



Career Identity as the Missing Link in Employability

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Abstract

In the modern world employment landscape, employability is often linked with certifications, skills and professional networking etc. However, the key indicator which has a significant impact on employability is often overlooked-which is career identity. In this article we explore how the absence of a clear professional concept have adverse impact on creating gap between education-to-employment among students. To address these challenges, the article suggests a holistic educational approach which integrates reflective learning, mentorships, internships etc.

Keywords: Career Identity, Employability, Career development, Professional Identity, Reflective learning, Higher education.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the discussion about employability has been a widely discussed topic which is more focused on skills, certifications and human connection. However, these components play an important role but there is one dimension which is heavily ignored but has equally of importance- career identity. In today's world where students have access to knowledge, they have a degree, access to online learning and professional networks and are more qualified than ever. Yet, they struggle to find a proper suitable job for themselves. This raises a very important question: Is this gap arises because there is a lack of skills or is it about something deeper?

The concept of career identity defines an individual's understanding of who you are, their interests, strengths and weaknesses and most importantly their long-term professional goals. This serves as a midway which guides them for career choices and adaptability in a dynamic job market. Without this clarity, even the most skilled persons with well-connected professional networks may fail to place themselves in a professional landscape (Savickas,2013).



The Problem: Education Without Self-Concept

In the context of the modern education system, it heavily relies on external forces such as grades, summer, internships, exams and certifications, whereas they often neglect students' internal development. Additionally, these students are trained to achieve academic benchmarks but they are rarely encouraged to work on their own personal goals or professional directions. As a result, students frequently choose careers which are on market trend or under peer pressure, they don't feel confident in professional environment and experience frequent career shifting and dissatisfactions. This leads to creation of which can be termed as an "identity gap". A gap where students possess degrees, but they lack a clear sense of professional self (Brown et al., 2003).

Why Career Identity Matters

Career identity plays a crucial role in shaping employability outcomes. It influences how individuals present themselves, make decisions, and respond to opportunities. According to career construction theory, individuals who actively shape their career identity are more adaptable and resilient in uncertain job markets (Savickas, 2013).

Career identity is not a just a conceptual framework, it plays a very crucial role in shaping the opportunities of employment. It influences how a person presents themselves in the job market, making professional decisions and responding to opportunities. According to career construction theory given by Savickas (2013), he stated that individuals who actively shape their career identity are more adaptable and resilient towards uncertainty in the job markets. When students have a strong sense of career identity, they tend to; They take more informed and confident career choices, they align their skills with the right opportunities and demonstrate professional directions to employers. On the other hand, a lack of career identity often leads to confusion, lack of confidence and poor job fit (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Challenges in Developing Career Identity

There are numerous number of social and educational factors contribute to the lack of career identity among students. The current education system mainly focuses on academic performance and follows a fixed curriculum, leaving little scope for self-discovery. Many institutions also lack proper career counselling, making it difficult for students to understand their interests and strengths. In addition,



family expectations, peer influence, and changing job market trends often affect career choices. The large number of career options and constant comparison on social media further create confusion and unrealistic expectations. As a result, many students struggle to develop a clear professional identity.

What Can Be Done?

To reduce this gap, educational institutions should adopt a more student-centred approach. Along with teaching academic knowledge, they should help students understand their interests, strengths, and career goals. Reflective learning activities, regular career counselling, internships, and project-based learning can help students gain practical experience and make informed career decisions. Encouraging students to build personal portfolios can also help them present their skills and achievements with confidence.

Policy Implications

Career identity development should become an important part of higher education. Institutions should include career development activities in the curriculum, while employers should value clarity of career goals along with technical skills. Policymakers should also strengthen career guidance services in educational institutions. These measures can improve career readiness, increase job satisfaction, reduce employee turnover, and create a more skilled workforce (OECD, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020).



Conclusion

Bridging the education-to-employment gap requires moving beyond skills and qualifications to focus on career identity. While technical skills and professional networks are important, they alone do not ensure employability. A clear career identity helps students make informed decisions, adapt to changing job markets, and pursue meaningful careers. Therefore, educational institutions and policymakers should promote career identity development alongside skill-building to prepare students for long-term professional success.

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