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Transformative Curriculum: A Human Resource Machinery for Employment Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The Human Resources Department played an important role in the selection and engagement of employees in the organization. It helps the strategic business units of the entity to ascertain competencies of entry level personnel. This study consist of listing the competencies acquired while preparing for a more advanced employment engagement. It investigated the competencies developed in the graduates of Legal Management Program and the competencies desired by industries and employers. A descriptive-comparative method of research was employed. The respondents were the graduates of Legal Management and their respective employers. The survey questionnaire was the main tool in gathering the data. The data were treated statistically using weighted mean, ranking and t-test. The graduates' competencies were integratively rated by assigning numerical values. The graduates' competencies were rated above average on critical thinking and organizational skills while computer skills, investigative skills were rated average, and legal research skills were rated below average. The graduates landed in a wide-variety of employment. Furthermore, employers revealed that they extremely required organizational skills, highly required in critical thinking skills, while in legal research skills, interviewing and investigating skills and computer skills are only moderate. Therefore, in these areas, there is a need for exposure of students to related learning experiences such as judicial exposure, and other supplemental activities where theoretical knowledge may be reinforced. There was a significant gap in the competencies developed in the curriculum and those required by the industries and employers particularly in organizational skills and legal research skills. It was recommended that practical exercises or actual research be assigned and done by students. The research should require the application of the legal research system. As such, for the students to adjust with the changes of time, curricular reform is a necessity. Strong and proactive educational leaders should examine the marketability of graduates.

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INTRODUCTION

A revitalized focus on graduates' employability to workforce life not only benefits employers who have a stronger labor market to draw from, but it also benefits students who are empowered to make better career decisions, and thereby make smoother transitions into the workforce. In understanding the "skills gap" occurring in the workforce (Askov & Gordon, 1999; Atkins, 1999; Robinson, 2000), there is a need to place a greater emphasis on preparing graduates for the demands of the industry. This skills gap is most notable with college graduates, as they are not equipped with the desired skills needed to fit in their job. Employers believe higher education is failing by not adequately developing the employability skills of graduates. Therefore, more emphasis is being placed on college graduates to possess employability skills. Brown *et al.* (2003) concluded that employers often state that college graduates are not being properly prepared for industry jobs. Therefore, a need exists for higher education institutions to investigate ways in which they can assist graduates in being better prepared for the workforce once they leave the university setting. Employers have the best knowledge of the workplace and can foster skill development in higher education and their own organizations by incorporating the base competencies in the selection, training, development, and retention of employees. Therefore, an additional need exists to ask the immediate supervisor of Legal Management graduates to determine which

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employability skills are most important and whether or not the college graduate is utilizing the skills to the best of his or her ability.

With this study the graduates will not find any difficulty in finding employment and in meeting the demand of the industry. Once hired, they can immediately attend to the tasks that may be assigned to them by their employer.

Moreover, the employers' expenses in training and development of newly hired employees to sustain an effective performance both in their current and future tasks may be reduced. The study will help establish an identity of competent graduates in the industry.

Statement of the Problem:

1. What is the level of employability and/or preparedness for advancement of Legal Management graduates?
2. What is the distribution of employment by industry?
3. What employability competencies are required by the employers?
4. What are the gaps between the required competencies by the Industries and the Curriculum?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This chapter explains the research design used, the respondents of the study, the instrument, procedure and statistical treatment used. This study used the descriptive-comparative research design using survey method. The data were gathered from graduates and their employers. The results of the survey determined the similarities and differences between the competencies developed by the curriculum and the competencies desired by the employer. The study utilized the researcher made survey questionnaire. The data were treated statistically using weighted mean, ranking and t-test. Weighted and ranking were used to determine the employability competencies of graduates, and competencies required by the employers. T-test was used to determine the gap in the competencies developed in the graduates and the competencies required by the industries/employees.

The study tested the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the competencies developed in the students and those required by the industry. This hypothesis was intended to find out the gap between the competencies developed in the students using the present curriculum and the competencies required by the industry.

