# Stakeholders' Perspectives of the Skills and Attributes for Accounting Graduates

**Abstract**

This study examines how a group of Australian stakeholders define technical and non-technical skills, identifies those skills that are demanded of graduates at various stages of their career, and assesses the level of stakeholder satisfaction with the skills level of accounting graduates. Further the paper attempts to highlight the views of stakeholders about whose responsibility it is to develop the required set of technical and non technical skills required by accounting graduates as they enter the workforce.

Findings indicate that employers are seeking graduates who possess a diverse range of non-technical skills including communication and presentation, self-management, teamwork, initiative and enterprise, problem solving, technological competence and planning and organising skills. Employers also use non-technical skills as discriminators when evaluating graduates. In terms of technical skills basic practical accounting skills, IT skills and industry specific awareness are important. In general employers were not satisfied with the level of communication and problem solving skills and seemed generally to have low expectations in the area of technical skills accepting that they undertake much of the technical training themselves. The discussion about who role it was to develop both technical and non technical skills was most clearly stated as that of the universities. The findings have implications for those involved in the training of accountants and indeed for those seeking to develop skills in order to enter the profession.

interviewees who generously supplied their insights and experience.

# 1. Introduction

The role of accounting and the profession is changing. Over the last decade there has been increasing pressure from industry, government and accrediting bodies for changes in accounting education to ensure development of appropriate skills and knowledge. For some time now, commissioned reports into higher education (e.g., AC Nielsen Research Services 2000; Hager, Holland & Beckett, 2002) have highlighted that discipline-specific knowledge is not sufficient for graduate employability. One way in which universities have sought to articulate their role and purpose is through a description of the qualities of their graduates (Barrie, 2006). However, academics constantly grapple to understand the concept of graduate attributes in the context of different discipline backgrounds. As Thompson et al. (2008) note graduate attributes are variously referred to across education and training internationally as key skills (Drew, Thorpe and Bannister, 2002), generic attributes (Wright, 1995), key competencies (Mayer, 1992), transferable skills (Assiter, 1995), employability and soft skills (BIHECC, 2007).

As the market continues to expand, the skills and attributes demanded of accounting graduates are shifting. Seeking to enhance employability or work readiness through educational initiatives with a view to boosting national wealth is a global issue (Little, 2003). Reports commissioned by higher education stakeholders (e.g., Business Higher Education Round Table, 1993; AC Nielsen Research Services, 2000) and those monitoring the changing face of the accounting profession (Birrell, 2007; Birrell & Healy, 2008) have all recognized that a strong disciplinary knowledge base does not, of itself, guarantee a new graduate a job. In a report on *Employability skills for the future* (2002), written from an 'employers' perspective' the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry identified the type of generic skills (e.g., communication, team work) and personal

characteristics (e.g., loyalty, commitment, enthusiasm, self-management) that the authors concluded were needed in the workplace and that they believed would ensure success as an employee or self-employed worker (Taylor, 2005). Moreover, de la Harpe et al. (2000) suggest that concern from employers that undergraduate programmes are failing to provide graduates with the necessary skills for their careers is a worldwide issue.

In a dynamic and competitive environment accounting graduates are expected to have acquired the technical skills of the profession but, more importantly to employers, should emerge from university with a broader range of attributes as well as being able to demonstrate competence in the common vocational skills required in modern workplaces (CPA and ICAA, 2005; Jones & Sin, 2003; Sin, Jones & Petocz, 2007). In the Australian context, employers have been so dissatisfied with the skills and competencies of graduate that the Australian government for a time considered linking graduate skills testing with federal funding (McClymont et al., 2005; Thompson, 2006).

Others argue that the creation of key or transferable skills required by employers is not consistent with the mission of higher education (Barnett, 1997, b; Dunn et al., 1997) and that the objective of a university education should be to instil in graduates a commitment to lifelong learning and professional development (West, 1998). It is also not clear where to draw the line of demarcation between universities' responsibility to respond to employers' needs and, employers' responsibility to provide on-the-job training (Hesketh, 2000). Despite this, in recent years universities have developed and articulated coherent policies and frameworks to ensure development of graduate attributes and skills within and across programs. This is to encourage skills and qualities as well as ensure a sound understanding of subject matter (Sharp & Sparrow, 2002). According to those with a stake in the development of accounting graduates, attributes include, and go well beyond, disciplinary or

technical knowledge and expertise and include qualities that prepare graduates as life-long learners, as agents for social good, and for personal development in light of an unknown future (Bowden & Marton, 1998; Albrecht and Sach, 2000; Howieson, 2003; Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008). However Hodges and Burchell (2003) contend that the literature has focused largely on the views of the academia, with few reports of research into employers' views.

