FACTORS INFLUENCING SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT.

A STUDY OF STUDENTS IN UCSI UNIVERSITY

CHRISTINE WONG SIEW KUAN

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ACCOUNTANCY

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

NOVEMBER 2010

FACTORS INFLUENCING SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT.

A STUDY OF STUDENTS IN UCSI UNIVERSITY

CHRISTINE WONG SIEW KUAN (CGD060017)

Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration

University of Wales

1998

Submitted to the Graduate School of Business

Faculty of Business and Accountancy

University of Malaya, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Management

NOVEMBER 2010

Abstract

Employers today are generally not satisfied with the quality of fresh graduates that graduate from university. Universities are no longer a vehicle for students to acquire academic knowledge but one to help develop life skills as well. So what are the graduate employability skills that the industry is talking about? This study was conducted on the students of UCSI University in Kuala Lumpur to find out the types of soft skills that are lacking amongst students and to find out what can contribute to the learning and development of such skills. The soft skills highlighted to be studied include communication skills, leadership skills, time management and emotional intelligence. This is the criterion variable. These are also the skills sighted by the industry as lacking amongst fresh graduates. This paper examines if personality, peer relationship, attitude towards school and emotional intelligence play a part in helping these students develop and sharpen their soft skills. This is the predictor variable. These factors are chosen because students spend more than half of their undergraduate journey in university, attending classes, learning from lecturers, making new friends and interacting with peers. This paper seeks to find out if these factors play a role in the development of soft skills amongst students.

The survey was conducted on students with a match done with their supervisors to find out if what students say about themselves match what supervisors observe through their work. A moderating factor of culture was included in this study to find out if there is any moderating effect of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism and femininity/masculinity on the relationship. Factor analysis was done on the independent variables, dependent variables and moderating variables to see the factors emerging from the questionnaire and to summarize the variables. Then a reliability test was conducted on all the

three variables to see if the measures are reliable and free from error. Finally hierarchical regression analysis was done on all the variables to determine if there is a direct effect of the independent variable on soft skill development with a moderating effect of culture.

The findings are as a guide for the university to look into introducing programmes, workshops to aid student learning and effectively embedding the graduate attributes in the current curriculum. Interestingly, the results showed that there is a no direct correlation of the independent variables to soft skills development but there is a moderating effect of culture on the independent variables and soft skills development.

Keywords: soft skills, student development, employability, graduate attributes

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With man this is possible; with GOD all things are possible. I wish to thank Almighty God for His abundant blessings and favours He has given me. So great is His love that I am able to persevere and complete this stage of my academic pursuit.

My utmost gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Sharmila Jayasingam, my supervisor, for without your patience, guidance and mentoring, I would not be able to complete my research. Thank you for your advice during every stage of my research.

Thank you to the management of UCSI University for allowing me to conduct this research.

My love to my parents Mr. & Mrs. Wong for their constant encouragement and prayers. My love also to my grandmother Mary for her constant prayers and patience waiting to see me graduate.

To David, my husband in the fullest sense of the word. Thank you for your unwavering love, believe, encouragement, help and advice.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Summary of soft skills lacking among graduates	8
Table 1.2	UCSI University Graduate Attributes	11
Table 3.1	Source of questionnaire and Cronbach Alpha value	47
Table 4.1	Profile of respondents	53
Table 4.2	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (Independent Variable)	58
Table 4.3	Summary of factors for Independent Variable	58
Table 4.4	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (Dependent Variable)	60
Table 4.5	Summary of factors for Dependent Variable	61
Table 4.6	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (Moderating Variable)	62
Table 4.7	Summary of factors for Moderating variable	62
Table 4.8	Reliability Coefficients for Independent Variable	63
Table 4.9	Reliability Coefficients for Dependent Variable	64
Table 4.10	Reliability Coefficients for Moderating Variable	64
Table 4.11	Hierarchical Regression results using Uncertainty Avoidance as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills	67
Table 4.12	Hierarchical Regression results using Individualism/Collectivism as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills	72
Table 4.13	Hierarchical Regression results using Masculinity / Femininity as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills.	73

LIST OF TABLES – CONTINUED

Table 4.14	Hierarchical Regression results using Power Distance as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills.	74

LIST OF FIGURES

	Title	Page
Figure 2.0	Personality as a possible factor for soft skills development	27
Figure 2.1	Framework for research	35
Figure 4.0	Link between new variables and old variables	66

LIST OF GRAPHS

	Title	Page
Graph 4.1	Relationship between Uncertainty Avoidance and Attitude towards Studies on Soft Skills Development	69
Graph 4.2	Relationship between Uncertainty Avoidance and Attitude towards School on Soft Skills Development	70
Graph 4.3	Relationship between Uncertainty Avoidance and Self-Esteem on Soft Skills Development	71
Graph 4.4	The Relationship between Power Distance and Self-Esteem on Soft Skills Development	75

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT		ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		iv
LIST OF TABLES		v
LIST OF FIGURES		vii
LIST OF GRAPHS		viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS		ix
CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Statement of problem	4
1.2	Significance of the study	12
1.3	Research Questions	13
1.4	Research Objectives	13
1.5	Scope of the study	13
1.6	Organization of study	14
CHAPTER 2	LITERATURE REVIEW	15
2.1	Introduction	15
2.2	Soft Skills	16
2.3	Peer Relationship	20
2.4	Personality	24
2.5	Emotional Intelligence	27
2.6	Factors relating to school	29
2.7	Cultural Orientation	31
2.8	Research Framework	32
2.9	Hypotheses	35

CHAPTER 3		RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	39
3.1		Introduction	39
3.2		Questionnaire Design	39
3.3		Sampling and Procedure	40
3.4		Data Collection Procedure	43
3.5		Selection of measures	45
	3.5a	The Big 5 Personality Traits	45
	3.5b	School Attitude Assessment Survey	45
	3.5c	Emotional Competence Inventory	46
	3.5d	Peer Relationship	46
	3.5e	Cultural Dimension Item	46
3.6		Data Analysis Technique	47
	3.6a	Factor Analysis	48
	3.6b	Reliability Test	49
	3.6c	Descriptive Statistics for demographic	49
	3.6d	Hierarchical Multiple Regression	50
CHAPTER 4		RESEARCH RESULTS	52
4.1		Introduction	52
4.2		Demographic	52
4.3		Factor Analysis	56
	4.3.1	Factor analysis for Independent variables	57
	4.3.2	Factor Analysis for Dependent variables	60
	4.3.3	Factor analysis for Moderating variables	61
4.4		Reliability	63

4.4.1	Reliability for independent variables	63
4.4.2	Reliability for dependent variables	64
4.4.3	Reliability for moderating variables	64
4.5	Multiple Regression	65
4.5.1	Hierarchical regression analysis with moderator	67
CHAPTER 5	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	77
5.1	Findings	78
5.2	Implication of findings	83
5.3	Limitations of study	84
5.4	Suggestions for future research	85
5.5	Conclusion	85
REFERENCES		87
APPENDIX 1	Survey Questionnaire – Supervisors	91
APPENDIX 2	Survey Questionnaire – Students	96