Discussion, Results, Conclusions And Recommendations:

Level of Employability And/Or Preparedness for the Advancement of Legal Management Graduates:

Discussion:

The competencies of Legal Management students are categorized into critical thinking skills, organizational skills, legal research skills, interviewing and investigating skills, and computer skills.

Critical Thinking Skills. It shows that the graduates have above average level of competencies along critical thinking skills (wm= 3.29), whereas their employers believed that they have above average level of competencies (wm= 3.16) in the same area.

The graduates claim that they possessed above average competence on the ethical implications of decision and effects of the decision made (wm= 3.88); followed by anticipating problems and evaluating alternative solutions as well as making decisions on the basis of thorough analysis of the situation (wm= 3.86). The same indicators were viewed by employers as to the graduates' high level of competence. The employers however believed that the graduates exhibited foremost their above average competence on anticipating problems and evaluating alternative solution (wm= 3.65); and in making decisions on the basis of thorough analysis of the situation (wm= 3.60).

The top three ranked indicators imply that the graduates have imbibed the value of legality and fairness towards others through the decisions they will make. In fact, they are guided by considering the implications of decision, anticipating problem and evaluating alternative solutions in order that if confronted with challenges, they can face them with confidence. Both graduates and the employers claimed that the former have average level of competence in distinguishing evidentiary facts from other materials and/ or controlling facts. One of the goals of the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration major in Legal Management is to develop in the students the ability to critically evaluate arguments and evidence. Basically, critical thinking skills are used for effective functioning in the modern world. It keeps things in perspective (Fowler, 2007). This is an essential tool for inquiry that results in the interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference, which everyone uses in making decisions. Therefore, concerted effort is necessary to improve the competencies of the students along this aspect. Since this is basic for graduates of Legal Management to do well in their jobs, this concern must be given preferential attention by the college.

Organizational Skills. It was observed that the graduates and employers have a common perception of the top three indicators of graduates' competencies along organizational skills. The graduates believe that they have

excellent competence in communication understandable to all (wm= 4.19), and responding to other's comments (wm= 4.05), followed by their high competence in establishing good rapport with clients (wm= 3.81).

The organizational competence of the graduates is more structured around communication and establishing good rapport with clients. These created a semblance of order for them to reduce stress levels. As Hale (2007) averred, being organized is putting more balance in life, having a place for everything is its place. The employers concurred with the contention of the graduates on their communication competence, but not on the responding to other's comments during conversation. The employers said that the graduates have above average of competence along this concern. Nonetheless, these are commendable attributes of the graduates because communication response abilities and establishing rapport are essential elements in a fair and just society, which is the essence of Legal management. For the lower ranked indicators, both graduates and employers have common evaluation that the former have average level of competence in making effective business presentations, making impromptu presentations, and conducting effective interviews with clients, witnesses and experts. These are the areas that should be reinforced in instruction. Generally, on the basis of organizational skills of the graduates they are prepared for their chosen field of interest. This means that the graduates have a sense of control and organized working structure. This would make their work easier, reduce stress, and easily process information to make decisions.

Legal Research Skills. The employability skills of graduates indicate that they believe that they have below average level of competence in legal research skills (wm= 1.16). The employers on the other hand declared that these graduates have average level of competence (wm= 2.12).

The graduates' understanding and applying principles of writing and rules of English grammar to all writing tasks is rated above average (wm= 3.63). However, they have average level of competence in writing in a style that conveys legal theory in a clear and concise manner (2.35), and citing print and electronic primary and secondary sources in proper form (wm= 2.07). The employers on the other hand believed that the third indicator that is on citing references found, the graduates have average level of difficulty in preparing and carrying-out a legal research plan (wm= 2.88). The graduates also identified the following as their weaknesses: use of print and electronic sources of law to locate applicable statutes, administrative regulations, constitutional provisions, court cases and other primary source materials (wm= 1.26) citing both print and electronic sources of law (wm= 1.21), and reporting legal research findings in a standard inter-office memorandum or order appropriate format (wm= 1.05). The employers cited that the graduates have below average competence in using both print and electronic sources of law to locate treatise, law review, articles, legal encyclopedia, and other secondary source of materials that help explain the law and to locate applicable statutes, administrative regulations, constitutional provisions, court cases, and other primary source (wm= 1.53). Their competence is below average in reporting legal research findings in a standard inter office memorandum or order appropriate format (wm= 1.67). The graduates of Legal Management are expected to possess abilities to locate, extract, and analyze data from multiple sources and able to research legal issues. Since the graduates expressed their weaknesses in these areas, their performance in the workplace will be adversely affected which in turn would affect their productivity. As such, proper follow-up and appropriate emphasis in instruction should be done to enable the graduates to effectively perform these tasks.