This paper examines how a diverse group [1] of employers in Australia define technical and non-technical skills, the level of importance placed on each skill and how satisfied employers are with the skills level of accounting graduates entering the workforce. In addition the skills and attributes that academics are identifying as necessary are compared with employer expectations.

The paper proceeds as follows: the next section examines the literature and develops the research questions. Section three discusses the methodology with findings reported in Section 4. The last sections of the paper discuss limitations and directions for future research and draw conclusions,

## 2.    Literature Review and Development of Research Questions

Competitive pressures, technology and a global environment have led to changed expectations in terms of the skills, attributes and competencies (in addition to the technical skills) that new accounting graduates demonstrate from the outset. Different stakeholders have different expectations.

Researchers such as Hodges and Burchell (2003) suggest that accounting graduates need to possess a combination of cognitive skills (technical knowledge, expertise and abilities) and

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[1] Employers were drawn from manufacturing and service industries, local and state government and accounting firms including Big 4, mid-tier and small firms.

personal or behavioural characteristics (principles, attitudes, values and motives) which are a function of individual personality. In recent years some academics have been suggesting that a skill such as emotional intelligence (the ability to recognize, use and manage emotions) is critical for engaging with the world and that emotions are central in all rational decision making processes (McPhail, 2004). Others have suggested that emotional intelligence has become a skill that may allow accountants to perform better in a variety of areas such as leadership, client relations, and even decision making (Bay & McKeage, 2006). Further Akers and Porter (2003, p.65) advocate that 'the AICPA and the Institute of Management Accountants recognize that emotional intelligence skills are critical for the success of the accounting profession".

There have been several studies undertaken across industries that reflect the views of employers. Lloyd (2008) suggested that in the UK current skills policy is centred on the need to drive up qualification obtainment and make the system more employer-led. This study also found that social skills are generally found to be of vital important and are often claimed to be lacking in the labour market (LSC 2006). However social skills are very difficult to define (Grugulis, 2007) and if these are the skills that employers want it is often difficult to meet these through qualifications.

Several studies have involved employers in an attempt to identify stakeholder expectations of university graduates. Bennett et al. (2002) in a project for the UK Economic and Social Research Council, explored employers' perspectives on the role of generic skills in the workplace and the different uses, purposes and contexts for their development in the first few years of graduate employment. They found that employers and employees alike had varying understandings of the importance of generic skills in the workplace. Other findings, (Bridges, 2000; Holmes, 2001) emphasize employers' stated needs for graduates to be able to

function in the workplace, be confident communicators, good team players, critical thinkers, problem solvers and, in addition, to be adaptive, adaptable and transformative people capable of initiating and responding to change (Harvey et al., 1997). Even though the desirable graduate attributes in these lists are similar to those of 20 years ago (Harvey, 1999), the lists are getting longer and more complex.

Demands from employers that new recruits should be 'job ready' are common. However this is difficult given that most jobs require some element of organisational and workplace specific skills (Gleeson and Keep, 2004). Further Gruguliset al. (2004) argue that by classifying such attitudes and behaviour as 'motivation' as a skill, employers have been able to shift responsibility for the creation or reinforcement of some of these attitudes and traits away from their role as managers and motivators of their employees and onto the education system.

In a study that investigated the knowledge, skills and personal attributes (KSAs) health care organizations require when employing accounting graduates Ahadiat (2002) found that the top ten most important KSAs have nothing to do with the candidate's technical accounting education. Rather they are attributes related to character and personal demeanour including trustworthiness, dependability and sense of responsibility. The study also found that aesthetic judgments relating to appearance and personality attributes seem to take precedence over employee performance

Across the world, studies have been conducted to gauge employer satisfaction with university accounting graduates (Harvey & Green, 1994; AC Nielsen Research Services, 2000; Albrecht & Sach, 2000; Bennett et al., 2002; Mazuki et al., 2007). In many disciplines the skills agenda (Holmes, 2000) has been widely debated. Several researchers have indicated that technical skills are regarded as implicit in the skills base of a person entering an accounting

career, but that it is a range of broader 'personal characteristics' that facilitate career success and make accounting graduates more valuable to employers (Agyemang & Unerman, 1998; Mathews et al., 1990; Collier & Wilson, 1994). Employers worldwide are becoming increasingly concerned that undergraduate programs are not producing graduates with the necessary skills for their careers (de la Harpe et al., 2000).

