Management Consulting Journal
Submission Template

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Title: This should be no longer than 15 words, and give a good idea of the subject.

Graduate employability: An update on behaviours prized by employers for entry level consulting roles

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Abstract (Required): Up to 150 words

Many universities and students want to know what are the skills and behaviours needed by employers for entry level consulting jobs? To answer this question, two job analyses were completed in a multinational management consultancy and in a boutique assessment firm previously published (Biggs, 2010). This research highlighted eight competencies that could be developed by students making them more employable. Many students have used this competency framework within universities and on a variety of degrees. There was a call by others to ensure that the research completed in Biggs (2010) still had currency today and that the eight consultancy competency framework was still valid. This paper sets out an update to that original research demonstrating that the framework is still relevant today through exploring entry level consultants in a boutique psychometrics firm.

Theoretical background

Higher Education has gone through a massive change over the last few decades. There are more young people than ever going to university and as such it is important that when they leave, they have employable skills and behaviours (Tomlinson, 2012). Most reputable books or professional guidance on employability will outline the need for consulting skills (Biggs, 2017; BPS, 2021; Hind & Moss, 2011). Skills, nonetheless, can be taught. Developing behaviour is arguably more difficult (Biggs 2018). That is not to say that behaviour cannot be developed. However, there needs to be a systematic method employed. One of the first issues in this process is having a clear competency framework on which the behaviour can be mapped (Bowler & Woehr, 2006).

The original eight consultancy competency framework was developed by Biggs (2010) primarily to create a framework that students could map their behaviours against. While there are other similar frameworks, such as the ICMCI framework forth Certified Management Consultant qualification. The eight consultancy competency framework was designed to be used by graduates to get into consultancy or managerial roles. This framework was developed from two job analyses and a meta-analysis of the literature (Woehr and Arthur, 2003). One of the organisations was an international management consulting firm that at the time had employed around 17,000 consultants. The other organisation was a boutique firm in the assessment and development arena. Both firms have been bought out since this research was done but the results from the job analysis went into the competency framework. Such competency frameworks are considered to be essential for improving graduate employability especially if they are focused towards a specific industry such as consulting (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Design/Methodology/Approach/Intervention

Four entry level participants were obtained from a boutique consultancy firm. The firm specialised in psychometric assessment, recruitment, and development. The individuals had worked in the organisation at an entry level grade. A job incumbent questionnaire was used to guide the interviews. The design was qualitative and used framework analysis common in research of this nature (Gale, et al. 2013). The eight consultancy competency framework was used as a way of mapping data on to it and using the interview transcripts to confirm the data. The interviews took place within the boutique firm and their purpose was clearly explained ensuring voluntary consent. The interviews were then written up and a framework applied. Points that were outside of the framework were noted and will be discussed in this paper.

Results obtained

The results obtained from the four participants supported the eight consultancy competence framework (see Table A). This broadly demonstrates that this framework is still relevant today. A clear differentiation could be seen in the data between behaviours and skills. Both are essential to master to ensure job success (Biggs, 2010). Basically, you had to be a good all rounder as this excerpt from Pat describes:

> *You have to be very customer focused and have a good communication style, as well as being very process oriented and prudent and organized for admin. And on the other hand, you have to be very, very creative and think outside the box. But at the same time organized and be attentive to the details with marketing and with consultancy*

This one quote demonstrates communication, influencing others, organising, problem solving and leadership. Team working was less common although still considered essential for the role as James states here:

> *the consultants collaborate with one another; yet, you have the sole responsibility for the majority of the projects that you are doing*

James did then say that in larger consultancies this may not necessarily be the case with team working being used more frequent in larger projects. While all competencies were discussed in the interviews, tolerance for stress/uncertainty was mentioned the least. This was possibly due to the consultants not being involved in business development winning new contracts like their senior counterparts. Nevertheless, it was still mentioned especially when there was frustration around a client. In this regard, there still needed to be some tolerance for uncertainty for the entry level consultants as shown in our 2010 research.

Table A: The Eight Consultancy Competency Framework (Biggs, 2010)

Communication: The extent to which an individual conveys oral and written information and responds to questions and challenges
Influencing others: The extent to which an individual persuades others to do something or adopt a point of view in order to produce desired results and takes action in which the dominant influence is one's own convictions rather than the influence of others' opinions
Organising and planning: The extent to which an individual systematically arranges his/her own work and resources as well as that of others for efficient task accomplishment; and the extent to which an individual anticipates and prepares for the future
Problem solving: The extent to which an individual gathers information; understands relevant technical and professional information; effectively analyses data and information; generates viable options, ideas, and solutions; selects supportable courses of action for problems and situations; uses available resources in new ways; and generates and recognises imaginative solutions
Teamwork and consideration of others: The extent to which an individual considers the needs of others, participates as a member of a group and is aware of the impact and implications of decisions relevant to others
Leadership: The extent to which an individual takes on the responsibility for providing focus to a team and develops members of that team
Drive: The extent which an individual originates and maintains a high activity level, sets high performance standards and persists in their achievement, and expresses the desire to advance
Tolerance for stress/uncertainty: The extent to which an individual maintains effectiveness in diverse situations under varying degrees of pressure, opposition, and disappointment

Limitations
There are limitations to the study. Firstly, only one boutique firm was used for the analysis and there were only 4 entry level consultants interviewed for the job analysis.

Research/Practical Implications
The practical implication for our study was that it supported the Biggs (2010) eight consultancy competency framework to improve graduate employability.

Originality/Value
This study explores the employability of graduates focusing on the behaviours required by employers for entry level consulting roles.

Intended audience
Both academics and practitioners should be interested in our study. Academics as they have a duty to ensure that their programmes produce employable graduates. Practitioners as they can use the framework in their own development for consultancy roles.

Keywords
consulting, graduate employability, competency framework

Article Text Ends

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