Interviewing and Investigating Skills. The competencies in interviewing and investigating skills are developed below average according to the graduates themselves (wm= 1.78).

The employers similarly viewed the graduates as having indeed below average competence in identifying and locating witnesses, potential parties to a suit and experts (wm= 1.91). Although, generally, the employers believed that the graduates possessed average level of competence in interviewing and investigating skills. Conducting interview and investigation are basic processes to gather data and evidence when handling legal problems or just plain solving problems. The Legal Management graduates are expected to possess these skills because data gathered from these processes are materials in making decisions, not only for themselves but also for the person in authority. These competencies must therefore be prioritized in the course content of Legal Investigation.

Computer Skills. The graduates and employers assessed the competency level of the former as average. These are indicated by 2.32 and 2.56 weighted means from the evaluations made by the graduates and employers, respectively.

The graduates disclosed that they have above average skills on using e-mail functions and electronic method of communication (wm= 3.72) and in defining and identifying basic computer hardware components (wm= 3.26). But, they believed they needed to improve more on identifying software and information systems typically encountered in the legal environment, factual research, describing the features of case management and information management software, and in locating and joining sites that relate to legal assessment. While it is true that computer education is a part of the curriculum, there is a special skill in Legal Management, which is needed to locate needed legal data. These competencies should be taken into consideration by the college to develop the students along these areas. However, the employers were confident enough that the graduates possessed these skills at moderate level. These areas have to be considered for the improvement of the graduates

in this course. As Carnevale, *et al.* (1990) pointed out, educators need to teach future employees how to make database decisions in order to solve problems effectively. More so, educators need to teach the students how to learn, how to work the job from start to finish and how to deal with people. These are the expectations from higher education sector for the graduates to effectively perform in the workplace. It is worth noting that the application of computer skills is not a problem for the graduates since they are computer literate. This is part of the curriculum, which is necessary in this global technology setting. In the case of computer skills as applied to Legal Management job, it is revealed in the data that majority of the graduates are not required to perform them, as these are not required in their present jobs.

Table 1: Employability And/Or Preparedness for the Advancement.

COMPETENCIES	GRADUATES		EMPLOYERS		AVE.	INTERP.
	Wm	Interp.	Wm	Interp.		
Critical Thinking Skills	3.29	AA	3.16	AA	3.23	AA
Organizational Skills	3.18	AA	3.10	AA	3.14	AA
Computer Skills	2.32	A	2.56	A	2.44	A
Investigative and Interviewing Skills	1.78	BA	2.26	A	2.02	A
Research Skills	1.16	BA	2.12	A	1.64	BA
Grand Mean	2.34	A	2.64	A	2.49	A

Legend:

0 – 1.00	Poor	(P)
1.01 – 2.00	Below Average	(BA)
2.01 – 3.00	Average	(A)
3.01 – 4.00	Above Average	(AA)
4.01 – 5.00	Excellent	(E)

Results:

The employability skills were considered above average from the perceptions of graduates and the employers (wm= 3.23) on critical thinking skills; and organizational skills (wm= 3.14); average level on computer skills (wm= 2.44); interviewing and investigating skills (wm= 2.02); and below average on legal research skills (wm= 1.64).

Conclusion:

The graduates possessed average level of employability skills.