Mathews (2004) suggests that students are not graduating with the broad, higher learning outcomes which should be achieved at university and that a more interdisciplinary curriculum is required. Too often, university accounting programs are managed as simply a series of distinct discipline-based areas. This has been reinforced by students themselves who feel that skills essential to their career in accounting are not being sufficiently emphasised in undergraduate accounting programs (Kavanagh and Drennan, 2007). In general, the professionally sponsored educational change literature has recommended the broadening of the accounting curriculum to include those competencies reported by Albrecht and Sack (2000), namely analytical/critical thinking, written communications, oral communications, computing technology and decision making.

Supporting this position in Australia, the Department of Education, Training, Youth and Affairs (DETYA) (2000) reported a survey of employer satisfaction with the learning of new university graduates, which found that there were perceived skill deficiencies in important areas such as problem solving, creativity and flair, and oral business communications. Further, Lee and Blaszczynski (1999) suggested that employers expected accounting students to learn a multitude of skills, not simply how to generate and use accounting information. These skills include being able to communicate, work in a group environment, solve real-world problems, and use computer and Internet tools. Studies such as Borzi and Mills (2001) however have discovered a significant level of communication apprehension in upper level

accounting students suggesting that changes to the manner in which this skill in particular is developed within the curriculum need to be addressed.

The call for accounting graduates to be equipped with a broader range of non-technical skills in addition to the necessary technical skills is not recent. A survey of employers' expectations of accounting graduates derived from classified job advertisements in the USA in 1993 (Johnson and Johnson, 1995) identified that after professional accounting qualifications (57%), accounting positions called for communication skills (15%), organisation skills (7%) and interpersonal skills (5%). However, despite this Howieson (2003) suggests that practitioners/employers have traditionally encouraged an entrenched technical approach which provides them with graduates who can instantly be turned to profitable activities. He further suggests that both universities and practitioners must change their perspective away from the short-term and technical, towards the long-term and personal skills such as adaptability.

Kim et al. (1993) report that the three most important criteria used by employers for selecting accounting graduates emerged as graduates' motivation or interest in the job, personal qualities and communication skills. Re-enforcing this, Mangum (1996) indicated that poor communication skills were among the greatest shortcomings of job candidates reported by employers. Daggett and Liu (1997) surveyed 92 employers of new college graduates about their work force readiness. They confirmed that accounting graduates were found to be least prepared in writing, presenting, and interactive skills, and best prepared in the competencies of entering, manipulating and retrieving data as well as data analysis and synthesis. ACNeilson surveys (1998, 2000) in Australia confirm that employers are looking for graduates who have work and life skills and are especially wanting graduates who have, amongst others, well developed communication, team-work and problem-solving skills.

The challenge of delivering graduates with a more extensive skill set is highlighted in a recent European study (Hassal et al, 2005). Their research points to similar employer demands for non-technical skills (beyond the necessary technical accounting skills), but reported at the same time that employers were unsympathetic with claims from universities that they had limited capacity to deliver on these greater demands. Nevertheless Hesketh (2000) reports that while the social and economic world has been transformed in recent years, the demands made of graduates by employers still largely revolve around traditional concerns of the ability to learn new material and to apply it to workplace scenarios. DiGabriele (2008) in a US study found that both academics and practitioners agree that critical thinking, unstructured problem solving, investigative flexibility, analytical proficiency, and legal knowledge are important skills for forensic accountants.

As Gati (1998) suggested, if employers prioritize skills that are not developed in most accounting undergraduate programs, the mis-match between entry level graduates and the requirements of organizational environments is likely to see opportunities for new graduates become increasingly limited, despite the fact that the shortage of accountants in countries worldwide continues to become more critical.

In the light of this literature, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How are stakeholders defining non-technical skills?

