, PESIT, Bangalore



Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) has started an initiative “**Employability Bridge**” which brings Enterprises, Academic Institutions and Students into one single platform for employability enhancement of students and exposing students strengths to employers which will help right students get right jobs.

**Employability Bridge** is the brainchild of CII (Southern Chapter) and has been implemented in Tamilnadu with many engineering Institutions and Industries subscribing to this initiative.

BITES in association with CII (southern chapter) organized this workshop to make our member institutions aware of this important initiative and also explore the possibilities of collaboration between CII, BITES and Engineering colleges to pilot a similar initiative in Karnataka.

In her opening address Ms. Madhu Vasanti, Regional Director, CII explained that Employability Bridge Initiative was conceived by the CII TN Educational panel in May 2010 to address following critical issues raised by the panel members from Institutes & Industry:

- Lack of awareness on expected employability skills
- Students are unable to find opportunities to do Projects/Internship in Industries to get Industrial exposure
- Despite tremendous opportunities available in SME's and MSME's institutes & students are unable to connect and leverage

Employability Bridge will bring the employers and educational institutions across engineering, arts & science, management and other vocational streams onto one single platform. The key features of the employability bridge are:

- Industry driven competency based employability skills training comprising of classroom sessions, e-learning, self-assessment tests, industry visits, internship opportunities etc
- Employability Skills Assessment & Certification will be provided by the Bridge
- Placement Aggregation Services for Companies for recruiting fresh graduates on campus and off campus

In the context of “*finding right student for the right job*”, Dr. Yagneshwar, former VP, Infosys Technologies spoke about the challenges faced by IT Industry and Institutions alike.

Large recruitment drives are leading to “*War for talent*” with only few campuses being favored by big IT firms. Mid and small sized IT companies are forced to reach out to large number of campuses even though their hiring requirements are moderate. Pressure on companies to hire in one day with limited time to assess students meaningfully has resulted in many not so deserving students making it to the job and the deserving ones kept out. Low industry readiness of fresh hires has resulted in long duration training programs affecting both productivity and cost of operations.

Institutes also face diverse challenges like shortage of skilled faculty and lack of clarity on what Industry requires. Inability to make students “industry ready” due to lack of clarity on how to design courses that help students become more “professional”, “team player”, and “better communicator”, No access good small & medium sized companies for recruitment.

**Employability Bridge** is a platform which seeks to overcome the shortcomings prevalent in the current recruitment model. Primary objectives of the bridge are

1. Increase employability of students by addressing gaps in knowledge and skills
2. Create a platform to enable industry and academia to address the gaps and also to recruit suitable students

This done by:

- A platform where companies can post jobs and skill requirements for various jobs which are visible to students across various colleges
- The platform enables students to use e-learning based modules to acquire / hone knowledge & skills
- Classroom sessions for certain knowledge and skills are arranged using proven 3<sup>rd</sup> party service providers at each college
- Students are assessed on certain common knowledge and skill requirements using the platform; in addition, company-specific skill requirements can also be assessed (if required)
- Companies can use the platform to conduct webinars, load e-learning material, and conduct assessments
- Companies can post internships, project specifications and provide guidance through the platform

Mr. Ambavalan Ramachandran of Surgeforth gave a detailed demonstration of the Employability bridge portal and walked through its salient features. As of now the bridge has got several training partners in i-Point, Digiscape and Equipe who provide both E-learning as well as class room based training to students on need basis. Student assessment is carried out by Assesspeople. Globarena is another partner which is providing exclusive e-learning content.

Mr. Naren of i-Point explained about the training provided by his company and how different training modules have been designed for seamless integration with the existing curriculum starting from 4<sup>th</sup> semester onwards. About 136 hours of class room training followed by 32 hours of on line reinforcement will be provided as part of the training package. The different training modules are: *Business Communication, Individual & Team Effectiveness, Placement Readiness and Industry Specific Workforce Readiness*