Recommendation:

It is suggested that the College conduct a thorough analysis on the factors causing the average level of students' employability skills in computer, and interviewing and investigating skills, and below average on legal research skills. Furthermore, it should consider the industry competencies as the content of the curriculum.

In Legal Research Skills, the faculty handling the subject should teach the students based on the syllabus submitted. Research activities of students should be monitored to check their performance. Team working among the students should be developed to enhance their research capabilities. The output should be submitted for presentation and be critiqued by a working team. A supplemental training should also be conducted. The grading system should also be in compliance with formalities on research and should be content based. Moreover, the student should be taught the language of research. Furthermore, in modifying the current curriculum, the college should include more classroom activities that will develop these skills. The classroom activity should be student-centered approach. This may be facilitated through e-learning circles & practical work. Workshops may be conducted to assist faculty in developing innovative methods and techniques to incorporate and teach these skills to future students. In Investigating and Interviewing Skills, the course should teach the students on how to procure reliable facts for them to able to make an informal decision. They should be required to perform a fact-finding process/information gathering. Gorden (2001) said that interviewing skills are not simple motor skills, they involve a high combination of observation, empathic sensitivity, and intellectual judgment.

Distribution of Employment by Industry:

Discussion:

The graduates of Legal Management got jobs which require and apply legal tenets. The trend of employment pointed to sales/marketing as the flock of the graduates (19.11%) followed by those employed in banking institutions (13.23%). The graduates are employable in these areas because of their background in business and industry which are part of the curriculum. With added features of legal management, the employers are somehow assured that management has people who will direct their agencies to the right path of progress. There is one (1.47) though who joined legal services and judiciary.

Classifying the job placement of graduates, it can be observed that most of the jobs landed by the graduates are mostly classified under administration and human resource management (37.50%), followed by sales and marketing (32.14%) and finance (19.64%). Few of them worked in legal, academe, and operations and production. It would be more rewarding if they will be employed in jobs that match their academic preparation. But due to economic instability and low employment opportunities, these graduates opted to stay with the jobs they have learned to love and have accepted for economic sustenance.

Table 2: Distribution of Employment by Industry.

JOB CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER	PERCENT
Administration/Human Resource Management	21	37.50
Sales and Marketing	18	32.14
Finance	11	19.64
Legal	3	5.36
Academe	2	3.57
Operation/Production	1	1.79
TOTAL	56	100

Results:

Majority got jobs related to sales/marketing; followed by those working in banks (9); and financial consultancy (5). Some of the graduates were employed in other agencies/industries.

Conclusion:

The graduates are employed in various jobs.

Recommendation:

It is suggested to the concerned offices of the University to scout or establish linkage with industries/agencies for possible and appropriate employment of the graduates to jobs that match their academic preparation. It is recommended to the College to join cause-oriented groups and paralegal services like election-related works, jail counseling, labor mediation, barangay settlement exercises; economic, social, environmental and political investigations and research and other activities.

Employability Competencies Required by the Employers:

Discussion:

The declaration made by employers that along critical thinking skills, they want their employees to possess utmost competence in anticipating problems and evaluating alternative solutions (wm= 4.25); and in making decisions on the basis of thorough analysis of the situation (wm= 4.19). The employers likewise expected their employees to possess at least moderate competence in identifying interrelationships among cases, statutes, regulations, and other legal authorities (wm= 2.13), and distinguish evidentiary facts from other materials and/or controlling facts. These skills are what the legal management program tries to pursue. These competent employees will help their employer's legal undertakings and are expected to put their employers in the right path of decision-making and problem solving.

The employers cited that, they extremely require their employees to possess organizational skills. Foremost, the employers want that the employees could very well respond to other comments (wm= 4.80); establish rapport with clients and co-employees (wm= 4.75); make effective business presentation (wm= 4.53). Other organizational skills are also essential like exhibiting tact and diplomacy, applying assertive behavior techniques, writing business communication, making impromptu presentations, delegating responsibility and integrating strategic consideration in making plans. The employers also cited that they also extremely need employees who understand and can apply principles of writing and rules of English grammar in all writing tasks. English communication is very essential because this is the medium usually adopted in business transactions, presentations and other tasks pertaining to legal matters. If communications fail, more problems will be forthcoming. The employers least expected their employees to possess competence in reporting legal research findings in a standard inter-office memorandum or order in appropriate format, citing/locating both print and electronic sources of law, to locate treatise, and law review among others.

