

School of Management

**Employer Expectations for Business Graduate
Communication and Thinking: An Investigation
Conducted in Singapore and Perth**

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This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Curtin University of Technology

December, 2000

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with a great deal of pleasure that this research draws to a close. I would like to share the credit with, and express my appreciation to, the following individuals.

To Laurence Dickie, Lawson Savery, Michael Wood, Malcolm Innes-Brown and John Milton-Smith who have good-naturedly guided me through this study with both academic and personal support. Lawson has taken an interest in my education since my undergraduate days and he continually provided advice and encouragement, as well as chairing my PhD research committee. Special thanks to Laurie, for being a model of what an educator and scholar should be, and for providing valuable insight at critical points in this study.

To David and Aimee Forde for accepting the impositions caused by Dad's study.

Most importantly, to Grace Forde for providing the motivation to keep going and encouragement to succeed.

ABSTRACT

In Australia, the employment destinations of new graduates are surveyed annually and descriptions of successful employment have become an indicator of quality within the higher education sector. The expectations that employers hold for graduate generic skills are of interest, therefore, to graduates and the institutions they attended. Communication and thinking are recognised widely as the most important generic skills, however the application of these skills will occur in the workplace where academic skills may not be totally appropriate. In addition, many graduates of Australian institutions; e.g., international students, are likely to be employed by foreign organisations. Therefore, not only is the workplace a very different environment to academia but graduates could be expected to satisfy the expectations of employers working in culturally different environments.

This investigation describes the expectations participating Singaporean and Perth employers held for recently graduated business graduates with particular attention given to graduate communication and thinking. The exploratory research used interviews and surveys to assemble contextual descriptions of employer expectations. The interview data was used to construct a questionnaire that was administered across a larger sample of employers to see whether the surveys corroborated the interview findings. Contextual descriptions of the communication and thinking capabilities that the Singaporean and Perth employers expected recent business graduates to possess are provided by this study. Gaps between employer expectations and perceptions of graduate ability are discussed, together with useful graduate characteristics. During data analysis five themes were noted and they have been used to propose a model of employer expectations. Finally, seven recommendations for professional practitioners have been suggested and a list of employer concerns is provided.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context of the Study

A recent review of Australian higher education noted that the 21st century will be characterised by greater international competition and recommended a number of guiding principles including “accountability expressed as quality in educational outcomes” (DEETYA 1997a:5). Most university stakeholders would agree that “some form of employment is the desired destination of the vast majority of graduates, and, stated at their simplest, the requirements of most graduate employers are that employees have relevant skills, abilities and potential” (Guthrie 1994b:5). In Australia, a quality assurance framework is used to monitor and place Australian universities accountable for their activities (DEETYA 1999:3). As part of this process, graduate employment data are collected annually using the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) (GCCA 1999) and combined with other performance indicators to describe the overall performance of Australian universities (Hand, Trembath & Elsworthy 1998). Consequently, graduate employment has become a quality measurement for universities, and the alignment of their graduates’ skills with the expectations of employers is receiving more attention (Cumplings, Ho & Bunic 1997:1) from universities.

The Australian higher education sector has expanded rapidly in recent years. In 1987, the total number of students participating in Australian higher education was 393,734, however by 1997, the number of students had increased to 658,827 at an average rate of 4.8% per annum (DEETYA 1997c:16). During this period, graduates held an employment advantage over non-graduates (Andrews & Wu 1998:27) and many of Australia’s graduates were international students. In 1997, there were over 64,000 international students contributing over A\$1.6b to the Australian economy (AIEF 1998:16) and most of these students came from Asian countries. Australia is a major international provider of education and training services, ranked 3rd behind the United States and the United Kingdom (AIEF 1998:13). Therefore, when attempting to align the expectations employers hold for graduates, Australian universities must consider that the employers may not be Australian organisations.

In the early 1990s, a number of influential government committees commented on issues surrounding the required competencies and generic skills of the Australian workforce. They produced advice for Australian government ministers culminating in the Mayer report (Mayer 1993). Cognisant of overseas developments in North America, Europe and New Zealand, the Mayer report proposed seven key competencies. Although these competencies were intended for use within the Vocational Education and Training sector (VET), they were introduced to the higher education quality debate as generic skills. Graduate generic skills, attributes and values were described as important quality outcomes (HEC 1992:20,57) for Australia's higher education sector. Government initiated quality incentives focused attention on the importance of graduate generic capabilities and stimulated research interest in the area. Studies declared that graduate communication and thinking were important generic skills; e.g., Guthrie 1994a; NBEET 1992; B/HERT 1992. However, the difficulty of describing generic skill application without reference to contextual circumstances was soon highlighted (Clanchy & Ballard 1995:157-158). Also, it was argued that graduate work was different when attending to university or employment duties (Marginson 1993a:41). Furthermore, a graduate's generic skills were continuously developing so graduates who successfully apply these skills were likely to be life-long learners (Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994:43) who recognised that employment experiences were a valuable part of that learning. Therefore, employer expectations for graduate communication and thinking would be based on a particular set of assumptions about work tasks, and these activities could be different to the work that graduates experienced in academia. In addition, generic skills will be applied within contextual circumstances, i.e., an organisational environment; therefore, situational influences will affect a graduate's ability to deliver their skills. Graduates who are not comfortable working within the organisation's environment could struggle to exceed employer expectations.

The Mayer report made mention of an eighth key competency, 'cultural understanding', and described it as part of the foundation for the competencies (Mayer 1993:8). Although Mayer decided not to pursue this competency, researchers have suggested that cultural understanding and awareness skills need to be developed (Cummings & Ho 1996:8). Given Australia's involvement in

producing Asian graduates and that those graduates have a strong propensity to seek employment with non-Australian organisations, it is appropriate to consider the expectations of Asian employers. However, research emanating from UK, USA, New Zealand and Australia could be perceived as 'western' orientated and may not correctly describe the expectations of Asian employers. Many Singaporeans choose to study in Australia (AIEF 1998:76) and Singaporean employers may have different expectations for graduates. Research has shown that countries can be differentiated by cultural dimensions (Hofstede 1982; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998). Hoecklin (1994:26) suggested that culture is about ways of doing things and that cultural values present themselves as practices. Although the business practices employers expect graduates to complete could be similar, i.e., accounting procedures, employers in different countries may accommodate cultural imperatives during the implementation of those practices. As a result, employer expectations of graduate communication and thinking may well be affected by cultural influences.

The background to the context of this study has shown that; graduate employment has become an outcome measurement of the quality of Australian universities, employers of graduates from Australian universities may not be Australian organisations, graduate work tasks could be different to the work completed in academia, contextual circumstances impact the delivery of generic skills, and employer expectations could be affected by cultural influences. The literature review in Chapter 2, considers these issues fully and describes the following themes:

- a) recognition by all stakeholders that communication and thinking skills are an important graduate capability,
- b) the necessity to refer to the context of generic skill utilisation,
- c) generic skills are applied to produce different outcomes when graduates attend to their work in the worlds of academia and business,
- d) the beneficiary of generic skills is an individual who continuously develops their capabilities through life-long learning, and
- e) academic and business situations are immersed in an environment replete with cultural values and practices, which influence the application of generic skills.

Purpose of the Study

The employer expectations sampled in this study provide the literature with contextual descriptions that focus upon the world of work and compare employer perceptions in two countries. Communication and thinking skills were chosen as the study's focus because they were identified in the literature as the most important graduate capabilities. The necessity to embed descriptions of these skills within context and the intention to obtain insight into the cultural influences on employer expectations required the study to collect detailed opinions and comments from participants. Additionally, because Singaporean employer expectations had not been described in the literature and 'western' research may not be appropriate for Singapore, exploratory descriptions were required. Although qualitative data describing employer expectations have been referred to in the literature, disclosure of the context surrounding the discussions of generic skills did not appear to have been a priority. Also, the differences in a graduate's academic and employment work, and the influence of work practices upon employer expectations, have not been adequately delineated. Therefore, descriptions of employer expectations that give further details about the context of graduate work and practice, would supplement the literature. Describing Singaporean employer expectations and comparing their expectations against Perth employers would also supplement the literature. The purpose of this study was to obtain data from Singaporean and Perth employers, and produce contextual descriptions of their expectations for a recent business graduate's communication and thinking.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to guide the research process and to propose descriptions of Singaporean and Perth employer expectations of recent business graduate communication and thinking.

In the case of Singaporean participants, and the case of Perth participants;

1. What communication capabilities did participants expect?

2. What thinking capabilities did participants expect?
3. What abilities did participants consider graduates possessed?
4. What graduate characteristics did participants consider useful?

Using the data and the answers to the research questions, themes will be identified to propose a model of employer expectations.

Significance of the Study

This study is expected to be of interest to higher education institutions, employers and educational policy-makers. University institutional researchers will be interested in the implications of employer expectations for quality and institutional performance purposes. University Business Schools will be particularly interested in the strategic implications of business graduates satisfying or exceeding Singaporean and Perth employer expectations. University academic teaching staff will be interested in employer expectations for learning experience design, assessment and professional accreditation purposes. Employers will find the descriptions provided by participating employers an interesting benchmark against their own expectations and perceptions. The proposed model of employer expectations will be particularly interesting to Human resource managers and recruiters. Educational policy-makers will find useful insights into both cultural sensitivity, and the implications for overseas students returning home as graduates who need to fulfil non-Australian employer expectations. This group of researchers, employers and educational policy-makers has been referred to as 'professional practitioners' throughout this study.

Descriptions of the communication and thinking capabilities that the employers expected recent business graduates to possess, is provided by this study. These descriptions show the expectations that were common to the Singaporean and Perth employers as well as the major differences. Gaps between employer expectations and their perceptions of graduate ability are also discussed. The employer's perceptions of some aspects of graduate performance were considered and the

usefulness of certain graduate characteristics was described. In addition, five themes were associated with employer expectations for graduates and they were used to propose a model of employer expectations. Seven recommendations have been suggested for professional practitioners and a list of employer concerns is provided.

Graduate communication within Australia and in many international business venues requires the ability to use the English language. Descriptions of the English language capabilities that employers expect graduates to possess will assist university business schools with design of student learning experiences. However, communication is more than the technicalities of language usage. Knowledge of how to communicate appropriately and effectively within the workplace is also important. Workplace simulations, case studies and business projects based on realistic situations are used in higher education to impart practicality into business studies; therefore courses in workplace communicative strategy could be usefully informed by contextual descriptions of employer expectations. Another aspect of effective communications is an awareness of the cultural implications of both the process of communicating and what is being communicated. This study provides insight into the cultural awareness that graduates were expected to demonstrate, and expectations of Asian language capabilities. The importance that employers ascribed to a graduate's understanding of their learning processes and a commitment to learn continuously, was identified. In particular, the type of learning that employers expected graduates to have acquired before their employment, and the workplace learning that graduates were expected to embrace are described. The employers provided insight into the value of discussing communication and thinking as separate and unconnected abilities. Perceptions of graduate ability to apply theory, contribute practical ideas, develop initiatives and introduce creativity, are also discussed.

The significance of this study is that the investigation's data have; produced expansive descriptions of Singaporean and Perth employer expectations for business graduate communication and thinking, provided an illustration of cultural influence upon employer expectations, and facilitated the proposal of a model of employer expectations for new employees.

Research Design

Given the purpose of this study and the research questions, an investigation was designed that included exploratory research, “the discovery of ideas and insights” and descriptive research “determining the frequency with which something occurs or the relationship between two variables” (Churchill 1995:145). The investigation collected extensive exploratory data during a series of interviews. Twelve employers participated in an interview process that resulted in written descriptions of each employer’s expectations. The initial interview was recorded on audio tape. Participants were asked to describe their expectations for graduate communication and thinking. A transcript was produced from the recording. During a second interview, the responses provided in the initial interview were discussed. Participants were encouraged to challenge, expand or amend their original responses. This meeting was also recorded. The initial and second interview transcripts were used to produce written descriptions of these employer’s expectations. These descriptions were sent to the participants for final comment. Each participant was able to comment on their own transcripts and description. They were not allowed to see data from the other participants. Finally, these textual descriptions became the interview data. Major issues that surfaced during an analysis of the interview data were used to construct a questionnaire that was administered to a larger sample of employers. The intention of the survey was to corroborate the issues that the interviewees had raised. The survey data was based upon 462 completed questionnaires. The strength of an integrated approach to the investigation was the ability to triangulate findings (Keeves 1997:283). However, the investigation was not a linear sequence of events. The data was interpreted iteratively in a process that started with the initial interviews and ended with survey and interview data combination. In the 1st phase, two interviews were used to allow participants to review and confirm their responses. A questionnaire was administered, in the 2nd phase, to corroborate interview data. The 3rd phase brought the data together to propose answers to the research questions.

In order to answer the research questions in a manner that produced contextual descriptions of employer expectations, an integrated investigation was designed that combined interview and survey research techniques. Throughout this investigation,

data confirmation and an open explanation of researcher interpretations were the guiding principles used when suggesting answers to the research questions.

Limitations of the Study

This investigation was an exploratory study based on twenty-four employer interviews and a confirmatory survey of 3,000 employers. The intention was to describe employer expectations of business graduate communication and thinking, by discovering issues and themes. The participants were not randomly selected and were not statistically representative of the population of employers in Singapore or Perth. However, the data contained responses from 475 employers in supervisory or management positions and their opinions, comments and perspectives facilitated an analysis of the expectations held by these employers.

The reader should be mindful of the following limitations.

- Interview participants were sourced from a University contact list, therefore they could be considered, because of their willingness to participate in University activities, to be interested in graduate transition from University to work. Consequently, they may hold biased opinions; e.g., they could be perceived as positively inclined towards graduates that possess business degrees.
- Employers had to be prepared to contribute a few hours of their time to this investigation. A few employers found this commitment was onerous and chose not to participate. Acceptance of this commitment could indicate a bias; e.g., because they had a particular point of view to pursue. However, the researcher's impression of participants was that they energetically contributed and were not engulfed within restrictive perspectives.
- Questionnaire respondents were members of professional organisations. Not all employers choose to be associated the professional bodies. The samples may be biased because respondents were involved in professional networks. However, this group of employers was accessible and was considered a reasonable starting point for an exploratory study.

- Expectations based on employer interview and questionnaire data may be biased because employers tend to be "focussed on those generic competencies which they see as specific and important to their enterprise rather than employment in general" (Cummings & Ho 1996:29). However, the implications of their organisational environment should be recognised.
- Researcher bias was recognised as a possible limitation on the quality of investigation data; e.g., researcher decisions made during the design and implementation of a study affect participants, data and the compilation of findings (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983). However, the heavy emphasis on confirmatory feedback in the interview process and the transparency of results interpretation was intended to expose and minimise researcher bias.
- The questionnaire was created to reflect issues arising from the interview data. The surveys were the first administration of this instrument; therefore, the items were previously untested. However, construct validity and internal consistency was indicated (see Chapter 4, page 77).
- Participants were required to have employed or managed a graduate; therefore, particular experiences with individual graduates have the potential to influence unduly employer perspectives.

Organisation of the Study

This study contains separate Chapters that describe the; literature review, research method, results, findings, and implications arising from investigation findings. Chapter 2 starts the literature review, with some background information on Australia's higher education sector and the employability of graduates. Discussion of international activity in the area of generic skills and key competencies is followed by descriptions of research into employer expectations and the implications for academic generic skills and graduate work. Consideration of cultural understanding is followed by a description of the study's theoretical framework and a summary of the relevant themes that were apparent within the literature. Chapter 3 explains the research method and starts with a description of the investigation design and research questions. An account of the administration of interviews and questionnaires is followed by an explanation of the data analysis processes. Chapter 4 has been

segregated into three sections. The Singapore and Perth interview data results are described in the first two sections and the survey data is explained in the last section. These result descriptions enabled the findings to be considered in Chapter 5. This Chapter is structured around the four research questions with the addition of a final section to consider the themes used by employers when describing their expectations. Chapter 6 proposes a model of employer expectations, suggests recommendations for practitioners, lists employer concerns and considers further research. Finally, extensive use was made of appendices so that the report's presentation remained cohesive.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Student numbers in Australian higher education have expanded rapidly in recent years. In 1988, the Minister of Education set an annual target of 125,000 graduates by the year 2001. That target was exceeded in 1995 with 141,000 completions (DEETYA 1997a:vii). The economic incentive of improved employment opportunities for graduates provides part of the reason behind increasing Australian graduations. From a conference that discussed the transition from elite to mass higher education, sponsored by the Department for Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1993, it was reported that “evidence suggests that the positive relationship between more education and better employment opportunities remains true” but it was recognised that the evidence was far from conclusive (DEET 1993b:2). However, in the Australian labour market, graduates were better off than non-graduates. In 1997, the graduate unemployment rate was 3.5% compared to a total unemployment rate of 8.7% (Andrews & Wu 1998:1). “Over the past decade higher education graduates enjoyed considerable vocational advantages over non-graduates. Employment in the traditional professional occupations of graduates grew faster than employment overall. Graduates also gained employment in those occupations that previously had not been seen as major employers of graduates” (Andrews & Wu 1998:27).