RQ2: What non technical skills do stakeholders expect of accounting graduates at recruitment, in training and in ongoing accounting employment?

RQ3: How are stakeholders defining technical skills?

RQ4: Are stakeholders satisfied that accounting graduates are presenting with the required skills and attributes for the profession?

RQ5: Who responsibility do stakeholders perceive it is to assist accounting graduates to acquire the necessary technical and non-technical skills?

## 3. Research Method

Data was collected for this study by conducting interviews of employers from different environments. 36 focus groups were drawn from stakeholders ranging from employers from Big 4, mid-tier and small accounting firms in both metropolitan and regional areas in the private and public sectors and professional bodies. The duration of each of the interviews varied between sixty to ninety minutes, with each session conducted by a member of the research team. All discussions during interviews were taped and then transcribed (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). NVIVO was used to analyse the data and comments are quantified in order to allow analysis of the data.

## 4. Results

**4.1** RQ1: How are stakeholders defining non-technical skills?

Stakeholders discussed the role of non-technical skills in a range of contexts, in recruitment, training, and in daily work as an accountant. The skills most frequently referred to, in order of frequency, were communication and presentation, self-management, teamwork and good interpersonal skills, initiative and enterprise, problem solving, technological competence and planning and organising skills. Beneath these general areas were specific skills in broad skill domains such as, for example, verbal skills such as speaking, listening, negotiation and feedback under communication skills; being a well-rounded mature confident person under self-management; applying theory to practice under problem solving and client relationship; rapport and trust under teamwork and good interpersonal skills; and time and project

management skills under planning and organising. The number of times these non-technical skills were mentioned by stakeholders is listed below in Table 1:

(insert Table 1 here)

Stakeholders commented extensively on the role and definition of *communication* skill*s*. There were 31 comments about communication and presentation skills by stakeholders with 17 being about verbal and 14 about written skills. Communication skills were seen as vitally important in satisfying the requirements of the workplace as the need to work in teams, relate to clients and operate within a business environment were all dependent on good communication skills, however they happened to be defined.  Employers placed emphasis on the ability to really listen to and understand client needs.  They were also wary of exposing graduates to clients until they were satisfied that their level of communication skills was sufficiently developed to match the organisation's benchmark.

Stakeholders commented equally on the three component parts of *teamwork* skills (1) client relationship, focus, rapport and trust, (2) leadership and (3) managerial skills.  The necessity for teamwork and how it creates a strong sense of commitment to colleagues and to the organisation and allows workflow to be managed and deadlines met was also noted**.**

The third key area of non-technical skills was *self management*.  In terms of self management stakeholders listed  in order of priority: well rounded, mature confident persons; the ability to work independently and manage time; hard working dedicated persons; and  persons who were holistic, flexible, able to deal with complexity, uncertainty, pressure.  Other skills mentions under this heading included self presentation; professional presence and behaviour; community involvement, social responsibility; ambition; and finally intellectual capacity.  In the recruitment process employer stakeholders indicated that grades were not all that was required rather the need for a 'well-rounded and mature' applicant was voiced by many.  It

was often used as a discriminator between applicants with similar grades. Life experiences such as part time employment, sporting and extra-curricula activities particularly including leadership responsibilities were also viewed favourably. In the workplace the ability to manage oneself in a team environment is deemed important to employers as is hardwork, dedication and an ability to deal with complexity, uncertainty and pressure.

When discussing *initiative and enterprise* the most common discussion was around business acumen, knowledge, planning and building. Vision, imagination seeing the big picture and adding value were also discussed. Stakeholders were particularly keen to see initiative and enterprise in their recruits but also built into their graduate programs opportunities for the recognition and nurturing of such skills within the workplace.

Comments about initiative and enterprise focus on the ability to think for oneself, to have some commercial acumen, and be prepared to take the lead and make some decisions based on their assessment of the environment in which they are working. The value of having final year (in particular) subjects where students had to deal with ambiguity and 'grey' areas was considered most helpful in preparing students for their graduate roles.

*Problem solving* was perceived as the ability to apply theory to practice and also critical analysis and thinking skills. The ability to relate concepts learned to new situations, the ability to think for oneself, the ability to regard critically new information and situations and the ability to apply knowledge from one workplace context or problem to another was valued. Stakeholders felt that theory learned at university needed to be applied to a range of new problems and contexts and the graduate who had this ability was well regarded.