Rodriguez (2002) said that it is in legal research where graduates were taught the systematic approach in solving problems so that s/he can do the work smoothly and efficiently with minimum wastage of time and effort. Furthermore, it will help the employee in solving work related problems with optimum use of time and resources. Legal research is a drill to acquire the skill of analyzing case briefing and synthesizing the same. Through these skills, the graduates will be taught to cull significant facts to make a decision applicable to the problem s/he wants to solve.

It should be noted, however, that today's world is a technological, borderless and polarizing world. In order to keep pace with these technological changes, the students must be prepared and must be provided with

learning opportunities to cope and adjust to the changing needs of time. Hence, curricular reform is not just an admirable thing or a desirable option to respond to students' needs but an absolute necessity.

Table 3: Employability Competencies Required by the Employers.

SKILLS	WM	INT.	RANK
Anticipating problem and evaluating alternative solutions.	4.25	ER	1
Making decisions on the basis of thorough analysis of the situation.	4.19	ER	2
Analyzing factual situations to determine when it is appropriate to apply exceptions to general legal rules.	3.58	MuR	3
Knowing ethical implications of decisions and recognizing the effects of decisions made.	3.24	MuR	4
Applying recognized legal authority to a specific factual situation.	3.10	MuR	5
Identifying interrelationships among cases, statutes, regulations, and other legal authorities.	2.13	MoR	6
Distinguishing evidentiary facts from other material and/or controlling facts.	2.05	MoR	7
MEAN	3.22	MuR	

Legend:

0 – 1.00	Not Required	(NR)
1.01 – 2.00	Less Required	(LR)
2.01 – 3.00	Moderately Required	(MoR)
3.01 – 4.00	Much Required	(MuR)
4.01 – 5.00	Extremely Required	(ER)
	Not Expected	(NE)

Results:

The employers declared that critical thinking skills are much required in their agencies/industries (wm= 3.22) foremost in anticipating problems and evaluating alternative solutions (wm= 4.25) and making decisions based on thorough analysis of the situation (wm= 4.19). Organizational skills are extremely required by the employers (wm= 4.21); most particularly in responding to other's comments during a conversation (wm= 4.80), establishing good rapport with subordinates (wm= 4.75), and making effective business presentations (wm= 4.53). Legal research skills are moderately needed by the employers (wm= 2.51), but they extremely needed skills of employees in understanding and applying principles of writing and rules of English grammar to all writing tasks (wm= 4.13). Investigating and interviewing skills are moderately needed by the employers (wm= 2.33) citing that employees must have the skill in listing questions for an interview, conducting an effective interview and recording the interview accurately (wm= 2.98). Computer skills of employees are moderately required by the employers (wm= 2.38), but they extremely needed personnel who are conversant in using e-mail functions and other electronic method of communication (wm= 4.75).

Conclusion:

The employers extremely required organizational skills, highly required critical thinking skills and moderately required legal research skills, interviewing and investigating skills and computer skills from the Legal Management graduates.

Recommendation:

It is suggested that a revision of the curriculum be done to consider the skills required by the employers. In the course syllabus, it should consider exposure of students to related learning experiences such as judicial exposure, field investigative activities, paralegal sessions, some extra-curricular requirements and supplemental activities to reinforce the theoretical knowledge and weakness of the students.

Gaps Between the Required Competencies by the Industries and Curriculum:

Discussion:

The gaps between the required competencies by the industries and the Curriculum are determined by using t-test.

Table 4: Gaps on the Required Competencies by Employers.