While the economic imperative is important there are other reasons for acquiring a university education. Emeritus Professor Peter Karmel, participating in the conference on transition from elite to mass higher education, pointed to the dangers of excessive expectations for the economic growth role of graduates because there were other important purposes for higher education; “the custodial role (occupying young people outside the labour market), the political role (preparing young people for active participation in their society), the cultural role (promoting national cultural identity and supporting basic levels of scholarship and research for their own sake), and the personal role (self development of the individual)” (DEET 1993b:68). Given

these weighty responsibilities, Australia needs to ensure that its higher education sector performs well. Mr Roderick West (an experienced educational administrator) was asked to review this sector and its ability to meet effectively the social, economic, scientific and cultural needs in the first two decades of the 21st century. He noted that the 21st century would be characterised by greater international competition and recommended a number of guiding principles including “accountability expressed as quality in educational outcomes” (DEETYA 1997a:5).

The call for accountability adds momentum to research into higher education performance indicators. An extensive description of ‘diversity and performance indicators’ in Australia’s higher education sector was published as early as 1993 (DEET 1993a:295-389). The GDS and Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) are examples of performance indicator data that are collected annually. In these surveys, graduates are asked about their employment destinations immediately after graduation (GCCA 1999) and their perceptions of course experiences (Johnson 1998). These data and other collections of information are being assembled to provide institutional and national indicators of the higher education sector. The Course Experience Questionnaire Analysis Model (CEQAM) is currently under development with the intent to produce performance indicators based on data from CEQ, GDS, DEETYA and Institutional databases. The model provides access to a “body of data which is collected systematically, at the national level, and has been shown to be a stable, reliable and meaningful measure of course satisfaction” (Hand, Trembath & Elsworthy 1998). Efficiency and effectiveness have been proposed as the essential pre-requisites for successful higher education institutes. “Efficiency relates to how well an activity is performed in terms of the resources used to achieve the desired results, while effectiveness relates to how well the desired results are achieved” (DEETYA 1998:21).

Most university stakeholders would agree that employability is a very desirable outcome for graduates. "Some form of employment is the desired destination of the vast majority of graduates, and, stated at their simplest, the requirements of most graduate employers are that employees have relevant skills, abilities and potential" (Guthrie 1994b:5). As a result, there is a growing trend for universities to align their graduates’ skills with the expectations of employers (Cummings, Ho & Bunic

1997:1). These expectations are relayed to universities from professional organisations, advisory councils, government departments, alumni, consultancies, joint research and research publications. In an example of a professional organisation influencing university curricula, it is the accounting profession's contention that accountancy graduates require wide ranging abilities and diverse backgrounds. They require "a capacity for inquiry, abstract logical thinking and critical analysis in addition to oral communication and interpersonal skills" (ASCPA & ICAA 1997:4).

However, it should be noted that employers of Australian graduates are not necessarily Australian. Apart from Australian graduates working overseas there is a large contingent of international students studying in Australia. Since 1987, Australian universities have become internationally focussed; "in 1987 there were 17,000 overseas students enrolled in higher education, of whom only 1,000 were fee-paying" (DEETYA 1997a:12). In 1997, higher education overseas enrolments had risen to 64,188 students and they generated A\$827m in fees and a further A\$825m was spent on goods and services (AIEF 1998:16). Asian students comprise the vast majority (87.4%) of international students studying in Australia and there has been consistent growth in the number of Singaporeans enrolled in Western Australian Universities; e.g., from 2,063 in 1994 to 2,832 in 1997 (AIEF 1998:17,76). In terms of overseas student numbers, Australia is a major international provider of education and training services. Australia (with 64,188 students) was ranked 3rd behind the United States (424,104 in 1966-97) and the United Kingdom (156,615 in 1966-97) (AIEF 1998:13). Therefore, Australian universities are graduating international students who will be intent on securing employment 'back home'. Graduates that equal or surpass employer expectations represent an important achievement for the higher education sector because they would be reflecting a strong commitment to providing "industry, governments ... and the wider community with access to advanced knowledge and skills" (DEETYA 1997a:3). Educational interest in employer expectations gathered momentum in the early 1990s when a number of influential committees produced reports for Australian government ministers.

International Activity and the Mayer Report

In December 1990, Australian Commonwealth and State Ministers of Education prepared recommendations for the fifteen to nineteen age group. Their committee (referred to as the Finn Committee) called for this age group to participate universally in education and training with nationally agreed competencies and standards (Marginson 1993b:156). In March 1992, the Carmichael Report used the 'Finn competencies' to underpin vocational and occupational competencies, although the report conceded that assessment procedures required more work (Marginson 1993b:158). The Mayer Committee developed the notion of 'key employment related competencies' based on the Finn competence areas (Marginson 1993b:161).

While these committees were bringing the ideas of competencies into the Australian education debate, international activity in the area of competencies and generic skills was already in progress. In North America, generic skills and education were related in the 1970s (Woditsch 1977 as cited in Peterson 1982:2). Ability was categorised, using fifty-two definitions, with the idea that tasks should be described in terms of their 'ability requirements' (Fleishman & Quaintance 1984:329). Ability and its generic qualities were linked at the turn of the 20th century when Spearman suggested that an ability to complete a task required intelligence and that a two-factor theory of intelligence (where 'g-factor' was common to all tasks and 's-factor' unique to each task) was appropriate (Spearman 1904:284 as cited in Keeves 1997:937). Tasks have been identified and grouped into 'core and non-core' clusters then associated across occupational families (Smith 1978:9-20). Although difficulties in defining the nature of generic skills were becoming evident (Peterson 1986:3), interest in generic skills was building. Initiatives to introduce 'necessary skills' into college programs encouraged the incorporation of generic skills into courses; e.g., George Brown College, Ontario's Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (Groves 1994; Derks 1995). In the United States of America, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) was established in 1990 by Elizabeth Dole, then secretary of the Department of Labour (Whetzel 1992:1). The commission's main task was to answer the question 'what are workplace skills'? Since then five workplace competencies and three foundation skills have been described and actively promoted (see Appendix 1). For example, the American Vice President Al Gore has endorsed the integration of these competencies and skills into the 'Skills for a New Century' (SCANS 2000).

In 1986, the British government formed the National Council of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and gave them the task of describing a framework of vocational qualifications. This NCVQ framework was to meet the needs of employment using five levels of qualification from the 'shop floor' to the professions (B/HERT 1993b:61-62). Industrialists produced a report entitled 'European approaches to Life-Long Learning' that described their definitions for training, education, operational capabilities, strategic capabilities and life-long learning (see Appendix 2) (B/HERT 1993b:5). Their views included references to competencies and skills as well as a recommendation that universities take the role of a resource rather than a facility (B/HERT 1993b:35). British research made distinctions between cross-curricular skills and transferable skills and suggested that skills should not be divorced from the cognitive or social context in which they are used (Bridges 1993:43-51). Another suggestion was to consider a distinction between 'transferable or core skills' and 'transferring skills' (Brindley, Cuthbert & O'Leary 1995:5). "Core skills may be deployed in a variety of social or cognitive domains with little or no adaptation" and "transferring skills are second order or meta-skills that enable a person to adapt to and cope with different social and cognitive domains" (Brindley, Cuthbert & O'Leary 1995:5). Also, research focusing upon graduate careers revealed the importance of self-reliance skills (Hawkins 1995:19).

In New Zealand, a competency framework that included essential and generic skills was described (NZQA 1993). Competency has been defined as "the ability to perform an activity within an occupation or function, to the standard expected" (NOOSR 1995:3). The National Training Board established "the Australian Standards Framework (ASF), that specified an eight-stage hierarchy of standard levels of skill based on units of competency" (Marginson 1993b:154). However, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) commented "ASF should not be used in relation to university courses because universities were committed to professional excellence rather than minimum standards" (Marginson 1993b:156).

At the time the Mayer Committee assembled the 'Key Competencies Report: Putting General Education to Work', there was considerable activity internationally. Consequently, similar sets of generic competencies were developed in Australia,

New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States (Cummings & Ho 1996:60). The Mayer Committee proposed “seven Key Competencies that young people need to be able to participate effectively in the emerging forms of work and work organisation, together with principles to provide for nationally-consistent assessment and reporting of achievement” (Mayer 1993:1). A three-stage process of research and consultation was used. The initial research resulted in the publication of ‘Employment-Related Key Competencies for Post Compulsory Education and Training: A Discussion Paper’ in February 1992. After further consultation and development the committee published ‘Employment-Related Key Competencies: A Proposal for Consultation’ in May 1992. Finally, the ‘Putting General Education to Work: The Key Competencies Report’ was published in April 1993 (Mayer 1993:1). The final report described seven competencies; collecting, analysing and organising information, communicating ideas and information, planning and organising activities, working with others and in teams, using mathematical ideas and techniques, solving problems, and using technology (see Appendix 3) (Mayer 1993:3). An eighth competence was noted; viz., cultural understanding. Although described as “an essential part of the knowledge, skills and understanding that forms a foundation for ... the Key Competencies”, cultural understanding needed further development “in conjunction with the Key Competencies” (Mayer 1993:1). With regard to languages other than English, the committee thought that a competency definition was not appropriate because “proficiency in a second language is not yet, and is not likely to be in the next few years, generic to all industries and occupations” (Mayer 1993:9). The committee wanted to empower people to put their general education to work. While recognising the role of flexibility and adaptability they suggested “the need for a further ingredient which fuses general education with vocational training” (Mayer 1993:2). The higher education sector was asked to acknowledge competency achievement (during university admission processes), however the Mayer Key Competencies were for the consumption of the school and vocational training sectors of Australian education (Mayer 1993:40-52).

Key Competencies within Vocational Education and Training

Mayer's Key Competencies have been researched and developed by the Australian VET sector. Within this educational sector, a key competency also means a generic skill (Moy 1999:6). Generic skills have different titles in other places. In Canada they use 'strategy for prosperity', in Denmark 'process-independent qualifications', in Germany 'key qualifications', in France 'crossing or transferable competencies', in United States 'workplace know-how' and in New Zealand 'essential skills' (Moy 1999:6). The VET sector views key competencies as "part of an international trend in which generic skills are viewed as essential for work and life" (Moy 1999:2). However, researchers in the VET sector recognise the overlapping and inter-related nature of key competencies, and that they underpin complex learning and require contextualisation (Moy 1999:2). With the support of the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training, nine Australian companies participated in a study to describe communication skills in the workplace and found that communications skills were integral to organisational operations and highly important in the workplace (TAFE NSW 1999:6). Communications in the work place were found to incorporate five of the Key Competencies and four skills; workplace writing, language and literacy skills, interpersonal skills, and customer service skills (TAFE NSW 1999:7). A review of research into the impact of generic competencies on workplace performance found that "researchers have affirmed the Key Competencies as an adequate working set of generic skills, except for the lack of resolution on the eighth key competency, cultural understanding" (Moy 1999:37). The importance of generic skills in education and training has been widely recognised in Australia. "The Mayer Key Competencies have been identified in all Training Packages and have also influenced school curricula" (McDonald et al. 2000:7).

The Importance of Communication and Thinking Skills

In the early 1990s, the 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement' allocation of the Commonwealth grant funding to Australian Universities stimulated interest in quality issues. The Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CQAHE) operated in the period 1993 to 1995 (CQAHE 1994; CQAHE 1995a; CQAHE 1995b; CQAHE 1995c). Its activities helped the sector to build new processes and effect a change of culture, however they were expensive administratively (DEETYA 1999:2). Nevertheless, a quality assurance framework has evolved, and "from 1998 onwards,

triennially-funded institutions included quality assurance and improvement plans, in the documentation required as part of the educational profiles process” (DEETYA 1999:3). Graduate generic skill acquisition is recognised as a quality indicator for higher education. Recently, the level of student satisfaction with the acquisition of generic skills improved from 84% of 1993 graduates to 87% of 1997 graduates (DEETYA 1999:12). The missions, values, quality achievements and key performance indicators are published and comparable across the sector (DEETYA 1999:24-352). Most Australian universities were found to describe similar core attributes that they hoped their graduates would possess (see Appendix 4) (DEETYA 1999:13).

Another major influence on the higher education quality debate was the Australian Higher Education Council’s ‘Achieving Quality’ report, published in 1992. It was an important report for the sector because ‘outcomes’ were injected into the quality debate. In particular, it argued that graduate “generic skills, attributes and values” were important quality outcomes of a university education (HEC 1992:20,57). Higher education was charged with the responsibility of producing graduates who demonstrated critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, problem solving, logical and independent thought, effective communication, (identifying, accessing and managing information), intellectual rigor, co-operative manner when working with others, and ethical practice (integrity and tolerance) (HEC 1992:20-22). Generic skills and a graduate’s ability to utilise them (once they enter the world of work) had been firmly placed on the higher education agenda. As a result, a substantial amount of Australian survey activity was undertaken to describe expectations of graduates.

An early study at the University of Western Australia in 1977, received responses from 224 employers about their opinions of university graduates (Anderson 1978:3). Over 25% of these employers mentioned communication skills as a ‘liked’ skill. However, these employers also indicated that graduates ‘lack communication skills’. As an example of employer concern about graduate communication skills, one employer said “graduates have very poor powers of oral and written expression” (Anderson 1978:37-39).

In 1994, Bruce Guthrie published a longitudinal study of graduate perceptions of their higher education experience. Institutions across Australia (Australian National University; Queensland University of Technology; Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology; University of Adelaide; University of Melbourne; University of New South Wales; University of Queensland; University of Sydney; University of Technology, Sydney; and University of Western Australia) facilitated telephone interviews with 328 graduates (106 from 1982, 111 from 1987 and 111 from 1992). In addition, all Australian higher education institutions were invited to participate in a mail survey. The twenty institutions that participated randomly selected 7,304 graduates for the mail survey. Completed questionnaires were received from 2,489 graduates (777 from 1982 graduates, 844 from 1987 graduates and 868 from 1992 graduates) (Guthrie 1994b:11). The 'administration – business – economics – law' discipline group indicated that their courses had developed their problem-solving skills (over 91% agreed), sharpened their analytic skills (over 94% agreed) and improved their written communications skills (over 82% agreed) (Guthrie 1994b:31). All the responses were ranked to indicate comparative agreement across six generic skills questions. It was found that 'sharpening analytic skills', 'developed problem-solving skills' and 'confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems' were most often ranked 1, 2 or 3, while, 'improved written communications skills', 'developed ability to plan own work' and 'developed team-working skills' were most often ranked 4, 5 or 6 (Guthrie 1994b:37). Therefore, while graduates considered their communications skills had improved, there appeared to be room for further improvement.

Stockwell and Associates were commissioned by the Australian Higher Education Council (HEC) to examine newspapers for skill advertisements and to obtain employer expectations for graduate skills in 1992 (NBEET 1992:iv). In the 1,412 advertisements reviewed, 4,445 skill references were collated into 45 transferable skill areas, 44 attributes and 84 areas of knowledge. Oral and written communication were ranked as the most requested skills (NBEET 1992:9). In addition, 80 employers, who collectively employed over 3,000 graduates and undergraduate trainees per year, completed a questionnaire (NBEET 1992:13). Communications skills were nominated as "the most important skills sought by employers when recruiting both new and experienced graduates"; however, these skills were

perceived to be lacking in the general population of new graduates (NBEET 1992:17-18).

In 1993, a survey of 79 Australian recruiters were asked about the 'necessity' of a new graduate's attributes and skills (Guthrie 1994a:24). The vast majority of these recruiters indicated that effective listening skills, oral and written communications, and comprehension, were necessary for all new graduates (Guthrie 1994a:42). Effective oral communication skills, comprehension, effective listening skills and 'logic and orderly thinking' were ranked 1, 2, 3 and 4, as necessary for all new graduates (Guthrie 1994a:49). Graduate deficiencies were most often declared as written communications, oral communications, public speaking, curiosity, imagination and lateral thinking, tact, diplomacy skills and negotiation skills (Guthrie 1994a:51). In this study, Australian recruiters indicated the importance of communication and thinking skills but stated that graduates needed to improve these capabilities.