Within the field of *technological competence* the areas of IT generally and Excel specifically received the most attention. There was also mention of accounting software as a desirable technological skill. The observation was made that as graduates are now Gen Y their

technological competence is at such a high level they may in fact feel bored or frustrated by lesser requirements in the workplace.

Comments on *planning and organising* skills indicated a linking of many of the non-technical skills mentioned previously. Team working, self management and having other life experiences all played a part in planning and organising skills. Planning was perceived to be composed of both the ability to plan and organise as well as time and project management skills**.**

In summary in response to research question 1 stakeholders held very specific views about the types of non-technical skills they required in accounting graduates.   It is also interesting to note that technological competence was viewed as a non-technical skill.

**4.2**  RQ2: What non technical skills do stakeholders expect of accounting graduates at

recruitment, in training and in ongoing accounting employment?

Stakeholders were very keen to discuss the range of non-technical skills they looked for at recruitment, in training and in ongoing accounting employment.  Communication, self-management and teamwork were the most discussed with comments on 'recruits' indicating what stakeholders found in their recruits, recruitment processes indicating how stakeholders recruited within these domains and finally the challenges faced in the recruitment process.

(Insert Table 2 here)

In recruitment, employers used non-technical skills as a discriminator when evaluating graduates with similar grades or even slightly dissimilar grades. This was borne out by other employers where grades alone were not paramount in recruitment. Extracts from a public sector employer stakeholder and a mid-tier accounting firm illustrate this shared view

Stakeholders discussed the ongoing nature of training, throughout one's career, in both the technical and non-technical areas and three phases were identified; acquiring of skills, ongoing training in those skills and future skills required. Communication, team work, problem solving, self management and initiative and enterprise were critical in acquiring skills, in ongoing training and in the development of future skills as indicated in Table 3.

(Insert Table 3 here)

In the role of the working accountant teamwork, good interpersonal skills were deemed to be considered most frequently in terms of career path. Illustrative extracts from employer stakeholders re self management skills indicated that grades were not all that was required but the 'well rounded' graduate was highly sought after.

In summary, in response to research question 2, life experiences such as part time employment, sporting and extra-curricula activities particularly including leadership responsibilities. Combined with study these were most desirable traits in recruits. In the workplace the ability to manage oneself in a team environment is important to employers.

**4.3** RQ3: How are stakeholders defining technical skills?

Technical skills, in order of frequency, were basic practical accounting skills, IT and accounting software skills and industry specific skills and awareness. Beneath these general areas were, as with the non-technical, specific skills such as, in order of frequency, tax, debits and credits, auditing and understanding financial reports and preparing financial statements. The frequencies for all technical skills are given below in table 4.

(Insert Table 4 here)

Employers generally did not expect competence in specialist areas such as tax or audit, and were willing to provide necessary training in such specialist areas. What they did want was basic competence and understanding around debits and credits and preparation and analysis

of financial statements, namely basic financial literacy. As mentioned in the non-technical skills area of technological competence, within the technical skills general IT competence and excel were the areas most discussed. Good computing skills, understanding of IT infrastructure and computer based programs such as work, excel and MYOB were discussed. In terms of industry specific skills comments generally centred around an understanding of corporate law, compliance and global standards with environmental accounting, finance and maths skills, governance and tax also being mentioned.

When breaking down the stakeholders into Big 4, mid tier, professional associations, corporations and not for profits, the main distinguishing feature was that basic practical accounting skills were mentioned by all except for not-for-profits; basic accounting skills and audit mentioned most frequently by the Big 4 with understanding financial statements most frequently by corporations which could suggest a preparer of financial information versus a user focus.

 In summary in response to research question three, stakeholders were very specific about the basic practical accounting and IT and accounting software skills required. While industry specific skills were mentioned there was less emphasis placed on these.

**RQ4**: Are stakeholders satisfied that accounting graduates are presenting with the required skills and attributes for the profession?

In addition stakeholders were asked to comment on the importance and level of development of each of the skills. Frequencies of comments on the evaluation of non technical skills are presented in Table 5.

