

CHAPTER

3

GENERIC SKILLS AND THE PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

Generic skills are important today because work and life are getting more competitive and challenging. Additionally, both work and life are becoming more complex, necessitating a high level of generic skills. Defined as the ability that can be learned and developed by an individual, examples of such skills include adaptability, leadership, communication, problem solving, and teamwork skills.

A common overriding benefit of these skills is that they enhance a person's state of employability. Employers deemed these skills important for the company. Notwithstanding, there is a lack of research on how generic skills can affect promotional opportunities – an important facet of work and career development. For graduates, when entering the workforce, of course, most of them will at some stage aim for promotion.

Taking the point of view of Thurow's job competition model, the one who has learned and acquired more skills has a higher value to a company. Hence, they will be the ones to consider when there are promotional opportunities.

Thus, the objectives of this research are to identify the perceptions of UTM accounting graduates about the generic skills they possess as well as examine the promotional opportunities among them, and

finally determine the relationship between generic skills and promotional opportunities.

In 2009, UTM started offering an undergraduate accounting degree titled Bachelor of Accounting. A total of 265 accounting graduates have been produced in 2017 so far. After graduated from university, they worked as accountants, auditors, finance officers, tax officers, etc. Since the professions are all subject to the Professional Code, in order for them to perform their jobs competently, it is a must to measure the generic skills of these employees.

The flow of this chapter begins with a review of generic skills and promotional opportunities. Next, the empirical studies of generic skills and the promotional opportunities at work are also explored followed by the research methodology used for data collection. Findings from the questionnaires were later presented. Finally, the overall discussion and conclusion as well as recommendations were also discussed.

3.2 GENERIC SKILLS

Hsu and Lu (2016) defined generic skills as abilities that can be learned and developed by an individual in many situations. They added that self-confidence, self-reliance, adaptability, open-minded, etc. are some examples of generic skills. People around us can help us learn generic skills. This can be done by establishing a role model. Not only generic skills could trigger learning and development of other skills, but they are also transferable across different sectors, which can be a competitive advantage in the workplace and in life (Canning, 2013). Generally, developing generic skills promotes success in the workplace and in life (Singh & Gera, 2015). This chapter only reviews four generic skills, comprised of adaptability skills, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, and teamwork skills. The skills are chosen because there have been many studies on these skills, which indicated that these skills are widely accepted as important (Belet, 2016; Cullen et al., 2014; Iqbal, 2015; Moo & Yazdanifard, 2015; Nedovic et al., 2013; Sattar et al., 2017; Voirin & Roussel, 2012).

3.2.1 Adaptability Skills

Based on the research from Sattar et al. (2017), adaptable employees performed better. Cullen et al. (2014) found that adaptable employees were company assets, which brought innovation into the organisation. This is due to the reason that employees' attitudes toward organisational change were determined by how well they understood the changes and how big the impact was on them. Ployhart and Bliese proposed a theory of I-ADAPT, which defined adaptability skills as the ability and willingness to change themselves so that they can always fit in a dynamic environment. In addition, a study by the Society for Human Resource Management found that adaptability skills were one of the most desired job skills that employers looked for in new and experienced hires. Heuvel et al. (2013) broadly defined adaptive behaviour as when employees cope with change and uncertainty. It was supported by Voirin and Roussel (2012) who stated that adaptable employees did a good job in managing stress, able to deal effectively with those career-related challenges, and more likely to perform duties outside their job.

3.2.2 Leadership Skills

Moo and Yazdanifard (2015) broadly define leadership as a nonstop process. Therefore, leaders must continuously improve their leadership skills. Iqbal (2015) noted that leadership is all about dealing with change in today's dynamic world. Nedovic et al. (2013) stated that leadership requires one to be emotionally stable at work. Emotional stability is important in order to maintain relationships between managers and employees. Belet (2016) added the definition of leadership as the ability to ensure organisational activities and processes are carried out in a proper and orderly manner. In reality, however, graduates from most top business schools are surprisingly lacking of leadership skills (Belet, 2016)