Associate Professor Ken Sinclair, a highly respected researcher in the area of employer expectations, working with the Business/Higher Education Round Table (an organisation of Australian Chief Executive Officers and University Vice-Chancellors) in response to an initial report 'Aiming Higher' that described the key concerns of business leaders and university vice-chancellors, produced a series of commissioned studies concerning graduates (B/HERT 1991). In the first study, 28 key education and business leaders were interviewed and found to hold fairly uniform views on education. Amongst the objectives they held for tertiary education was for "a broad education which will ensure that graduates – regardless of the courses undertaken – have high-order skills in the areas of oral and written communications, have well-developed interpersonal skills, are numerically and economically literate, and have a grounding in the study of Asian cultures and values" (B/HERT 1992:3-4). This study also surveyed 122 university coordinating or lecturing staff and 147 recruitment or supervision officers from major businesses. When these respondents ranked the importance of education objectives, it was discovered that both the 'business' and 'university' respondent groups ranked learning thinking/decision-making skills as 1 and learning communication skills as 2 (B/HERT 1992:26). However, when it came to the emphasis that should be given to

graduate characteristics there was a marked difference in the rankings. The business group ranked communication skills, capacity to learn new skills and procedures, and capacity for cooperation and teamwork, as 1, 2 and 3; whereas, the university group ranked these characteristics as 7, 5 and 8. The university group ranked theoretical knowledge in professional field, capability to use computer technology and capacity to make decisions and solve problems, as 1, 2 and 3. In contrast, the business group ranked these characteristics as 7, 8 and 4 (B/HERT 1992:28). This finding indicated that academics were not prepared to relegate pursuit of knowledge below generic skills and established the different work expectations that business and academic groups held for graduates. Respondents were also asked for an assessment of the current standards reached by graduates. They judged general business knowledge, understanding business ethics and communications skills as having the lowest standards. The business group considered that 46.8% of graduates were poor or very poor at communications skills compared with only 24% indicated by the university group (B/HERT 1992:31-32). Although amongst key leaders, academics and business recruitment/supervisory officers there was general agreement about educational directions, there were differences of opinion about emphasis and the graduate capacity considered most important (i.e., communication skills) was judged, especially by the business group, to be poor.

The next study, in 1993, obtained the opinions of 535 business students. These students also ranked the objective of learning thinking/decision-making skills and learning communication skills as 1 and 2 (B/HERT 1993a:6-7). They were asked about the emphasis placed upon learning activities at university. Their responses indicated the importance of “practical experiences of a professional nature as a component of their professional studies” (B/HERT 1993a:12). For these respondents, there was too little emphasis for on-the-job work experience, practical studies and career choices. Also, only a third of these students considered that their communication skills were ‘very good or good’ (B/HERT 1993a:15). Students felt that the most desirable assistance they could be given was ‘work experience opportunities’ (B/HERT 1993a:16). These business students indicated that a top priority was required for “the development of general skills in communicating, making decisions and learning to cooperate and work in teams” (B/HERT 1993a:23). Therefore, business students felt pragmatic emphases were important, and that

communication and thinking skills should receive more attention within their programs.

The last study in the Sinclair series was published in 1995. It focused upon graduate recruitment and career progression during the first ten years of work. Questionnaires were completed by 261 working graduates in eleven major Australian companies and by 16 human resource (HR) managers from six major companies. In addition, 9 of the HR managers were interviewed (B/HERT 1995:2-4). The working graduates felt that for current success 'high standards for achievement', 'communication skills' and 'thinking and decision-making skills' were ranked 1, 2 and 3. For future success they indicated that 'communication skills', 'coping with change' and 'thinking and decision-making skills' were 1, 2 and 3. The HR managers ranked 'communication skills', 'coping with change' and 'motivation' as 1, 2 and 3 in the first ten years of employment. 'Communication skills', 'thinking and decision-making skills' and 'coping with change' were 1, 2 and 3 during the next ten years (B/HERT 1995:6-7). In addition, a question on ranking 'capability importance' to achieve the most senior position in a company resulted in 'communication skills' being ranked 1 and 'thinking and decision-making skills' ranked 4 (B/HERT 1995:9). The working graduates also felt that the most important objectives for universities were learning thinking and decision-making skills (ranked 1) and learning communications skills (ranked 2) (B/HERT 1995:22). These working graduates and HR managers had reiterated the importance of communication and thinking skills. Focusing upon a group of Australian companies, this study found that the "importance of communication and thinking skills in the workplace and particularly in managers, and the importance of finding ways by which these qualities and skills can be nurtured and developed, is of general significance to businesses large and small" (B/HERT 1995:41).

In 1995, 2,552 questionnaires were mailed to all final year honours and postgraduate students (masters and doctoral students were excluded) from the University of Western Australia. These students were asked about the development of generic skills within their courses and 828 of them returned completed questionnaires (Paton 1996:4). The responses indicated that "students do not feel that their courses are

satisfactorily developing most generic skills” even though these skills were considered “to be very important” by respondents (Paton 1996:7-10).

In 1996, 10 industry associations and 17 employers in Western Australia were telephone surveyed. Although these employers were not familiar with the Mayer key competencies, they had developed their own generic requirements to use in job descriptions and to assist selection processes (Cummings & Ho 1996:4). However, a study of Western Australian small business owners found that the right attitude, an understanding of the importance of making a profit, and people skills, were more important than the Mayer Key competencies (Goddard & Ferguson 1996, as cited in Cummings & Ho 1996:56).

Also in 1996, the views of VET and university staff were described (Golding, Marginson & Pascoe 1966). Staff (66 from the VET sector and 22 from universities) provided comment on the transferability of generic skills and the integration of these skills into courses. Most VET respondents (62%) felt that skills were transferable between VET institutions and university. Unfortunately, university academics were less persuaded; only 14% agreed. However, there was general agreement that generic skills are best learned when integrated into programs; i.e., embedded with a context (Golding, Marginson & Pascoe 1966:95:99).

Each year, the graduating cohorts from Australian universities are asked to describe the improvement in their generic skills that resulted from their course experiences (Johnson, Ainley & Long 1996). This data is incorporated into the CEQAM providing a longitudinal description of generic skills that could be used to compare the outcome of academic cohorts across the higher education sector.

In 2000, ACNielsen Research Services published their report into employer satisfaction with graduate skills. This study was commissioned under the ‘evaluations and investigations programme’ in the Higher Education Division of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA 2000). In the first stage of their study, twelve focus groups and six interviews with representatives of Australian professional associations were held. Most of the focus groups were held in Sydney and Melbourne. They included representation from large (three), medium

(three), and small business (two), as well as one mixed group of higher education graduates and one mixed group of VET graduates. In Canberra, a focus group was held with government human resource managers/graduate recruiters and the final group comprised higher education graduates working for the Australian government. While recognising that larger organisations were able to allocate more resources to recruitment and, therefore, were likely to be more satisfied than smaller companies, and that there was an apparent over supply of graduates, recruiters indicated they were satisfied with the skills of graduates. Any dissatisfaction “probably lies in the area of written communications, because the majority of students are not taught to write in a manner appropriate to business communications” (DETYA 2000:9). ACNielsen Research Services also administered a survey to 1,105 employers. Unfortunately, little differentiation was displayed in the response to the importance of skills and competencies; “there are virtually none that they (respondents) do not consider important” (DETYA 2000:15). This may have resulted from questionnaire items that were generalised. Given a list of generic skills it is likely that employers will indicate all are important. This appears to have been the case in this study. Bearing in mind that respondents indicated all skills were important, ‘oral business communication skills’ was rated of highest importance while also rated as one of the lowest applicant capabilities (DETYA 2000:36). In addition, the ‘capacity for independent and critical thinking’ was “of great importance to employers, and on average applicants were not particularly impressive” (DETYA 2000:37). Employer perception of skill deficiencies included “a lack of communication and interpersonal skills and a lack of understanding of business practice” (DETYA 2000:41). However, ‘business/administration/economics’ graduates were amongst the most highly rated graduates (DETYA 2000:ix). This survey of employers indicated their satisfaction with graduates’ generic skills and once again, the importance of communication and thinking skills was noted.

A study of workforce trends to the year 2005 (DEET 1995), indicated that there could be an increase in higher education graduates and that many will be employed outside the professions. An analysis of the characteristics and performance of higher education institutes pointed to this trend then commented that “higher education institutions may need to provide a wider range of vocational or generic skills to their students, as well as the core discipline knowledge and growth (DEETYA 1998:6).

Apparently, considerations about graduate generic skills have attracted the attention of workforce policy and planning strategists.

It is also worth noting that assessing student ability in critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal understandings and written communication, is the subject of on-going research. In 2000, a large sample of Australian students will sit the Graduate Skills Assessment Test (ACER 2000). This instrument is being implemented with the intention to provide nation-wide data on generic skill ability of graduates.

Although communication and thinking skills were repeatedly identified as important by these studies, there was a tension surfacing between the different expectations for graduate work while at university and when employed, and how generic skills can successfully traverse this transition.

Academic Generic Skills

With its roots in the natural sciences, the word generic was used to refer to a general category, class or genus; however, generic could mean universal, essential, common or to separate the particular (Marginson 1993a:19). Oates (1992 as cited in Brindley, Cuthbert & O'Leary 1995:4) referred to Piaget's suggestion that "every situation is new but some require more adaptation and learning than others", to propose a model of skills as an interaction between "an individual's existing skill strategies and the situation being addressed". The application of generic skills, therefore, will be impacted by contingency and circumstance; i.e., peer relationships, opportunity, structural restriction, and so on. This contingent aspect of generic skills undermines the apparent precision of what constitutes competency. "There is a massive mismatch between the appealing language of precision that surrounds competency or performance based programs and the imprecise, approximate and often arbitrary character of testing when applied to human capabilities" (Norris 1991:336 as cited in Marginson 1993b:163). Clanchy and Ballard ([, 1995 #480]) commented on the confused and sometimes interchangeable use of words like attributes, characteristics, competencies, generic competencies and skills. They argued that it was not appropriate to talk of individuals possessing 'imagination or creativity' as a

generalised or context-free attribute; instead reference should be made to individuals displaying 'imagination or creativity' within particular "contexts of behaviour from which there is no necessary flow-over or transfer to other contexts of behaviour" (Clanchy & Ballard 1995:157-158). They also challenged the assumption that universities can be held responsible for the development of personal characteristics and values (Clanchy & Ballard 1995:160). This responsibility is the apparent consequence of a strategy that holds universities accountable, via quality outcomes, for graduate 'generic skills, attributes and values' (HEC 1992:20,57).

While being mindful of these misgivings, Clanchy and Ballard felt that university education could be characterised by three distinctive generic skills; thinking, research and communication. Thinking and reasoning was to be acquired within a disciplinary context. Research included methods of enquiry and information management, using identification, selection and evaluation - framed by the purpose the researcher brought to the task. Communication, both oral and written, included the selection of an appropriate medium as well as knowledge of, and the capacity to use, the selected medium (Clanchy & Ballard 1995:160-163). These references to academic generic skills bring into focus the type of work expected of university students. Their work is embedded within disciplinary practices, based upon knowledge and a critical didactic that challenges current perceptions. Although university business schools have a strong vocational and applied outlook they require students to produce assessable outputs in formats that would not normally be produced when employed; e.g., formal examination and academic papers. Therefore, the emphasis placed on generic skills at university should not be assumed to be totally appropriate within the work place.

Graduate Work

Universities and businesses usually have very different agendas. As Marginson (1993a:27) put it, "to assume unity of purpose and to obscure the specific nature of each site is to make the negotiation of effective links more difficult". Even though words like 'communications skills' are used to describe academic or employment work, they are perceived differently in each place. Academics concentrate on the work necessary to achieve excellent results in higher education; they commence with the objective that students must communicate successfully at university. Although

surveys have found that academia and business value graduates with generic communication and thinking skills, the perspectives are different (Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994:39). It is necessary, therefore, to consider graduate transition to the skills required in the world of work. "Employers can minimise these problems by interpreting generic skills in the context of the particular job context and job requirements, including the knowledge requirements. By understanding the distinctiveness of both academic skills and knowledges, and work-related skills and knowledge requirements, it becomes possible to plot the transition and maximise transferability" (Marginson 1993a:41). Employers do use generic skill performance standards when describing jobs and selecting staff (Cummings & Ho 1996:60). However, the assumption that generic skills are transferable from higher education to the world of work (HEC 1992:20) requires a shared understanding of differences in definitions of 'skill' as used in each environment.

While terms like 'generic skills' suggest that ability can be adapted to situational circumstances, the skill descriptions used to accumulate generic skills data are often generalised and vague. In addition, these descriptions usually are assembled within academia and applied to business environments, where a different set of perceptions could mask areas of disagreement; for example, business may agree that 'clear writing' is a required communication skill, but the perceptions of what constitutes 'clear writing' could be dramatically different in both places. When used in the work place, the term thinking skill could refer to an individual, a group of employees or an organisation. Dr Robert J. Sternberg (Professor of Psychology and education at Yale University) argued that an individual's life is dependent on not only on *how well they think* but also on *how they think*. "People think in different ways ... as a result misunderstanding can develop – between spouses, parents and children, teachers and students, and bosses and employees" (Sternberg 1997:18). An individual's way of thinking can be described using a framework of thinking styles; i.e., functions, forms, levels, scope and leanings (Sternberg 1997:19-26). However, Sternberg pointed out that thinking styles: varied across tasks and situations, they were socialised, and those that were valued in one place may not be valued in another (Sternberg 1997:79-98). Therefore, an individual's ability to successfully make decisions and suggest alternatives that result from applying their thinking style within a particular employment situation will be influenced by their working environment. These

environments are typically complex and messy because participants are “not confronted with problems that are independent of each other, but dynamic situations that consist of complex systems of changing problems that interact with each other” (Ackoff 1979:99). In these circumstances individuals are encouraged to contribute towards group activities in an attempt to realise the synergistic benefits of the organisation (Moss Kanter 1997:139-150). However, at the organisational level, single groups of like-minded people do not usually make large decisions; these decisions result from extended negotiations between representatives of different opinions (de Neufville & Keeney 1972). The organisational processes that encourage thinking and consequently learning are considered important because the quality of learning as individuals, managers and organisations will be a critical factor for the success of national and international business enterprises (Lessem 1991:x).

Graduate transition from higher education to employment draws attention to the need for continuing development of generic skills and that this capability is a quality or characteristic possessed by an individual. Candy, Crebert and O’Leary (1994:43) studied the concept of life-long learning and proposed a description of the characteristics that a life-long learner would display. They included an inquiring mind, helicopter vision, information literacy, a sense of personal agency, and a repertoire of learning skills (see Appendix 5). Associating generic skills with individuality draws attention back to Mayer’s eighth competency – cultural understanding.

Cultural Understanding

Karmel’s (DEET 1993b:68) cultural role for higher education, Sinclair’s (B/HERT 1992:3-4) call for graduates to study Asian culture and values, and West’s (DEETYA 1997a:5) quest to meet effectively social and cultural needs in the 21st century resonate with the Mayer Committee’s awareness of the cultural implications surrounding generic skills. Cross-cultural understanding is implied in the Key Competencies; i.e., communicate effectively with others. However, Mayer points out that this requires “knowledge of society and culture and that this needs to be recognised as an essential part of the foundation for the Key Competencies” (Mayer 1993:8). Researchers have repeated the need to develop ‘cultural understanding’ as a

generic concept (e.g., Cummings & Ho 1996:8; Moy 1999:37). Guthrie's interpersonal attributes and skills included the "capacity to relate to people with varied backgrounds" (Guthrie 1994b). The SCANS project listed the second workplace competence as an ability to "work with people from culturally diverse backgrounds" (SCANS 2000). Australian universities have also recognised the importance of cultural understanding by including "an international awareness" in their communications skills description (DEETYA 1999:13). Given the multi-cultural and international complexion of Australian business it is unfortunate that the most recent study of employer satisfaction of graduates (DETYA 2000) chose not to collect information on language or the cultural implications of employer expectations and that references to communication appeared to assume English language communication.

Cultural implications are of interest to graduates because a survey of 1995 Australian graduate work place destination, found that "graduates from non-English speaking backgrounds faced more difficulty in the labour market than those for whom English is the main spoken language" (GCCA 1997:32). Fortunately, another Australian review demonstrated that international students were successful at gaining employment during the years 1993 to 1997 (Trembath 1998). In Singapore, the graduate unemployment rate has been higher. A survey of the 1998 graduates from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), identified that 83.4% found employment within a year of graduation, but this was 11.5 percentage points below the 1997 rate (Davie 1999).

Many Singaporeans attend overseas universities with the possibility that their course may not be totally relevant in Singapore. Dr Cham Tao Soon, president of NTU, said it was inevitable that Singaporean scholars abroad would be "taught concepts not quite applicable to the home country because higher education systems were geared towards national priorities; in Singapore that priority was producing manpower for the economic benefit of the country" (Cham 1999). This point was supported by Singapore's Ministries of Education, Manpower and Community Development when they stated that "the wealth of Singapore lies in our people – our values and instincts, our courage and tenacity, our skills and competencies" and they went on to describe how curricula will be revised to 'infuse' thinking skills (Nathan 1999). In a strategic

response to the demands of a 'knowledge-based economy', the Singaporean government has recognised the importance of a competent workforce. As a result, the Singapore Productivity and Standards Board (PSB) launched the Critical Enabling Skills Training (CREST) initiative, in 1999. "The seven critical enabling skills are based on a comprehensive study undertaken by the American Society of Training and Development and the United States Department of Labour, Employment and Training Administration" (CREST 1999:iii). With the intention of training half the workforce by the year 2002, CREST is directed at all levels of work. However, an organisation developing CREST courses for diploma and/or degree qualified employees, is required to deliver a similar 'workers level' course within a year, otherwise that organisation will lose PSB endorsement (CREST 1999:2,5). The seventh critical enabling skill, 'organisational effectiveness and leadership', incorporates cultural capabilities (see Appendix 6) (CREST 1999:4). Unfortunately, a literature search, using the English language, found no reference to Singaporean employer expectations of graduate skills.