<div align="center">(Insert Table 5 here)</div>

Across the board communication, team work, and self management were deemed to be both the most desirable skills. However there were more negative than positive comments about

the level of communication and presentation skills possessed by graduates. In addition, problem solving skills while required by stakeholders also attracted more negative than positive comments. Planning and organising skills were also viewed as not being developed sufficiently. Most important was the finding in relation to Basic Accounting skills with 68% of stakeholders comments indicating a negative view of the level of these skills being developed in accounting graduates.

In summary in response to research question 4 stakeholders perceive that the non-technical skills of communication and problem solving are the most inadequate as are the basic technical accounting skills. These deficiencies pose the greatest limitations on graduates in both their skill sets and their career development.

**RQ5:** Whose responsibility do stakeholders perceive it is to assist accounting graduates to acquire the necessary technical and non-technical skills?

When different stakeholders were asked whose responsibility it was to nurture the acquisition of skills, the two key groups responsible were deemed to be the employers and the universities, with much almost double considering technical skills the responsibility of universities with almost a third more considering non-technical skills the responsibility of universities as well as represented in Table 6.

(Insert Table 6 here)

Audit was one area of technical skills where there was limited expectation by employers that universities would provide anything more than basic level skill. It was not a discriminator in recruitment and seen to be an area employers were prepared to take on in the training field. Most had their own audit programs which they introduced graduates to at induction.

While employers wanted basic debits and credits knowledge they commented frequently that their expectations were not fully met. Some commented that they needed to spend time in induction and training going through the most basic level of debits and credits training.

Employers were concerned they had to teach graduates areas they felt the universities should have adequately covered.

Tax was another area where the expectation of employers of universities was that basic knowledge should be provided and they would manage the specialist knowledge. Financial reporting was another area where the expectation of employers of universities was that basic knowledge should be provided with also an ability to do certain basic data entry and reports with some level of financial literacy.  Employers generally did not require advanced levels of accounting knowledge as they provided extensive training through their graduate or on-going training programs.  They did however require the ability to keep up with rapid change in content and complex processes of accounting.

In summary in response to research question five comments indicate a strong need for understanding of basic skills but a willingness by employers to train graduates in specialist skill areas. They expected rudimentary knowledge of skill areas and in fact were quite modest in their requirements. What they did expect however was a keen willingness and capacity to learn new skills based on a solid framework of theoretical understanding gained at university.

**5.**

## 5.1    Limitations

Although we have interviewed a very wide cross-section of employers (in terms of industry, size, and geographical diversity), like most interview based studies our sample size is small. In addition, the analysis of the interviews is subject to the researchers' subjective interpretations.  We have sought to limit this bias by systematically analysing the interview transcripts with NVIVO.

5.2    Directions for Future Research

The study's findings can be used as a foundation for future research that could survey a larger sample of employers and academics.

**6.    Conclusion**

The increasing demands in the current regulatory, legal and global business environment have stimulated academics to recommend the development of an increasing diverse set of skills for accounting graduates with consequent implications for accounting programs. This study has described how employers and practitioners understand the concept of graduate skills and articulate those technical and non technical skills required for accounting graduates.

Despite the assumption of a shared meaning both within and between stakeholder groups this study highlights the fact that there is indeed a great deal of variation in the views of those charged with developing graduate attributes and skills as outcomes of accounting programs and those employers and practitioners who employ accounting graduates in terms of the skills set required. "Bringing the variation in understanding of graduate attribute outcomes into the open, where they can be debated and discussed, would seem to be an essential element of the process of agreeing on these attributes and a vital precursor to successful curriculum reform to facilitate the achievement of such outcomes" (Barrie, 2006; p239).

Overall the analysis of interview transcripts gave strong messages about the importance of non-technical skills in areas of recruitment, training and ongoing workplace skills. Communication, in all its forms, coupled with team work, self management and interpersonal skills were highly sought after in graduates and also made a difference in advancement within the workplace. These skills were often used as discriminators in recruitment when faced with the choice of applicants of roughly equal academic merit. Employers chose the student who displayed strengths in these non-technical areas. Employers seemed generally to have low expectations in the area of technical skills. The looked for general understanding and competence and a willingness and a capacity to learn, but were content to undertake much of the technical training themselves. The discussion about whose role it was to develop both technical and non-technical skills was most clearly stated as that of the universities.