SKILLS	T-VALUE	PROB. VALUE
Critical Thinking Skills	0.2894 ^{NS}	0.3910
Interviewing and Investigating Skills	0.2099 ^{NS}	0.4236
Computer Skills	0.6466 ^{NS}	0.2709
Organizational Skills	5.3556 ^{**}	1.159E-04
Legal Research Skills	4.8678 ^{**}	3.269E-04

Legend:

ns = Not Significant
** = Highly Significant

Data revealed that the competencies developed in the curriculum along development of critical thinking skills, investigating and interviewing skills and computer skills fitted the requirements of the industry. This is indicated by the t-values whose probability values are greater than 0.05, which means that there is no significant difference in the level of competencies developed and the competencies required by the industry. These further imply that the graduates in Legal Management Course could serve well the industry because the needed competences are duly developed in the graduates.

In critical thinking skills, the non-significant difference could be traced on the fact that while the employers have higher level of expectation from their employees to have possessed the critical thinking skills, the graduates on the other hand have developed these skills to a much higher level. Therefore, this could not be a source of problem but an advantage to the graduates.

On the contrary, there is a significant difference in the competencies developed via the curriculum in the aspects of organizational skills and legal research skills and those required by the industry. These are indicated by the t-values whose probability value is less than 0.01. These findings imply that the level of competencies developed in organizational and legal research skills does not match the requirement of the industry. With this information, the graduates would possibly encounter problems in the disposal of the organizational and research tasks.

In investigative skills, the priority skills of the employers have differed in the developed skills in student from highest to lowest level. But, the weighted means are not much different. While the employers foremost require the graduates to have developed skills in formulating questions or interview, conducting an effective interview and recording interview accurately, these only rank third in the developed investigative competence of graduates. Similarly, in locating and preparing request documents to obtain information, this ranks first in the developed competence among the graduates while same indicator is third in rank in the priority of employers. But, this does not matter in the test for difference, which means that the priority competencies and skills of industries are also considered in the development of student competence under the present the curriculum.

Along computer skills, the developed competencies in students match those needed in the industry and that is why the computer subjects included in the curriculum should be retained.

Unfortunately, the organizational skills required by the industry do not match with those developed in the Legal Management Course; hence, there is a competency gap. For example, communicating to be understood by all ranked first. It is given preference in the curriculum but is not a priority to the employers as it ranked seventh in them. Recognizing alternative routes in meeting objectives is much developed in the graduates; it ranked fourth among the skills but less preferred by the industry, ranking tenth only. Exhibiting tact and diplomacy is least developed in the graduates as it ranked ninth but this is to the employers ranks fourth. These areas contributed to the competency gap along organizational skills developed in the curriculum and those required by the employers.

Lastly, in research skills, a discrepancy is accounted on the degree the competencies are developed in the graduates and the degree they are required in the industry. The employers extremely require these skills but unfortunately are moderately developed only in the graduates.

Results:

In critical thinking skills, the t-value was 0.2894 (Prob. Value = 0.3910); interviewing and investigative skills obtained t-value of 0.2099 (Prob. Value= 0.4236); and in computer skills, the t-value was 0.6466 with probability value of 0.2709. All the probability values were greater than 0.05, which implied that there is no significant difference in the developed competencies and those desired by the industries/employers. Organizational skills obtained t-value of 5.3556 (Prob. Value= 1.159E-04); and legal research skills got t-value of 4.8678 (Prob. Value= 3.269E-04); the probability values were less than 0.01. Therefore, the graduates' competencies developed through the curriculum and those desired by the industries/employers vary.

Conclusion:

There is a gap in the organizational and legal research competencies developed in the students and those required by the industries and employers. But critical thinking skills, investigating and interviewing skills as well as computer skills needed by the industries are appropriately addressed in the curriculum.

Recommendation:

These are areas, which should be considered in the modification of the curriculum to make Legal Management Course more relevant, responsive and theory and practice-focused curriculum. But one basic requirement in the revision of the curriculum is the teachers' appraisal of the students' learning outcomes. This does not only satisfy the requirement of the Commission on Higher Education but information from the teachers is vital in the continuing development of the students. Curriculum offering must be subject for periodic review to maintain relevance and academic excellence.

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