Research emanating from UK, USA, New Zealand and Australia could be perceived as 'western' oriented. Although Australian, Malaysian and Singaporean MBA students were found to have similarities in their cultural attitudes (Armstrong & Krasnostein 1995), it could be misleading to assume that Singaporean employers have the same expectations as 'western' employers. Therefore, while an impressive inventory of skills and characteristics could be assembled from the discussed literature, they would not necessarily be appropriate for Singapore because cultural dimensions have been shown to differentiate countries (Hofstede 1982; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998). Culture has been described as a shared system of meaning that is relative, learned and about groups of people (Hoecklin 1994:24). Moreover, Hofstede (1982:16) noted that "societies, organisations and groups have ways of conserving and passing on mental programs from generation to generation with an obstinacy which many people tend to underestimate." These 'mental programs' underpin practice when culture is perceived as, "a distinctly human capacity for adapting to circumstances and transmitting this coping skill and knowledge to subsequent generations" (Harris & Moran 1998). Hoecklin (1994:26) suggested that culture is about ways of doing things and that cultural values present themselves as practices. Defining a value as a preference for one state of affairs over

another, Hofstede (1982:18, 212) found four cultural value dimensions that differentiated countries; viz., power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. More recently, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998:8-10) described seven dimensions; universalism versus particularism, individualism versus communitarianism, neutral versus emotional, specific versus diffuse, achievement versus ascription, attitudes to time and attitudes to the environment. Value dimensions were tested for 'bias towards western values' (Connection 1987) and refinement (Schwartz 1992), and found to sustain and amplify Hofstede's conclusions rather than contradict them (Smith & Bond 1993:46). Research data comparing Singaporean and Australian responses to surveys about cultural dimensions, indicated cultural differences (Hofstede 1982:77,122,158; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998:35). Consequently, Singaporean employer expectations of graduates could be culturally influenced and the ramifications of this influence should be demonstrated in employer/employment practices.

Theoretical Framework

Employer perceptions of graduate skills are important for higher education because they reflect how well graduate skills meet the expectations of the labour market (DEETYA 1999:16). Research has shown that employers consider graduate communication and thinking to be very important generic capabilities, and that descriptions of graduate generic skill expectations should be framed within appropriate contexts. The literature also points out that employer expectations for graduate work contributions could be different from the contributions graduates produce for academics. Generic skill capabilities rest within the individual graduate and the literature showed individuals continuously develop their skills; therefore, employers interested in high quality generic skills will look for graduate characteristics that indicate a life-long learner. Employers in different countries were considered to hold expectations of graduate communication and thinking that will be influenced by their cultural practices, because the literature has shown that cultural dimensions can differentiate amongst countries. Although qualitative data describing employer expectations have been referred to in the literature; e.g., interviews with key education and business leaders, (B/HERT 1992:3-4), disclosure of the context surrounding the discussions of generic skills does not appear to have been a priority.

Also, the differences in graduate work between academia and employment, and the influence of work practices upon employer expectation has not been adequately explored. Therefore, descriptions of employer expectations of business graduate communication and thinking that expound upon the context of graduate work and practice, would supplement the literature. Describing Singaporean employer expectations and comparing their expectations against Perth employers would further supplement the literature.

The following points summarise the themes that have emerged from the review of literature:

- a) recognition by all stakeholders that communication and thinking skills are an important graduate capability,
- b) the necessity to refer to the context of generic skill utilisation,
- c) generic skills are applied to produce different outcomes when graduates attend to their work in the worlds of academia and business,
- d) the beneficiary of generic skills is an individual who continuously develops their capabilities through life-long learning, and
- e) academic and business situations are immersed in an environment replete with cultural values and practices which influence the application of generic skills.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

The design of the research process will be explained and illustrated in this Chapter. Research questions are postulated and the collection of data described. Interviews and surveys are the basic techniques that were used to gather data. The administration of these techniques and the data analysis are also discussed. Finally, the limitations of this study are considered.

Investigation Design

The overall objective was to propose descriptions of employer expectations for business graduate communication and thinking, that were assembled from data rich in contextual relevance. By collecting information from employers in two different cities, Singapore and Perth, similarities and differences were highlighted. The expectations that employers in these cities held for recent business graduates have not been simultaneously described and compared. Therefore, an investigation was designed that included exploratory research for “the discovery of ideas and insights” and descriptive research for “determining the frequency with which something occurs or the relationship between two variables” (Churchill 1995:145).

The researcher’s attitude to the philosophical ramifications of conducting social research are aligned closely to those expressed by Miles and Huberman. They:

“think that social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the objective world – and that some lawful and reasonably stable relationships are to be found among them. The lawfulness comes from the regularities and sequences that link together phenomena. From these patterns we can derive constructs that underlie individual and social life. The fact that most of these constructs are invisible to the human eye does not make them invalid. ... We agree with the interpretivists who point out that knowledge is a social and historical product and that ‘facts’ come to us laden with theory. We affirm the existence and importance of the subjective, the phenomenological, the meaning-making at the centre of social life. Our aim is to register and ‘transcend’ these processes by building theories to account for the real world that is both bounded and perceptually laden, and to test these theories in our various disciplines.”

(Miles & Huberman 1994:4).

As a result, data confirmation and an open explanation of researcher interpretations are the guiding principles used throughout this investigation. Although quantitative research methods are understood widely and have been standardised to suit particular research applications (Churchill 1995:813-814), qualitative research methods have yet to evolve an agreed set of standardised techniques. Qualitative research traditions have been developed from taxonomies (Jacob 1987), and typologies (Ogbu, Sato & Kim 1997) but “as comprehensive and clarifying as these catalogues and taxonomies may be, they turn out to be basically incommensurate, both in the way different qualitative strands are defined and in the criteria used to distinguish them” (Miles & Huberman 1994:5). Even so, analytic practices have been found to be useful in various qualitative research situations: viz., when

- affixing codes,
- noting reflections or other remarks,
- sorting and shifting ... to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups and common sequences,
- isolating these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences,
- elaborating a small set of generalisations, and
- confronting those generalisations.

(Miles & Huberman 1994:9).

The processes of confirming data and evidencing data manipulation, adds to the validity of the investigation process. This openness addresses the implication that “actions always occur in specific situations within a social and historical context, which deeply influences how they are interpreted by both insiders and the researcher as outsider” (Miles & Huberman 1994:10). For these reasons, a participative approach was used in the interviews and interviewees were given opportunities to challenge, amend or add to their responses. Particular care was to be taken to ensure that interviewees agreed with the interview data. In addition, interpretations of the data include references to attachments that display relevant personal quotes from the

interviewees. Readers, therefore, have the opportunity to form their own opinion about the validity of the analysis.

Keeves and Sowden (1997) have described an interactive research model that was based upon the qualitative techniques of Miles and Huberman. Their four-stage approach with its three analysis components was used as a working guide during the qualitative phases of this investigation.

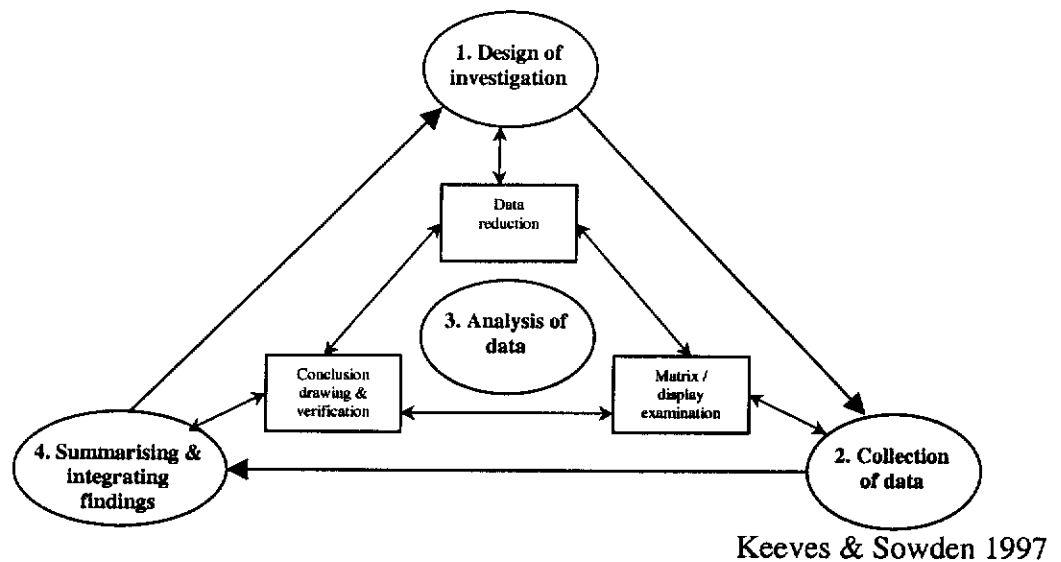


Figure 1: Interactive Research Model

The present investigation was conducted iteratively rather than as a sequence of linear events. In the 1st phase, two interviews were used to allow participants to review and confirm their responses. A questionnaire was administered, in the 2nd phase, to corroborate interview data. The 3rd phase brought the data together to propose answers to the research questions. The investigation started with a small number of employers being interviewed. Their expectations were described and summarised. Issues that surfaced in these summaries were used to create a questionnaire that was administered to a larger sample of employers. Finally, results from both the interview and survey data were combined for analysis.

The 'chart of investigation process' (see Appendix 8) illustrates how qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaires) research methods have been integrated into this study. The superiority of quantitative methods has been challenged and the

utility of qualitative methods emphasised as offering alternative inquiry paradigms (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Valerie Janesick pointed out that qualitative research is holistic, it looks at relationships, refers to the personal, face-to-face, immediate; is concerned with understanding rather than prediction, involved in the setting, describes what occurs in social settings, requires the researcher to become the research instrument, responsive to ethical concerns, (discloses a researcher's personal bias and ideological preference), and requires on-going analysis of the data (Janesick 1994). The strength of integrated investigation is the ability to triangulate findings hence the growing recognition that educational research can profit from studies that include both qualitative and quantitative techniques (Keeves 1997:283). In fact, it has been argued that within the social sciences, single-method studies are no longer defensible (Patton 1980:330, as cited in Keeves 1997:321).

Research Questions

The data collection and analysis activities reflect the exploratory and investigative nature of this research. Accordingly, the following research questions address this theme and were designed to guide the research process and to propose 'descriptions of Singaporean and Perth employer expectations of recent business graduate communication and thinking'.

In the case of Singaporean participants, and the case of Perth participants;

1. What communication capabilities did participants expect?
2. What thinking capabilities did participants expect?
3. What abilities did participants consider graduates possessed?
4. What graduate characteristics did participants consider useful?

As previously indicated, the data from both cases and the answers to the research questions, themes will be identified to propose a model of employer expectations.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with a small number of employers in Singapore and Perth. The collected data was used to answer the research questions and to inform the creation of questionnaire items that could be administered to a larger employer sample.

Administration of Interviews

Conducting the investigation in Singapore and Perth placed significant demands on research funding, nevertheless sufficient resources were obtained to enable 12 employers to be targeted (for a total of 24 interviews and 12 confirmatory responses) and for questionnaires to be subsequently developed and administered in each location. As the interview data was based on small number of interviews it was decided to seek participants who were characteristically different in order to obtain diverse responses. In each location, six different employers were targeted. The characteristics used to select diverse employers were,

- experience of employing business graduates
- industrial or professional sector,
- gender,
- age group, and
- amount of work experience.

To locate participants, the resources of the Curtin University of Technology (Perth, Western Australia) were used. The Curtin Business School (CBS) maintains regular contact with Perth employers through a consultative committee process. In Singapore, contact with employers is maintained via the CBS International Programs department. Consequently, the sample used to collect the interview data should be considered a convenience sample of employers who had a prior interest and commitment to the improvement and development of higher education. Participants contributed a significant amount of their time on an honorary basis; on average, they invested two hours of their time spread over a six month period. They engaged in various activities; i.e., responding to phone calls and written communications, attending the 1st interview, attending the 2nd interview and reviewing the final

response document. The extent of participant involvement prevented eleven employers from being involved in this stage of the research. In recognition of participant contributions to the investigation, the interviewer agreed to provide participants with a copy of the final report.

An interview pro-forma was prepared for the 1st interview. While participants were encouraged to say whatever they wanted, the interview had to focus upon the research questions. Therefore, a set of 'open-ended' questions was constructed to form a semi-structured interview pro-forma that would take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Interview questions were designed to establish agreed definitions for certain words, obtain expectations for communication and thinking, obtain an indication of 'expectation' importance, ask for perceptions of graduate ability, ask about useful graduate characteristics and finally to ask for any other contributions. To test the pro-forma, two Perth employers (one Australian and one employer of Chinese background) were asked to 'walk-through' an interview. They were encouraged to comment on any aspect of the interview. These employers had no difficulty in talking freely about the subject matter; however, the interviewer had difficulty taking notes and concentrating on the flow of the interview. The richness of interviewee comments, the propensity to jump to related issues and the length of their responses, demonstrated the importance of recording interviews. Both of these employers indicated that they would agree to a tape recorder being used. These events confirmed a practical aspect of recording the interviews. The employers raised another two issues. They suggested that the word 'skills' should be used (instead of 'capabilities') and they raised the possibility that interviews could easily last longer than 30 minutes. Although there were academic differences between skills and capabilities, the objective of the interviews was for employers to describe their expectations, in their own words. The word 'capability' was not as familiar to employers as the word 'skill'. As the interview structure enabled employers to expand upon 'what they expected' it was decided to replace 'capabilities' with the word 'skills'. Limiting the interviews to around 30 minutes was an important factor in getting employers to participate in this investigation. The participants were supervisors or managers with heavy work commitments. Unless the interviews were kept to a reasonable length, employers would not participate. Therefore, it was resolved to keep the research interviews as close as possible to 30 minutes each.

The adjusted semi-structured interview pro-forma contained the following questions:

- 1) Will you agree to use the following definitions during this interview?
 - **Graduate** will refer to a Singaporean (or Australian) who has been awarded a bachelor's degree in business studies.
 - **Expatriate graduate** will refer to someone who is not a Singaporean (or Australian), who has been awarded a bachelor's degree in business studies.
 - **Recently** graduated will refer to a graduate who obtained their bachelor's degree within the previous year.
 - **Skills** will refer to the communication and thinking you expect recently graduated graduates to possess.
 - **Employer expectation** will mean the skills you look forward to, from graduates.
- 2) What communication skills do you expect a recent business graduate to possess?
- 3) What thinking skills do you expect a recent business graduate to possess?
- 4) Of the skills you have mentioned which are the most important?
- 5) What skills do business graduates perform very well?
- 6) What skills do business graduates perform badly?
- 7) What personal characteristics do business graduates need to be successful?
- 8) What personal characteristics lead to failure?
- 9) Do you have any other comments on your expectations of business graduates?

Interview participants were initially contacted by telephone and then sent an explanatory letter. Their anonymity was assured and they were given an opportunity to confirm the bona fides of the study. Assurance was given to participants that individual identification would not be possible from published results. Pseudonyms were used on all internal documents, to protect identity. Most interviews were conducted at employer offices during normal working hours. One Singaporean participant chose to meet at the interviewer's hotel. All participants cooperated by

making sure that they were not disturbed during the interviews. They all accepted the use of a tape recorder. A standard introduction was used to commence each interview. This introduction described what was going to happen during the meeting and it provided an opportunity to raise issues before the interview commenced. Encouraging participants to relax and 'open-up' required an effective working relationship between the interviewer and participants. Conducting the interview in a business-like manner was considered most appropriate. At all times an honest and open description of the research process was provided to participants. They were encouraged to discuss any aspect of the investigation that worried them as soon as a concern arose. While participants often started slowly they soon warmed to the subject and were talkative. The interviewer made a conscious effort not to lead the conversation but instead tried to 'pick-up' on each participant's insights. It was often necessary to bring the conversation back to the pro-forma questions. The researcher attempted a balance between letting the participant talk about what they thought was important and trying to keep the discussion focused.

The recorded interviews were transcribed on to word processor documents by a typist. Whenever the typist could not understand a word or expression, a blank space was left in the transcript. The interviewer listened to the tape while reading the transcripts to minimise transcription error. All the 'blank spaces' were successfully resolved by the interviewer. Each verbatim transcript contained approximately 10 pages of discussion and they evidenced how the conversation had occasionally diverged from the investigation topic. To assist the discussion in the 2nd 'follow-up' interviews, the researcher re-arranged the transcript data to collate responses under the pro-forma questions. A simple 'cut and paste' process was used to turn these collated responses into a draft written response to the pro-forma questions (2 to 9). At this time, the respondent's words were kept intact and no attempt was made to attend to the readability of the document.