The results of this study have important implications for students, academics and recruiters of accounting graduates. Students may use this information to tailor their study programs to

meet the expectations of employers in the job market.  Employers will benefit as the findings

may assist to forge relationships with universites to develop curricula that are more in line

with their expectations.  Academics may use this information to identify differences in terms

of the experience being provided and the employee requirements.

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**TABLES**

| Non Technical Skills | Comments |
|---|---|
| **Communication, presentation** | |
| * Verbal skills, speaking, listening, negotiation and feedback | 17 |
| *  Written communication, reports | 14 |
| **Teamwork, good interpersonal skills, fit organisation ethos** | |
| * Client relationship, focus, rapport, trust | 16 |
| * Leadership | 15 |
| * Managerial skills | 16 |
| **Self Management** | |
| * Ambition | 8 |
| * Community involvement, social responsibility | 6 |
| * Hard working, dedicated | 12 |
| * Holistic, flexible, able to deal with complexity, uncertainty, pressure | 11 |
| * Intellectual capacity | 2 |
| * Self presentation, professional presence, behaviour | 8 |
| * Well rounded, mature, confident persons | 20 |
| * Work independently, manage time | 13 |
| **Initiative and enterprise** | |
| * Business acumen, knowledge, planning, building | 17 |
| * Vision, imagination, seeing the big picture, adding value | 7 |
| * Ethics, discretionary behaviour | 3 |
| **Problem Solving** | |
| * Applying theory into practice | 11 |
| * Critical analysis, thinking skills | 11 |
| Technological Competence | 12 |
| **Planning and Organising** | 11 |
| * Time, project management skills | 2 |

Table 1: Non-technical skills as listed by stakeholders

| | Recruits | Recruitment processes | Recruitment challenges with changing market, organisation structures |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communication, presentation | 5 | 16 | 3 |
| Initiative and enterprise | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| Planning and organising | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Problem solving | 1 | 7 | 1 |
| Self management | 9 | 17 | 6 |
| Teamwork, good interpersonal skills, fit organisation ethos | 8 | 12 | 4 |
| Technological competence | 1 | 0 | 2 |

Table 2:  The role of non technical skills in recruitment

| | Acquiring skills | Ongoing  training | Future skills |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communication, presentation | 21 | 12 | 9 |
| Initiative and enterprise | 14 | 5 | 9 |
| Planning and organising | 7 | 1 | 0 |
| Problem solving | 18 | 6 | 4 |
| Self management | 14 | 11 | 2 |
| Teamwork, good interpersonal skills, fit organisation ethos | 18 | 15 | 12 |
| Technological competence | 8 | 2 | 4 |

Table 3:  The place of non technical skills in training

| Basic Skills | No. of documents |
|---|---|
| Basic, practical accounting skills | 29 |
| Accounts payable | 3 |
| Audit | 10 |
| Consolidations, variance analysis | 2 |
| Entries, debits and credits | 8 |
| R&D incentives | 0 |
| Reconciliations | 4 |
| Retrieving information from the system | 1 |
| Superannuation | 4 |
| Tax | 9 |
| Transactional activity | 2 |
| Trusts and companies | 1 |
| Understanding financial reports, preparing financial statements | 8 |
| **IT software skills** | |
| Ability to use Excel, MYOB and related accounting software programs | 30 |
| Excel | 6 |

Table 4: Defining Technical skills

| Non-technical Skills | Positive | Negative | Neutral |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communication, Presentation skills | 9 | 12 | 1 |
| Teamwork, good interpersonal skills, fit organisation ethos | 10 | 6 | 0 |
| Self Management Skills | 12 | 5 | 0 |
| Initiative and Enterprise | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Problem Solving | 4 | 6 | |
| Technological Competence | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Planning and Organising | 1 | 3 | |
| **Technical Skills** | | | |
| Basic Accounting Skills | 6 | 13 | |
| IT software skills | 3 | 1 | |

Table 5: Stakeholders Views on the Level of Skills Developed in Accounting Graduate

| | Technical skills | Non-technical skills |
|---|---|---|
| Employer's role | 17 | 23 |
| Graduate aptitude, responsibility | 2 | 7 |
| Partnership | 3 | 7 |
| TAFE model builds skills | 1 | 0 |
| University's role | 32 | 34 |

Table 6: Responsibility for developing skills in accounting graduates