Once the 1st interviews had been transcribed and the 'draft responses' prepared, participants were contacted to arrange the 2nd interview. The purpose of this meeting was to enable participants to provide further insight, explanation and/or challenge; to the document prepared from the 1st interview. After agreement that the meeting could be recorded, the 2nd interview started with an explanation of how the draft

response had been prepared. A copy of their response was given to the participant. As the participant read the document, the interviewer drew attention to each question response and attempted summarisations. The participant was encouraged to challenge any part of the document with which they disagreed. Pro-forma questions that had been 'lightly' dealt with were raised to see if the participant wanted to add anything further. Finally, any responses that needed further explanation were discussed and guidance was accepted on overall readability. As a result, the 2nd interviews were a feedback mechanism that allowed participants to clarify their individual responses. Transcripts of the 2nd interviews were produced from the tapes. These documents assisted the production of the final written responses to the pro-forma interview questions. Each individual's final response was faxed or emailed to them for comment and agreement. A few changes were requested and the amendments made. This interactive, confirmatory and iterative interview process resulted in a set of written responses that accurately reflected respondent's answers to the pro-forma questions. A bonus was that the interviewer had been provided with a couple of opportunities to meet with interviewees and understand their responses. These 'final written responses' became the interview data upon which the questionnaire was developed.

The initial research proposal intended to conduct a series of Delphi rounds (Delkey 1969) to enable interviewees to comment on the major issues that arose from the combined interview data. However, further interviewee involvement was discovered to be impractical because of the amount of time already contributed by the interviewees. The researcher considered that a request for further participation may not be well received therefore the Delphi rounds were not conducted. Also, the participative data collection and the qualitative analysis method substantially clarified the shared issues; therefore, there was no strong or essential reason for using the Delphi technique in addition to the iterative interview process.

Analysis of Interview Data

The process of data interpretation was also iterative and involved data reduction, examination and conclusion verification by:

- looking for comments that described recognised skills as described in published research (see Appendix 7),
- looking for comments that indicated new skills,
- looking for explanations of skills,
- describing perceptions of ability, and
- looking for graduate characteristic preferences.

This process was informed by heuristics suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) to assist with deriving meaning and confirming findings (Keeves & Sowden 1997:302-304, have paraphrased these heuristics). Each participant's interview generated a 'final written response' that contained approximately four A4 pages of closely typed textual data.

A coding model was used to assist the collation of interview data because major themes could be described prior to coding (e.g., communication or thinking) and the first-level codes were informed by the pro-forma question structure. The inter-relationships between the major themes enabled descriptions of coding patterns that facilitated the analysis and collation of interview data across multiple cases.

A number of important functions have been described for pattern coding:

1. It reduces large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units.
2. It gets the researcher into analysis during data collection, so that later fieldwork can be more focused.
3. It helps the researcher elaborate a cognitive map, an evolving, more integrated schema for understanding local incidents and interactions.
4. For multi-case studies, it lays the groundwork for cross-case analysis by surfacing common themes and directional processes.

(Miles & Huberman 1994:69).

Given the structured nature of the interview questions and the clarity of the written responses, it was decided that data interpretation would be facilitated by using a coding model. The importance of graduate communication and thinking (to

employers) had been identified in the literature, therefore these concepts were the focus of the coding. The literature had identified that organisational contexts and practices could influence employer expectations therefore the model allowed for required and desired capabilities to be coded, together with practices. Also, because employers have been shown to hold opinions of graduate ability, it was thought to be useful to code these perceptions thereby enabling comparison against expectations. Finally, employers were expected to be attracted to graduates with good communication and thinking skills but the literature showed that generic skills develop continuously. Personal characteristics that indicate a graduate's inclination towards continuous development were expected, therefore, to be favoured by employers. As a result, the model included a place to code for personal characteristics. The major purpose of the coding model initially was to sort and arrange data into chunks that could be useful for data interpretation.

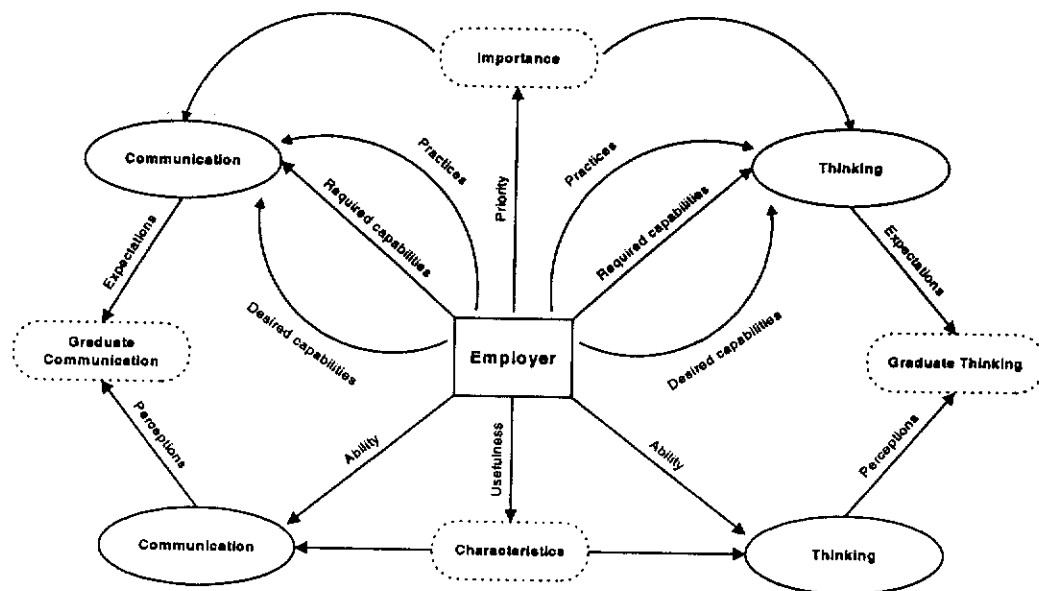


Figure 2: Interview Data Coding Model

This coding model was used to construct an NVivo project that was a collection of qualitative data assembled within the QSR NUD*IST Vivo software environment (Richards 1999). The project was created and nodes (containers or folders) were constructed to represent the coding-model. Additional nodes were created to represent each pro-forma question. The 'final written responses' were imported into the project and automatically coded by question. Coding data across the nodes was completed manually. This involved placing text (phrases, sentences or paragraphs)

into relevant nodes. A reference was attached to each item of text so that the original location and context of the text item could be easily reviewed. The creation of new nodes was utilised to accommodate interesting issues that emerged from the data. In this way a number of views of the project were considered as the coded data was assembled, examined and verified. After a number of coding and reflective iterations, the project settled to the point where further manipulation did not add new information.

The collated references were used to produce assembled quotes that were associated with particular issues. These data assemblages facilitated data interpretation during the production of interview results. The assembled quotes from interviews are listed in Appendices 15 and 16. To assist the interpretation of the interview results, the issue descriptions include extracts from the assembled quotes, however these extracts are not quotes because they have been adjusted to assist sentence flow. Readers will be able to identify extracts by the use of single quote marks and a reference link to the relevant section of the Appendices. This format discloses the data underpinning each issue description and provides readers access to the data noted in the qualitative analysis but not focused upon. In keeping with the open explanation of researcher interpretations, readers have the opportunity to compare researcher summarised issue descriptions against the extracted and assembled data.

It should be noted that the use of qualitative data analysis software facilitated the ability to substantiate data interpretations by collecting and revealing the interviewees' comments associated with particular issues. The software also provided a facility to interrogate continuously the data and model as the investigation progressed. This capacity supported the iterative components of the investigation. A further advantage of using the software was that the NVivo project could easily be made available to other researchers.

Surveys

The intention of the surveys was to test and expand issues raised in the interview data, across a larger sample of employers. This survey data was to be used to

provide descriptive statistics that could support, corroborate (Becker 1958) or clarify the interview results.

Construction of Questionnaire

The initial results from the interview data were used to locate the major issues to be addressed by the questionnaire. Many aspects of employer expectations were described by the interview data, however only a few issues could be considered in the survey. After reference to the research questions and the interview results, the questionnaire was designed to accumulate data across four major themes; viz., communication expectation, thinking expectation, perception of ability and personal characteristics.

It is noted that the researcher was advised 'strongly' to keep the size of the questionnaire to a minimum and to ensure that it did not take too long to complete. This advice was received from both of the professional associations that provided access to their membership. Their recent survey experience suggested that the response rate would be low and that a large time-consuming questionnaire would not be well received.

Eleven issues concerning communication and thinking expectations were selected; spoken English, written English, spoken Asian languages, multicultural considerations, effective communications, continuous learning, thinking method, knowledge contribution, creative ideas, initiative and contributors. Questionnaire items were constructed to clarify aspects of these issues. For example, in the interview data spoken English was required but the standard of spoken English expected, varied. Therefore, the 'spoken English' item was designed to find out if it was required, and then to clarify the standard expected. Each questionnaire item was designed to confirm an issue, then obtain further clarification. Respondents could select one of five options associated with each item. The first option would establish if the issue was expected; e.g., whether the respondent expected English to be spoken by the graduate. Next, was an attempt to clarify an aspect of the issue; e.g., the standard of spoken English expected. Three options relating information from the interview data were constructed. Using phrases to describe each option added to the

lengthy appearance of items. An additional problem was that available options might not satisfy all respondents, therefore a final option was added to enable respondents to indicate when the previous option choices were not suitable. A boxed item format was used to contain these items on just two pages of the questionnaire (see Appendix 10).

A demographic section was included on the second page, to enable comparisons across respondent characteristics; i.e., gender, age, education, Asian language capability and management role. Participants were offered an incentive to complete the questionnaire. They could elect to receive a summary report. Not many respondents requested the report because to request a copy required a return address. Even so, the summary report will be published in the newsletters of the professional associations that assisted this investigation.

The final page of the questionnaire contained two sections devoted to perceptions of graduate performances and useful graduate characteristics. Each section's items were based on issues that were raised in the interview data. Some of these issues were similar to items used in previous Australian research instruments and they provided useful guidance in the construction of items and scales. Guthrie surveyed recruiters and asked if graduate skills or attributes were necessary, necessary for some, useful but not necessary, not expected or don't know (Guthrie 1994a). Sinclair surveyed businesses and asked what emphasis (5 options ranging from no emphasis to very strong emphasis) should be attached to characteristics and how well they assessed the standard graduates demonstrated (5 options ranging from very poor to very good) (B/HERT 1992). Rather than construct items that surveyed general abilities (e.g., communication skills) or general characteristics (e.g., confidence), this investigation focused upon specific tasks and characteristics that arose from the interview data; 16 tasks and 16 characteristics were described. To obtain perceptions of graduate ability, respondents were asked to indicate how well graduates completed tasks. They were provided with 5 options and a 'no opinion' choice. Against each task, respondents could indicate:

- **fail** (graduates do not have the ability to complete this task),
- **need help** (supervision is needed to complete this task),

- **average** (graduates can complete and produce an acceptable result),
- **good standard** (graduates complete this task professionally), or
- **excellent** (all my expectations are exceeded).

To obtain perceptions of characteristics, respondents were asked to indicate the usefulness of a particular characteristic. They were provided with 5 options and a 'no opinion' choice. Against each characteristic respondents could indicate:

- **not useful** (I would not want to work with these graduates),
- **can be useful** (this characteristic would need careful supervision),
- **useful** (a handy characteristic for an employee to possess),
- **very useful** (this characteristic should lead to valuable contributions), or
- **must have** (this is an important characteristic that we need to reach our goals).

A small group of thirty five postgraduate students were asked to trial the questionnaire. It took these students between nine and sixteen minutes to read the introductory letter and complete the questionnaire. Singaporean and Perth students provided a few comments on layout and indicated that they had no difficulty understanding questionnaire instructions or the individual items. The student pilot data then was used to test the statistical techniques that were to be applied to the questionnaire data. Finally, the questionnaire was subjected to the Curtin Business School approval process that includes an ethical review. The letter accompanying the questionnaire provided participants with an opportunity to have queries answered by the researcher (see Appendix 9).

Administration of Questionnaire

Two individuals were deliberately targeted to assist in this investigation because their personal influence within professional organisations could support the questionnaire phase of the research. Their respective organisations were professional business institutes that enjoyed large memberships of employers (over 1,500 members in Singapore and over 6,000 members in Perth) and they agreed to participate in the investigation. At the very beginning of the investigation, both organisations

commented on the difficulty of persuading employers to complete questionnaires. To combat this impediment to a high response rate, the following strategies were agreed upon:

- The sample size of members to be mailed the questionnaire would be large enough to support a 10% to 15% response rate. A sample size of 1,500 was expected to yield between 150 and 225 responses. This sample size required mailing a questionnaire to the complete membership of the Singaporean organisation, whereas only 25% of the Perth membership was required.
- The letter requesting completion of the attached questionnaire was on the stationery of the respective professional organisation and that letter displayed the signatures of both a senior executive and the researcher (see Appendix 9).
- For the Perth mail-out, a prior announcement was included in the organisation's newsletter to alert members to the forthcoming questionnaire and encouraging them to participate.
- Participants were given a choice of three ways to return the questionnaire; by facsimile, by mail and by e-mail. The questionnaire was designed to be 'easy to fax' because this method was expected to be the most attractive to employers. In Singapore, it was felt that employers who were motivated to complete the questionnaire would not object to the minimal cost of faxing to a local telephone number (the professional organisation's facsimile number). In Perth, a special 'no-cost' telephone number was arranged so that returning the questionnaire by facsimile would be free. Mail-back was not expected to be used by any participants but was provided as a traditional alternative. No pre-paid envelopes were provided. An electronic version of the questionnaire was available by following an Internet URL (address) described in the letter. The completed electronic questionnaire could then be emailed to the researcher as an attachment.
- Given the reported expectation of low response rates, preparations were made with both organisations to enable a limited amount of telephone follow-up to start two weeks after the mail-out. These calls established that

the questionnaire had been received and requested personal participation as soon as possible.

- At the end of each questionnaire's administration, a small number of members from the sample that had not responded were telephoned and encouraged to participate in the survey. The data collected from these participants was used to represent the 'non-response' of members. This data provided an estimate of difference between the participants and non-participants for comment on the overall response rate.

Responses from these members should be viewed as a sample from a subset of the population of employers in Singapore and Perth. The membership of these organisations consists of employers that choose to be associated with these professional organisations. However, not all employers join professional organisations. The database administrator of the Perth organisation arranged for access to approximately 25% of the members who were randomly selected from major membership categories. Consequently, the employers that received a questionnaire should be considered part of a stratified sample of the employers that choose to be members of two particular professional business associations.

Analysis of Questionnaire Data

The questionnaire was a 'self report' survey (Churchill 1995:462) containing 'itemised rating scales' (Churchill 1995:478) that collected nominal and ordinal data (Churchill 1995:455) for measurement (Stevens 1951:22). In addition, the questionnaire was constructed recently (i.e., formulated from interview data), therefore the items had not been tested for 'construct validity' (Churchill 1995:535) or 'internal consistency' (Churchill 1995:541). A univariate analysis of nominal and ordinal data used nonparametric statistics to describe relationships between the Singapore and Perth independent samples. Frequency distributions were used to describe item responses across item-options for each sample. To indicate statistically significant differences between samples (i.e., between the Singaporean and Perth responses) a Mann-Whitney test was used on ordinal data and a Chi-square test was used on nominal data (Churchill 1995:813). Finally, the abilities and characteristics items were ordered according to best and worst response proportions. Spearman's

rank correlation coefficient was used to indicate ranking similarity between the two samples (Churchill 1995:929).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Interview and survey data are described and summarised in this chapter. In accordance with the explanatory nature of this investigation, interview data was collated, and then paraphrased to disclose the underlying issues. Separate sections are used to describe the issues that arose from the Singapore and Perth data. Issue descriptions contain extracts from the transcripts, however these extracts have been adjusted to assist sentence flow. Extracts can be identified by the use of single quote marks. Each extract has a reference link to the relevant section of the Interview Assembled Quotes, (see Appendix 15 for Singaporean quotes and Appendix 16 for Perth quotes). This format discloses the data underpinning each issue description. It also provides readers with access to particular quotes as well as the data noticed in the qualitative analysis but not focused upon during issue resolution. Consequently, readers have the opportunity to compare the researcher's summarised issue descriptions against the extracted and assembled data. The issues arising from the interview data became the focus of a questionnaire that was used to triangulate expectations across a larger sample of employers. The resulting questionnaire data is summarised in the last section of this Chapter.

Interview Data - Singapore

Six employers participated in the Singaporean interviews (five males and one female). Their ages ranged from under 30 to over 50, and their work experience ranged from less than 10 years to over 30 years. Two supervisors, two senior managers and two top managers participated. Four participants had received their education overseas. All participants spoke other languages in addition to English. Participants were professionally aligned to Human Resource Management, Marketing, Law and Medical Research.

Participant	Age	Educated	Experience	Gender	Languages	Nationality	Position	Profession	Residence
P01	> 50	Overseas	> 30 years	Male	English (a little Dutch & Malay)	British	Senior management	Marketing & Advertising	Singapore permanent resident 20 yrs
P02	< 30	Locally in Singapore	< 10 years	Female	English, Malay & Bahasa Indonesian	Singaporean	Supervisor	HRM	-
P03	31 to 40	Locally in Singapore	< 10 years	Male	English & Tamil	Singaporean	Supervisor	HRM	-
P04	41 to 50	Overseas	21 to 30 years	Male	English, Mandarin & (little) German	Singaporean	Senior management	HRM	-
P05	41 to 50	Overseas	11 to 20 years	Male	English & Mandarin (+ dialects)	Malaysian	Top management	Commercial Law	Singapore permanent resident
P06	< 30	Overseas	< 10 years	Male	English & Mandarin (+ dialects)	Singaporean	Top management	Medical research	-

Table 1: Attribute Table of Singaporean Participants

Communication

Singaporean participants expected graduates to communicate effectively with work-mates and clients. This involved being 'able to communicate clearly and precisely', using 'a practical style of speaking that simply addressed the objective of the communication'. Communicating 'effectively both within organisations and with clients' required 'someone who could put ideas across in a convincing manner and not be lost for words'. It was important to use 'language in a manner (or style) that the customer preferred' because this made 'people feel comfortable in a conversation'. Graduates needed 'an ability that spanned a number of languages' and which included 'knowledge of appropriate ways of using those languages'. In essence, graduates should communicate their ideas clearly and simply. They should not be lost for words as they express themselves in ways acceptable to recipients. These communications may be required to span several languages and, in that case, would assume a working knowledge of how cultural implications impact language usage. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 1)

Graduates were expected to use a high standard of written and oral English because 'a professional standard of English communication was expected' by clients. 'Writing must be accurate, grammatically correct and business-like; there was no need to be flowery at all'. Graduates should also be able to 'speak well and confidently use business English'. Verbosity was not necessary, 'communications should be as succinct and concise as possible', in other words using 'grammatically acceptable and plain English'. The technicalities of correct English usage were

necessary for graduates in order to promote a professional communication style. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 2)

Participating employers expected graduates to incorporate an understanding of multicultural issues into their communications because ‘graduates may be required to make presentations to audiences that might not understand English very well’. Using communicative techniques that were ‘culturally sensitive was important because Singapore is a multiracial, multicultural society’. Graduates were expected to possess ‘cultural awareness’. It was also important to be able to converse with many people. Indeed, one participant stated ‘our employees must be fluent in two languages’. Appropriate communication delivery was an important aspect of business because ‘understanding the ways of doing business and the traditional levels of respect that were socially/culturally appropriate’, mattered. It was stated that, ‘I would not employ a graduate from a different nationality because there are too many communication subtleties and a non-Singaporean would be at risk of making the customer feel un-comfortable’. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 3)

Graduates were expected to achieve communication outcomes. They should ‘be very focussed on what they communicate’. Successful communications involved being ‘able to make customers feel comfortable, so that levels of trust are maintained or improved’. This approach will assist with ‘getting ideas across to customers’. Graduates should monitor their communicative activities and respond appropriately to adverse developments. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 4)

By getting involved and ‘not sitting quietly’ graduates should be able to participate actively and ‘contribute’. However, the correct type of contribution was expected. During ‘discussions with clients, customers, or peers, a certain amount of composure’ could be required and ‘perhaps a different tack’ necessary. ‘There are different ways to ask questions and seek clarification while at the same time not assuming too much’. This ‘required being able to see another person’s point of view and to help them feel comfortable’. Everything was not always obvious. ‘There may be long term implications that result from a communication to a particular audience and graduates are expected to be sensitive towards potential side-effects’. This sort of knowledge is embedded within the business, therefore a graduate’s ability to ‘communicate sensitively will progressively improve as they gain experience’.

Graduates will have to 'learn to communicate at all levels' of business. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 5)

Foreign educated graduates were attractive to some participants because there was a perceived 'English advantage' for those graduates. Participants described the importance of understanding local history and the way cultural groups interacted. 'Graduates should be aware of how cultures and societies live together in Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia, because historical concepts' could have real impacts upon livelihoods. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 6)

Bilingual capabilities were an advantage because 'a good working knowledge of Mandarin or Singaporean is advantageous' and 'a working knowledge of Bahasa Indonesia' was handy. Written English ability 'is essential but writing abilities in another languages is not that important'. However, one employer stated that 'I require graduates to communicate in English and Mandarin, in addition other languages are also important'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 7)

Participants provided insight into situations that graduates would experience, once employed. They were concerned about a graduate's impact upon business reputation; for example, the detrimental effect of 'a young graduate eagerly selling to a very traditional manager, who has mediocre English'. Graduates must handle these situations well because they will 'not be employed if they cannot manage this sort of cultural difficulty'. Actually, 'there are many cultural sensitivities to worry about in Singapore and Malaysia'. Graduates 'need to understand heritage, culture and working styles'. Attention to 'face required sensitivity towards a particular person, their cultural and social standing', in order to ensure that personal insult was 'not inadvertently given'. In these cultural interchanges a 'Singaporean would fare better than an Australian' because of their cultural knowledge and experience. A similar 'advantage is expected to favour Australians working in Australia'. It would always be difficult for a non-Singaporean because although 'a non-Singaporean can communicate in a comfortable way, that communication will be obviously different and will always be seen as outside the culture'. Therefore, graduates were expected to manage effectively cultural sensitivities and to be alert to the difficulty of establishing a 'trusting and comfortable' relationship. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 8)

Graduates must recognise the necessity to learn in the workplace. 'They must take advantage of opportunities to build practical experience'. Once they join an organisation, graduates 'have to learn how to interact with peers and how to put forth effectively their knowledge'. In short, 'they have to get used to an organisation's way of doing things'. Graduates should embrace workplace learning and training as a quick way to improve their professional effectiveness. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 9)

Monitoring the impact of their communications would help graduates develop an effective communicative style because 'communications are also relationship building opportunities and people are sensitive to how they are spoken to'. Successful self-monitoring would ultimately lead to the graduate 'projecting a professional image on behalf of our organisation'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Communication, 10)

In summary, the Singaporean employers expected graduates to communicate effectively using clear and simple conversations, to deliver information and ideas in a manner that was acceptable to recipients. Communications could span a number of languages and participants expected knowledge of how to interact with people using those languages. Participants expected graduates to display a professional standard of written and oral English that was concise, accurate and written plainly. They expected graduates to have an understanding of multicultural issues together with fluency in two languages. Participants indicated that managing communicative subtlety and having bilingual capabilities was so important that it was necessary to employ graduates of local nationality. Graduates were expected to manage their communications and to respond effectively to adverse developments. The employers wanted graduates to achieve communication objectives. They were expected to contribute by becoming active participants who used work experience to develop their communicative ability. Although overseas-educated graduates were attractive to employers, they were expected to understand the business implications of local societal interaction. Graduates were expected to improve their ability to manage effectively cultural sensitivities, establish trusting business relationships, embrace vocational learning and enhance the professional image of the business.

Thinking

Singaporean participants expected graduates to be analytical as they 'relate information to a situation, explain what they have done, as well as the reasons why they took' a particular course of action. Graduates should 'be able to arrange their ideas in a systematic way and to explain their approach to an issue'. They were not expected to 'make decisions without guidance but they should be able to understand the issue, think fast, defend their solution and organise their thoughts'. During these processes they should be 'focused on organisational objectives'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 1)

The capability to relate their thought processes to issues that were important, was expected of graduates. They should 'see the large picture and be prepared to listen and discover what is going on around them'. Graduates should be able to 'deal with concepts and ideas, conceptualise issues and to see how the various pieces in the puzzle fit together'. In this way they would 'crystallise the big picture to its essentials, but they should always bear in mind the ultimate objectives' of the organisation. Ideas needed to be pragmatic so that graduates could 'provide clients with good commercial advice. Commercial advice in the sense that it was practical for the client and prudent for the organisation.' A holistic and practical perspective was expected of graduates. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 2)

A 'well-rounded thinking ability that is based on listening, understanding and relating to people' would help graduates 'to advise, cajole, give ideas and encourage' others. Graduates should 'be discerning enough to ask leading, intelligent questions and to seek clarification whenever necessary'. After thinking about what they had observed, graduates would be expected to 'use common sense as they dispense' their business expertise. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 3)

Graduates should contribute ideas; i.e., 'come up with ideas that could suggest new business opportunities'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 4)

Early contributions to business were expected from graduates. For example, 'contributions to planning, however to do this effectively graduates need to be

constantly thinking about what the organisation does'. Contributions of 'this sort of thinking would indicate real commitment' to the present task. Graduates 'also need to consider our business ten years down the road'. Graduates with 'proactive thinking' were appreciated because they could 'suggest ways round difficulties and try to achieve something in a new way'. Participants were 'looking for graduates with that little bit of extra wisdom. People who look at things a little bit differently and who come up with different solutions.' These graduates would 'have the ability to provide the organisation with strategic commercial advantage'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 5)

Graduates should be prepared to 'learn from mistakes and move on'. It was stated that 'this form of learning has a very healthy effect on employee morale'. However, the graduates had to appreciate that 'the knowledge they acquire at university is simply a starting point'. Employment provides graduates with opportunities to 'adapt to new practices and the chance to learn by experience'. Participants expected graduates to develop continuously their thinking capabilities so that they were fine-tuned and more useful in business practice. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 6)

The employers encouraged creative thinking but expected 'a balance between creativity and pragmatism'. It should be practical in the sense that graduates should not recommend solutions that 'require substantial investments or are unachievable'. In the case of structured problems, 'solutions are already known so not much creative thinking is necessary'. Participants appreciated 'simple, practical ideas' that reflected 'a refined form of common sense'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 7)

Participants provided insight into situations that graduates would experience once employed. Graduates should recognise that 'there is a learning curve and that they would require training' to learn the way things were thought about within a particular organisation. Graduates would be given 'room to make mistakes and as far as possible their confidence would not be shaken'. However, senior employees 'expect to spend a lot of time with new graduates providing leadership as they learn the way things are done and how to handle customers'. By taking the time to become accepted by other organisational members, graduates 'have the opportunity to influence the way things are done'. Early in their employment, graduates must not

expect a free hand to make decisions. They would have occasions to contribute but they would be monitored so that 'the firm is not placed in a situation of unacceptable risk'. Graduates were expected to 'understand the importance of this sort of internal procedure and to embrace these processes enthusiastically'. Graduates would be allowed to make mistakes, and those 'mistakes handled the right way would provide powerful learning experiences for recent graduates'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 8)

Graduates would be encouraged to offer contributions because this would give them the opportunity to defend successfully their ideas. By 'presenting small pieces of work as soon as possible, graduates would be able to contribute very early in their employment'. Graduates were not expected to follow blindly instructions but they should realise that 'quite often the senior's idea would prevail, perhaps more than fifty percent of the time'; however those ideas may no longer be suitable. That was when graduates would be expected to 'explain why the old way is no longer appropriate'. Graduates were also expected 'to consult with their seniors regularly'. They would 'normally be given parameters within which to work because mistakes could lead to expensive legal suits'. In addition, participants expected graduates to consult their work peers before presenting or promoting ideas. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 9)

Practical initiatives were expected from graduates. As one participant put it, 'I ask for lateral thinking from my creative staff but I would expect business graduates practically to temper creative advice in a constructive and supportive manner'. Participants wanted 'people who had initiative and creativity, but in Asia there are always constraints and a framework within which to work, so creativity is managed because proposals that are very elaborate or did not work' would be too costly. Once again participants wanted graduates to think creatively, but that thinking must result in practical strategies. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Thinking, 10)

In summary, the Singaporean employers felt that graduates should utilise systematic thought processes, have a capacity to visualise the 'big picture', be rational, critical, and use their common sense when applying business expertise. Graduates were expected to contribute early by providing proactive ideas that were based on their

business expertise. These ideas would flow from looking at things differently and suggesting ways around difficulties or considering future scenarios. Participants wanted graduates continuously to develop practical business knowledge, embrace work experience as a learning opportunity, consult with their peers and develop creative but practical strategies.

Importance

Participants indicated that although 'English is essential, other languages are useful and cultural sensitivities important'. History and culture are important in Singapore. In particular, graduates 'need to be sensitive to the idea that cultural variations must be handled otherwise people would be rubbed-up the wrong way'. In business, it was important that graduates 'understand the cultural nuances that apply in this part of the world'. Therefore, graduates should be alert to 'what is happening during a conversation and be aware of any cultural issues that may be involved'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Importance, 1)

Effective graduate communications were important to participants. 'There is no point in creative thinking if ideas cannot be expressed easily'. For example, when talking with clients, graduates must consider whether 'they were understood and be sensitive to the client's comfort with using the English language'. Even an accountant requires 'the ability to communicate specialised concepts and information to people without a technical background'. All the time graduates needed 'to think about the communicative situation, in terms of what is trying to be achieved'. 'When working with clients verbal communications are important, however when working with fellow professionals written communication is paramount'. For these reasons, graduates were required to communicate effectively by incorporating discipline knowledge, presentation methods and feedback processes into a comfortable interaction with other people. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Importance, 2)

The ability to 'bring it all together is expected of graduates'. 'Common sense and a well-rounded outlook' would help graduates realise effective communications. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Importance, 3)

A commitment to continual self-improvement was expected of graduates. They must 'learn, adapt and absorb useful ideas'. Thinking about the future and how to manage it better, 'being a good listener and getting on with other people, are all helped by a very good attitude to learning'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Importance, 4)

Graduates must be competent in the execution of their employment role. Graduates should 'know their job well enough to gain the respect of customers'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Importance, 5)

Participants expected graduate conduct to reflect organisational values. Graduates would be 'representing organisations, so they are expected to accept organisational values'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Importance, 6)

In summary, Singaporean participants indicated that English was essential. They also felt that effective communication incorporated an understanding of local history and cultural issues, discipline knowledge, presentation methods and feedback monitoring. Participants wanted graduates to be committed to continual improvement in work task competence and they wanted graduates to embrace organisational values.

Perceptions of Graduate Ability

Some graduates were perceived to have poor writing ability. Graduates have lost employment opportunities 'because their writing ability is simply not good enough'. Many graduates talked well but 'when it came to putting their ideas down on paper they did not live up to expectation'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 1)

Even though sensitivity was so important, graduates were often 'over-confident or brash and sometimes they had not thought of the repercussions of their statements'. 'They were young and confident but in their excitement they forgot to be culturally sensitive'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 2)

Overseas-educated graduates were attractive prospects for participant employers. These graduates were preferred because 'Singaporeans who graduate from overseas universities seem to have a broader outlook on life and possess a bit more personal confidence'. Perhaps this was the result of 'mixing with students from different backgrounds and being exposed to international travel, other cultures or ways of living.' Often their 'English abilities are better'. One participant remarked that 'I have noticed that graduates from Singapore Universities seem to be much more nervous than Singaporeans who graduated overseas'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 3)

Graduates were perceived to be confident of their own ability. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 4)

Some graduates showed a lack of initiative and determination. These graduates 'want to be told everything and they do not seem to have much initiative'. Sometimes they did 'not think through a problem'. Graduates were expected 'to have a commitment to finding out things'. They should not 'expect to be guided all of the time, wanting somebody to hold their hand'. Rather they should 'express their ideas voluntarily' and keep going when things have not worked out as planned. 'Some graduates have difficulty handling pressure' and in taking a chance on putting forward an idea. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 5)

Participants indicated that graduates have not appreciated the practicalities of work. Graduates had to adjust to 'the time frames that apply at work and they need to understand business practice'. This required them to 'focus on their area of expertise but at the same time they should be mindful of the business aspects of company practice'. Graduates 'get sidetracked by client problems; e.g., when clients say they will not be able to pay'. It was worrying that 'new graduates are not bothered by this.' Graduates were expected to 'do a good job for the client but they owe it to themselves to get paid'; otherwise the organisation would not remain in business. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 6)

Knowledge gained overseas had to be adapted to suit the local business environment. 'Many graduates fail to understand that they have to adapt knowledge gained

overseas to the Singaporean context'. New knowledge was welcomed but there were 'ways of getting things done in Singapore'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 7)

Participants wanted graduates to accept guidance. Graduates should remember that learning to work with senior staff was important because 'the extent to which graduate advice will be accepted depends upon superiors.' These seniors would 'attempt to provide guidance so that wild suggestions are tempered with reality, however new graduates find it hard to accept advice'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 8)

'New graduates are not very good at managing their time'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 9)

Graduates usually demonstrated that they had a broad perspective and that 'they are aware of what is going on around them'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 10)

Work experience was regarded highly because 'graduates with work experience seem to understand the importance of learning in an organisational environment and they adapt very quickly'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 11)

'Graduates learn quickly and they seem to be continually looking to improve their abilities'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 12)

In summary, Singaporean participants indicated that some graduates wrote poorly, made insensitive statements, displayed a lack of initiative and determination, had not appreciated the practicalities of work, had not realised that knowledge must be adapted to local conditions, had not accepted guidance, and demonstrated poor time management. However, participants indicated that graduates were confident, possessed a broad perspective and learnt quickly. Some participants indicated a preference for graduates that were educated overseas and for graduates with work experience.

Useful Graduate Characteristics

Professional conduct by graduates was regarded highly by participants. 'A professional manner and approach to their work that includes being serious yet sincere, help graduates get their point across'. Graduates needed 'an element of sincerity if they are to establish a feeling of trust.' They should not 'mind doing mundane stuff' because it indicated a commitment to the team. 'A bit of stamina and the ability to take a couple of hard knocks, and a readiness to learn about the job', were considered useful characteristics. Graduates needed to be honest and to display their integrity. 'A competitive leaning that combines a preference for winning with good technical ability' would also be useful. Therefore, diligence, a willingness to learn, sincerity, participation, determination, integrity, identifying with an organisation's core values, being a team player, a commitment to quality, a competitive leaning and a sound technical knowledge-base were considered useful graduate characteristics. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 1)

Being prepared to contribute positively was an important characteristic. A participant, describing contribution, said 'I don't want people to just sit there quietly, I expect them to contribute'. Graduates needed 'confidence and they should be self-starters, positive, optimistic and generally be happy people'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 2)

Graduates should quickly learn to ask questions. 'If graduates are unsure they should speak up. They are expected to ask for guidance and not to feel that asking is a reflection of incompetence. Asking is an important part of the learning process'. 'There would be projects that failed' and in those cases 'graduates must learn quickly and move on if they want to survive'. Therefore, participants wanted graduates to be prepared to get involved, ask questions and to use work experiences to improve their contribution. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 3)

Arrogance would work against a graduate's quest for success. 'Some graduates don't want to take the time to listen to another person's point of view.' It was noticed that 'sometimes graduate expectations are out of whack with the real world. They feel that because they graduated the company owes them a living or that their

movement up the corporate ladder should be very fast'. These were unrealistic ideas. 'Graduates who think too highly of themselves and who use their ideas in an attempt to impress selfishly, would have difficulty succeeding'. Graduates should be prepared to adapt and not 'demand attention; i.e., by insisting on a particular area of work and no other'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 4)

Aggression needed to be carefully handled. 'Highly strung individuals and aggression would lead to personality clashes and shouting matches'. There would be conflict 'because healthy debates are encouraged and staff are expected to defend their proposals'. In these situations, graduates should display 'a pleasant business-like manner and not be overly aggressive'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 5)

Integrity was important for graduates. 'The worst thing that could happen is for the graduate to cover up a problem and to try and sort it out quietly'. (Appendix 15, Singapore – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 6)

In summary, Singaporean participants indicated that graduates should conduct themselves professionally and that diligence, willingness to learn, sincere participation, determination, integrity, identifying with an organisation's core values, being a team player, a commitment to quality, acceptance of change, a competitive leaning, a sound technical knowledge-base, confidence and continuous improvement, would be useful. Participants also indicated that arrogance and aggression could impede a graduate's success and progress within organisations.

Interview Data - Perth

Six employers participated in the Perth interviews (four males and two females). Their ages ranged from the 30s to over 50, and their work experience ranged from more than 10 years to over 30 years. Four senior managers and two top managers participated. Only one participant had received their education overseas. Only one participant spoke other languages in addition to English. Participants were professionally aligned to Human Resource Management, Consulting, Printing and Accountancy.

Document	Age	Educated	Experience	Gender	Languages	Nationality	Position	Profession	Residence
P07	41 to 50	Locally in Australia	> 30 years	Male	English	Australian	Senior management	Business Consultancy	-
P08	41 to 50	Overseas	21 to 30 years	Female	English (little French, Italian & Latin)	American	Senior management	HRM	Australian residence permit
P09	> 50	Locally in Australia	> 30 years	Male	English	Australian	Top management	Printing	-
P10	31 to 40	Locally in Australia	11 to 20 years	Female	English	Australian	Senior management	Business Consultancy	-
P11	41 to 50	Locally in Australia	21 to 30 years	Male	English	Australian	Top management	Accountancy	-
P12	41 to 50	Locally in Australia	> 30 years	Male	English	Australian	Senior management	Accountancy	-

Table 2: Attribute Table of Perth Participants

Communication

Perth participants expected graduates to be effective communicators who could ‘present themselves well in formal or informal situations’. Shared conversations were expected of graduates where ‘team culture and practice is changed to suit the individuals in the team’. Graduates should be able ‘to communicate easily with fellow employees and customers and be able to feel comfortable talking with people at all levels’. Their manner of communications should be ‘accurate, understandable and relevant’. In essence, graduates should be ‘very good at verbal communication’ and be able to give presentations, encourage shared conversations, support team working, work comfortably with people at all levels, present accurate information and deliver understandable communications. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 1)

Graduates should listen carefully and question things they don’t understand. One participant stated, ‘if they don’t understand then I expect graduates to elicit sufficient information for them to assess very accurately what is being communicated to them.

Listening was therefore an important part of communication'. They also needed to hear the real messages being communicated. This would involve 'thinking beyond the words and hearing what is behind the conversation'. Effective communication required an awareness of 'what's going on and an ability to catch' hidden messages. Graduates should be capable of 'tailoring their message to different groups of people and of adjusting communicative actions to suit situations in a dynamic and reactive manner'. Graduates should ensure that recipients understand what was being communicated. Therefore, graduates were expected to construct their message to suit the audience, actively listen to pick-up subtle changes in the status of the communication, consider the impact of the communication on the recipient, and adjust their communication style to suit particular situations. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 2)

Graduates should 'write in a concise and easily understood form without being longwinded or too brief'. Graduate communications should be deliberate and demonstrate the 'ability to highlight key points in a succinct but effective way'. Reports should be as interesting as possible, 'brief, professional and business-like rather than weighty tomes'. Graduates must show they are able to write and speak English in a professional manner. This requires written ability (to be literate in their written ability with high level grammatical usage), oral ability (be able to express themselves and be articulate) and the ability to address clearly the objective of the communication. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 3)

The style of communications should enable 'facts and information to be presented in ways that appeal to the audience'. This would require graduates to 'say what they think in a constructive and unemotional manner. They must be able to demonstrate their knowledge without being bombastic or dictatorial; i.e., talking over the top of people or showing off'. Therefore, participants expected graduates to communicate in a constructive, unemotional and non-threatening manner. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 4)

Graduates were expected to use English. Although employees come from all around the world, 'to work effectively they must use English because it's the dominant language'. Also, because we are in Australia, 'an understanding of the Australian

way of talking is necessary; i.e., Australian cultural norms'. Graduates were not expected to 'have knowledge of other languages'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 5)

Graduates were expected 'to identify an appropriate medium for communication and successfully utilise communication technologies'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 6)

Effective communicators will contribute towards corporate outcomes. 'It is not enough for a graduate to be academically brilliant, they should be well-rounded individuals as well'. Graduates with 'superior written abilities' were attractive to recruiters. Work experience provides graduates with evidence that they could 'speak and write well'. In addition, it 'shows that they can get on in different environments'. Therefore, participants expected graduates to be academically brilliant, have superior communicative capabilities and be able to get on with people. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 7)

Graduates should be able to interpret critically the implications of a communication, without offending recipients. The 'manner should not offend the recipient so this requires graduates to think beyond what is being said'. Graduates should 'pay attention to body language' because it could provide an indicator of how the conversation was going. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 8)

Participants were interested in graduates with Asian language capability, however English fluency was valued most. While 'graduates with other language capabilities would be looked upon favourably it is not a reason to select someone for employment'. If a graduate 'had an Asian language as their primary language and their English was not that good, then they would not impress recruiters'. Graduates from an Asian background 'would be given more leniency when it came to the subtleties of Australian culture'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 9)

Graduates were expected to use their communicative capabilities to influence team outcomes. 'This requires an understanding of the ways or practices that teams use to get things done'. Graduates should use 'words that the team can relate to, if the

group is to reach its goals effectively'. Graduates were expected to provide team leadership. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 10)

It would take graduates a little time to adjust to work situations. They would 'need time to appreciate all the social subtleties active within an organisational environment'. Therefore, graduate communication methods 'would require a period of adjustment to adapt to new practices'. During this period, 'mistakes will occur, however they are an important part of the learning, provided those mistakes are not huge'. Graduates were expected to require 'on-the-job training to learn how to write corporate proposals but they are expected to pick up the technique easily'. Therefore, participants wanted graduates who learnt quickly and appreciated the value of work experience. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 11)

A graduate's writing style should fit-in with business practices. The writing style a graduate would be encouraged to use would depend upon organisational practice. One participant stated, 'I don't like my employees using slang expressions, however provided they can write a lucid report, I'm happy. Graduates can use their own style of writing as long as it was effective. Internal communications did not have to be perfect but they must be able to achieve the communication objective; i.e., I am not worried about minor errors as long as the communication made sense. So, I encouraged graduates to adopt a style of communication that best suits their temperament, as long as that style is professional and enhances the corporate image'. Another participant said, 'the nature of our documents necessitates a very high standard of both content and presentation. Documents have to be absolutely accurate and comments have to be constructed so that unfair political mileage could not be construed from these comments. Therefore, we expect graduates to adopt a particular writing style'. Consequently, graduates were expected to display high standards of written communication but the writing style would depend on organisational practice. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 12)

Cultural differences could impact on business communications but this depends on the amount of interaction with 'non-English speaking cultures'. Participants recognised that 'the style of business in Asian cultures is quite different to the approach taken in Australia. Therefore, companies should pursue what they consider

is the right way to do business'. This came down to a 'question of how business practice is communicated between different cultures.' A participant remarked, 'that some foreign engineers are not comfortable saying no, therefore whenever a question was asked that should receive a negative answer, I had to construct it so that a yes answer would indicate a negative response'. Where necessary graduates were expected to be able to make cultural adjustments to normal business practice. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 13)

Previous work experience provided a useful indicator of whether a graduate would be able to provide early contributions. For example, 'small contributions to the effectiveness of team work' would be a good sign that graduates could contribute early. Graduate performance would only become obvious once they were 'in the workplace environment and this was why work experience was an important indicator' of graduate capabilities. (Appendix 16, Perth – Communication, 14)

In summary, the Perth employers expected graduates to be effective communicators who listened carefully and questioned things they did not understand. Graduates were expected to adjust their communication style to suit particular situations. Participants expected graduates to write concisely and speak English very well, and behave in a manner that was constructive, unemotional and appreciative of Australian cultural norms. Graduates were expected to use communication technology appropriately. Participants wanted effective communicators who could contribute to corporate outcomes. Ideally, graduates would be academically brilliant, have superior communication capabilities and get on 'easily' with people. Participants valued English fluency more than Asian language capability and they expected graduates to provide effective team leadership. Graduates should appreciate the value of work experience and be prepared to adopt a writing style that was appropriate to their employment. Participants realised that business communications may require cultural adjustment. They also indicated that a graduate's previous work experience was a pointer to their capability to contribute early in their employment.

Thinking

Perth participants expected graduates to propose new ideas. Graduates should be 'prepared to consider something new, use rational/structured arguments and challenge the accepted way of doing things'. By stating their view and defending their proposals, graduates were expected to learn how to promote ideas within an organisation. This involved being 'good listeners, taking information from other people, re-interpreting that information and then applying it to different circumstances'. They may also seek 'explanation to improve their understanding'. Graduates were expected to 'listen and apply necessary filters so that they pick up on what is important, reconstruct it and then feed it back for confirmation'. Listening required the graduate to 'focus on the intention of the communication and it require extensive thinking ability'. The 'ability to listen and reason was very important'. To do this well, graduates needed to have 'a quality of openness in their thinking and to want another person's view'. Therefore, graduates were expected to be good listeners who could interpret information, seek clarification, appreciate different points of view, draw inferences and offer alternative suggestions. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 1)

Graduates should think about issues rationally and explain ideas convincingly. They have to 'communicate their thinking'. A slightly different approach to thinking that included being 'logical, structured and rational', would be appreciated. However, it should also include 'an ability to be creative, innovative and to approach an issue from another point of view'. Graduates were expected to 'absorb and assimilate information then produce further information with added value'. On the other hand, graduates who were 'overly creative or innovative could become liabilities'. One participant preferred graduates who could be very subjective with their thinking; 'individualist interpretations of information or personal impressions about situations are not wanted, graduates are expected to apply a very rational, logical and structured approach to their thinking'. Challenging and new ways of thinking would be acceptable as long as it resulted in 'reasonable suggestions'. Therefore, graduates were expected to be creative and innovative in the assimilation of information but their suggestions were expected to be defensible and practical. Their issue resolution methods should suit the graduate's employment situation because some

participants expected graduates to provide challenging and innovative interpretations while other participants would not encourage individual interpretation. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 2)

They must be able ‘to describe the way they identify an issue and how their thoughts develop’. This required an ‘understanding of how their learning occurred especially within complex environments where problems and solutions are not easily defined’. Graduates were expected to understand fully their personal learning techniques and the processes used to accumulate knowledge. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 3)

To handle the complexity of real business, graduates were expected to be aware of major business issues. This required an ‘awareness of the world at large so that they could appreciate the big picture and relate it to the complexity of real life’. Graduates should be well-rounded people who could demonstrate that they had involved themselves in ‘academic study, extra curricula activities, part-time work experience, travel, and interests that are not singular in nature’. This sort of person would be more likely to ‘understand interrelationships between organisations, markets and staff’. They should also ‘be aware that cultural backgrounds impact on the way people communicate and know how to get along with people without big-noting themselves’. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 4)

Participants expected graduates to use new technologies to support their thinking processes. In particular, participants wanted graduates to ‘handle new technologies very well’ but to use them in a manner that helped graduates to ‘construct solutions that make the best of these technologies’. Graduates were expected to utilise technological tools that could usefully enhance their thinking processes. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 5)

Graduates were expected to contribute to corporate outcomes; i.e., ‘to influence what we do and to suggest improvement’. ‘Graduate naivety could benefit our organisation because their ideas are not attached to historical organisational baggage’. They were expected to ‘contribute to planning processes and accept joint ownership of resulting strategies’. This contribution could result in ‘enhanced creative thinking for the organisation’s structured problem solving process’. One

participant commented that some graduates were very average contributors and that graduates would not be allowed to 'stay in their comfort zone'. Graduates 'need to eliminate personal bias and be outcome focused'. Participants recognised that although 'thinking and communication are linked abilities it is easier to see graduate communication than it is to see graduate thinking'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 6)

The promotion of ideas within the prevailing corporate cultures had to be learned. Graduates had to 'learn how to contribute effectively within organisations by defending their ideas and promoting their views effectively'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 7)

Participants wanted graduates to manage their own careers and demonstrate personal purpose. One participant succinctly illustrated this point, 'I expect graduates to own their career; individuals need to show me that they know themselves'. He went on to explain that graduates should 'know their capabilities and why they do things in a particular way'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 8)

Perth participants provided insight into situations that graduates could experience, once employed. Graduates were expected to be able to 'put questions in a way that encourage people to think about themselves and their practices'. For example, 'if graduates are too aggressive at the beginning of their employment, they may attract a negative reaction from their peers and superiors, whereas an inquisitive manner and an approach that involves others would attract a positive reaction'. Graduates would be 'encouraged not to accept everything at face value because whilst it was necessary to apply standard methodologies and not reinvent the wheel, we encourage constructive questioning'. Sometimes there were very clear procedures to be followed. Therefore, participants wanted graduates to question inquisitively procedures and practices but to do so in a manner that afforded their suggestions a good chance of acceptance by their peers and superiors. Participants wanted graduates to be disciplined but would allow constructive criticism. They expected graduates to adjust the tenor of questioning to suit their employment role. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 9)

Work experiences should be used to develop graduate thinking capabilities. Graduate 'intellectual and thinking capabilities are perceived to be powerful tools requiring guidance'. Graduates were expected to make mistakes because 'if mistakes are not being made then nothing is happening'. As long as graduates 'approach issues genuinely and with a view to improvement, then mistakes will be viewed as learning experiences'. There would be controls placed on graduate decisions and 'the amount of latitude associated with decision management would depend on perceptions of an individual graduate's knowledge and experience'. Therefore, participants wanted graduates to learn from mistakes but safeguards would be installed to ensure mistakes were not too costly. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 10)

Participants wanted graduates to develop their listening techniques so that they improved their thinking and communication. (Appendix 16, Perth – Thinking, 11)

In summary, the Perth employers expected graduates to propose new ideas, interpret information and offer alternative suggestions using rational thinking that was defensible and practical. Graduates were expected to add value to information. However, graduates were expected to adjust their issue resolution method to suit their employment situation because some participants expected challenging and innovative interpretations, while others did not encourage individual interpretation. Graduates were expected to understand fully their personal learning processes. Participants expected graduates to have an awareness of major business issues and to be able to utilise new technologies. Participants wanted graduates to contribute to corporate outcomes by learning to promote their ideas within the prevailing corporate culture. They wanted graduates to manage their own careers. Graduates should be inquisitive and question existing practice in a constructive manner that suited their employment status. Participants wanted graduates to develop their thinking capabilities through vocational experience, however appropriate safeguards would be installed.

Importance

Perth participants indicated that effective communication was very important. This included 'how a communication is delivered; i.e., demeanour, body language and appropriate social conduct'. For written communications, 'the way graduates gather information and commit it to paper, is important'. Although communications should 'read well and look good, it is what is being said that is most important'. Effective communication involved 'actually being able to get a message across successfully, whether it is to a customer or a work-mate'. Graduates should 'think first and then communicate'. Participants expected graduates to 'think on their feet'. Therefore, communications should be delivered in a manner that suited the business situation and recipients, and with the prime focus being upon what was said. The purpose was to get the point across as effectively as possible. (Appendix 16, Perth – Importance, 1)

Graduates were expected to understand the deeper meaning behind activities. This required 'a graduate to be alert to the possibility of a deeper meaning' and the ability to analyse the implications. Therefore, it was important for graduates to have an insight into the nature of people and an awareness of the world-at-large. (Appendix 16, Perth – Importance, 2)

Participation and graduate contributions were more important than leadership. (Appendix 16, Perth – Importance, 3)

Graduates should be committed to continual self-improvement. (Appendix 16, Perth – Importance, 4)

Participants indicated that confidence in their capabilities was important for graduates. (Appendix 16, Perth – Importance, 5)

In summary, Perth participants indicated that effective communication delivered in a manner that suited particular business situations was very important. They felt that understanding the deeper meaning behind communication activity was important and that this understanding required effective information processing, an insight into the nature of people and knowledge of the world-at-large. Graduate participation, contribution, self-improvement and confidence were also important.

Perceptions of Graduate Ability

Graduates often lacked common sense in the application of communication techniques. Wisdom was described as 'understanding the differences between people'. There was a 'lack of basic fundamental knowledge about how to work with other people'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 1)

Some graduates displayed elitist arrogance while displaying shortfalls in their own capabilities. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 2)

The 'interpersonal skills graduates displayed are fairly good'. Graduates were confident people who 'could make a favourable first impression'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 3)

Many graduates often held unreal expectations about their organisational role. For example, 'new graduates will be given limited decision making power and they will not have autonomy'. They were expected to 'comply with our organisational directions'. Unfortunately, 'graduates have difficulty accepting that there are limitations'. Organisational practices were there for a reason but 'some graduates just do not accept the necessity for procedure and often re-education is required to enable progress within our structure'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 4)

Possessing theory was fine but many graduates 'lack an understanding of how to implement effectively their knowledge'. They had 'little appreciation of what the world of work is really like and what graduates are expected to do in the work environment'. Consequently, 'graduates that go straight from school to university take longer to develop into effective employees compared with graduates who pick up some work experience along the way'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 5)

Some graduates did not learn from their mistakes. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 6)

Also, some graduates had poor time management skills. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 7)

However, graduates were very good with new technology. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 8)

Most graduates possessed a very good general business understanding and framework from which to launch their careers. (Appendix 16, Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 9)

In summary, Perth participants indicated that graduates were short on communication common sense and lacked knowledge about the implementation of business practice. Some graduates were arrogant, did not appreciate organisational limitations, did not learn from mistakes, had poor time management skills and did not fit into the corporate structure. However, participants felt that graduates had self-confidence, were very good with new technology and possessed a broad perspective.

Useful Graduate Characteristics

Participants indicated that being assertive without being offensive and being individualistic whilst also a team player, were useful graduate characteristics. Graduates should be able 'to relate to other people using friendliness and controlled aggression; so as to be assertive without being offensive'. To be an active team member graduates 'should be prepared to do whatever is necessary to complete our tasks, by getting involved, sharing information and fitting in'. They should be committed to 'cohesive groups and making sure group members are not left out. In this way, a collection of individuals with different strengths and weaknesses' could perform as an effective team. Graduates who could encourage cohesive group dynamics and practice active listening would be useful. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 1)

Graduates with realistic work expectations, an ability to communicate with people and an ability to handle different working environments, would be useful. One

participant said, 'I have noticed a higher turnover in younger graduates whereas graduates with four or five years work experience stay with us longer, therefore we deliberately target graduates in their late twenties'. Also, 'work experience is an important factor in recruitment because even employment in fast food outlets indicates that individuals have a realistic expectation about our work environment'. Mature aged graduates seemed to be more self-confident. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 2)

Self-confidence was a useful graduate characteristic. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 3)

The willingness to learn, a strong work ethic, initiative, tenacity, common sense and integrity were also useful characteristics. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 4)

Graduates who gathered relevant information, focused on important issues, constructed concise arguments and communicated their ideas effectively; would be very attractive employment prospects. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 5)

However, participants indicated that over-confidence, arrogance, stubbornness and unrealistic expectations were not useful graduate characteristics. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 6)

Also, selfishness was not well received. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 7)

Graduates needed to be supportive of organisational philosophy. For example, 'our organisation overtly supports private enterprise and strongly criticises anything that is anti-private enterprise or anti-business. Although graduates should constructively question organisational philosophy, they must be basically supportive'. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 8)

If graduates did not consult their colleagues and actively contribute to business practices, they would not be successful. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 9)

Participants indicated that submissive participation would lead to failure. (Appendix 16, Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 10)

In summary, Perth participants indicated that graduates should be assertive, self-confident and willing to learn. They should display initiative, tenacity, common sense and integrity. Graduates should be team players who encourage cohesive groups. They should be supportive of the corporate philosophy. Participants indicated that previous work experience provided graduates with realistic work expectations, an appreciation of work place communication and the confidence to work in different environments. Participants felt that graduates who focused on important issues, found relevant information, constructed concise arguments and could effectively communicate their ideas, were very attractive. Graduates who were over-confident, arrogant, stubborn, selfish, introverted and who held unrealistic work expectations would not be attractive employees.

Survey Data

Response Rate, Validity and Reliability

Members of two professional business organisations participated in the survey. In both organisations the managers anticipated low response rates based on their recent survey experience. A total of 462 employers completed the questionnaire. Low response rates were received from both samples (20% in Perth and 11% in Singapore). As a result, it was necessary to consider whether the non-response effect reduced the sample size down to a level where it was of limited value. One 'rule of thumb' used to consider whether the sample size is large enough is that there should be:

"100 or more units in each category of the major breakdowns and a minimum of 20 to 50 in the minor breakdowns" (Churchill 1995,644).

This investigation was focused upon the major breakdown between Perth and Singapore. As both population samples provided in excess of 100 responses they were considered to contain useful information.

	Perth	Singapore
questionnaires distributed	1,500	1,500
responses received	301	162
response rate	20%	11%

Table 3: Questionnaire Response Rates

Another effect of non-response is that "non-respondents may differ systematically from respondents" (Holt 1997:593). "Keeping track of those responding to initial contact and follow-ups" then comparing statistics that describe these sub-groups for significant difference could be used as a procedure to estimate non-response bias (Churchill 1995:673). Using the Mann-Whitney test, no significant differences between the initial and follow-up groupings of the Perth data were found; therefore, non-response bias was estimated to be insignificant for the Perth survey. Three of the Singapore items (7% of all items) indicated a difference between initial and follow-up groups. However, the Singaporean and Perth responses to these particular items displayed similar option frequency distributions. Therefore, because the Perth data was considered to be un-biased (and the vast majority of the Singapore items replicated that view), the Singaporean non-response bias was estimated to be insignificant.

Questionnaire items describing graduate thinking and communication included an option to indicate whether the range of options offered to the respondent were suitable. Given that these items were constructed to reflect aspects of issues arising from interview data and that the survey data was derived from small samples, some level of ‘unsuitability’ was expected. If the ‘unsuitable’ option were selected, respondents would have indicated there was not an option available to them that adequately described their response. ‘Construct validity’ (Churchill 1995:535) would be enhanced if the proportion of respondents indicating an ‘unsuitable’ response, was low. The average ‘unsuitable’ response for both samples was 2%. This was considered to be very low and to indicate ‘construct validity’. However, Perth respondents indicated (with scores above 2%) that the Spoken Asian Languages, Thinking Method, Multicultural Consideration and Contributor items could have been ‘unsuitable’ in some respects. Also, in Singapore, the Continuous Improvement item could have been ‘unsuitable’. This result indicated that a future refinement of survey items may produce lower ‘unsuitability’ response rates.

Concept;	Perth %	Singapore %
Spoken English	0.0	0.0
Written English	0.0	0.0
Spoken Asian Languages	10.0	1.2
Multicultural Consideration	5.0	1.9
Effective Communication	1.3	0.6
Continuous Improvement	1.0	2.5
Thinking Method	3.7	1.2
Knowledge Contribution	0.7	0.6
Creative Ideas	1.3	0.6
Initiative	0.3	0.6
Contributor	5.7	0.6

Table 4: Proportion of Respondents indicating Unsuitable Item Options

If items that measured an underlying concept displayed option response patterns that were similar, then internal consistency across these items would have been indicated. To measure option response similarity, all item options were allocated an interval number (i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) and a reliability coefficient alpha was calculated. This data transformation was used to enable an “equivalence measure of reliability focused on the internal consistency or internal homogeneity of the set of items” (Churchill 1995:541). Although the survey data was ordinal, this procedure is appropriate if options reflect a coherent ranking structure. In the case of spoken and written English, the perception items and the characteristic items, this ranking requirement was satisfied.

Although expectations for spoken and written language capability could differ, it was reasonable to expect that option response patterns for Spoken English and Written English would be similar; e.g., respondents who indicated high expectations for written English could also be expected to have indicated high expectations for spoken English. A moderate to high level of internal consistency between these items was indicated. The sixteen perception items were based upon issues arising from the interview data; however, these items were similar to previous research (Mayer 1993; B/HERT 1992; B/HERT 1993a; B/HERT 1995; Allan 1996; Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994; Hawkins 1995). (See Appendix 7.) A high level of internal consistency between these items was indicated. The sixteen characteristic items were encompassed by the adjective 'useful'. This unusual approach to characteristic item design provided mixed results. Perth respondents indicated a moderate level of internal consistency whereas Singaporean respondents indicated a high level of internal consistency. This result indicated that describing graduate characteristics by their usefulness could be further refined.

Reliability of;	Perth coefficient alpha	Singapore coefficient alpha
spoken English & written English	0.6976	0.8133
perception of graduate ability	0.9034	0.9096
useful graduate characteristics	0.4881	0.8361

Table 5: Internal Consistency or Homogeneity of Item Sets

Demographic Considerations

Male and female response proportions were opposite in each sample. Approximately 30% of Perth responses came from females while 30% of Singapore responses came from males. Six items indicated significantly different responses when categorised by gender.

Participants that indicated they were;	Perth %	Singapore %
Female	29.6	72.3
Male	70.4	27.7

Table 6: Gender Demographics

Responses grouped by age showed that the majority of Perth respondents were over 40 while the majority of Singaporean respondents were under 40. Four item responses (from Perth respondents) indicated significant differences based on age. There were no significantly different item responses from Singaporean respondents.

Participants that indicated they were;	Perth %	Singapore %
less than 31	9.4	48.8
31 to 40	23.7	29.0
41 to 50	39.8	17.9
greater than 50	27.1	4.3

Table 7: Age Demographics

The proportion of respondents holding a University degree was very high. Singapore's percentage was higher than Perth's. The vast majority of respondents spoke English as a first language. However, while a large majority of Singaporean respondents spoke an Asian language, the vast majority of Perth respondents only spoke English. Nearly all the Perth respondents held a management position. Over 60% of the Singaporean respondents held management positions. A number of item responses indicated significant differences based on these demographic groupings.

Participants that indicated they;	Perth %	Singapore %
held a University degree	64.5	72.2
spoke English as a 1 st language	95.3	90.6
spoke an Asian language	8.8	93.2
held a management position	96.4	63.6

Table 8: Other Demographics

Note : A Chi-square test was used to test independence between demographics and survey items. Survey items with significantly different demographics are detailed in Appendix 11. For example, Singaporean male respondents indicated a response to the creative ideas item that was different to Singaporean female respondents. Appropriate comments have been included within the following discussion of survey items.

Dichotomous Responses

Questionnaire items describing graduate thinking and communication were designed to extract yes/no dichotomous responses by combining options. Each item provided five options. If the 5th option were selected respondents would have indicated that the first four option choices were unsuitable. However, respondents choosing the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th options could have their choice transformed into a yes or no response by using the following rule:

- if the 2nd, 3rd or 4th option were selected respondents would have indicated a **YES** response.
- if the 1st option were selected respondents would have indicated a **NO** response.

Spoken English: (Please tick one box only.)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not expect graduates to speak English.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I expect graduates to speak English but I would accept a few vocabulary or sentence construction errors provided they could make themselves understood.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I expect graduates to speak English easily and use a standard of English that indicates they are capable business professionals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I expect graduates to speak excellent English and to give the impression of being highly educated in the use of the English language.
<input type="checkbox"/>	None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Table 9: Example of Response Options for the Spoken English Item

Therefore, in the above example (Table 9), respondents that ticked the 5th box would have indicated that the other available options did not adequately describe their response to 'Spoken English'. If the respondent ticked the 1st box they would have indicated that they did not expect graduates to speak English. Respondents ticking either the 2nd, 3rd or 4th boxes would have indicated that they expected graduates to speak English.

Using this transformation process it was found that all, except one, of the communication items received an affirmative responses. The vast majority of respondents expected graduates to speak and write English, to use English at work, to start their employment with the ability to communicate effectively, and to have the capacity to improve continuously their communication ability. The disagreement was over Asian languages. Perth respondents did not expect graduates to speak an Asian language whereas Singaporean respondents did.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %
be able to speak English	99.0	99.4
be able to write in English	100.0	100.0
be able to speak an Asian language	7.8	95.0
work in an environment where English is used	99.7	99.4
be able to communicate effectively at the start of their employment	99.3	96.3
be able to improve continuously their communicative ability	100.0	100.0

Table 10: Affirmative Responses to the Communication Items

The thinking items attracted almost total agreement in both cities. The vast majority of respondents expected graduates to have thought about their thinking processes, possess practical business knowledge, be creative, use their initiative, and to contribute to the organisation.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %
have analysed their method of thinking	97.9	98.8
possess practical business knowledge	94.3	94.4
utilise creativity	99.7	99.4
apply their initiative	95.6	99.4
contribute using their communicative and/or thinking capabilities	96.8	93.2

Table 11: Affirmative Responses to the Thinking Items

Expectations

Frequency distributions for the communication and thinking item option responses were calculated for each city and the proportions compared. Responses were considered to be dissimilar where a statistically significant difference was found between samples.

It should be noted that the Mann-Whitney statistical test, for two independent samples from the same population, was used to determine whether there was a 'significant difference' between Perth and Singaporean responses, with 95% confidence. This test was used throughout the 'survey data' analysis.

Spoken English was responded to differently in each city, with (proportionally) about twice as many Perth respondents expecting an excellent standard of English, compared to Singaporean respondents. Also, twice as many Singaporeans were prepared to accept a lower standard of English. However, the majority of all respondents expected graduates to 'speak English easily and use a standard of English that indicated they were capable business professionals'.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be able to speak English	1.0	0.6	Yes
speak English but participants would accept a few vocabulary or sentence construction errors provided graduates could make themselves understood	6.3	13.6	
speak English easily and use a standard of English that indicated graduates were capable business professionals	64.1	69.1	
speak excellent English and give the impression of being highly educated in the use of the English language	28.6	16.7	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	0.0	0.0	
Total number of valid responses	301	162	

Table 12: Spoken English - Frequency Distribution

Written English also received different responses. More Perth respondents, compared to Singaporean respondents, expected an excellent standard of written English and almost three times as many Singaporeans were prepared to accept a lower standard of written English. However, the majority of all respondents expected graduates to 'write in English easily and use a standard of English that indicated they were capable business professionals'. In addition, Perth respondents who possessed a University degree expected less graduates to excel.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be able to write in English	0.0	0.0	Yes
write in English but participants would accept a few spelling or grammatical errors provided the message was clear	5.0	14.2	
write in English easily and use a standard of English that indicated graduates were capable business professionals	65.4	67.9	
write excellent English and to give the impression of being highly educated in the application of the English language	29.6	17.9	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	0.0	0.0	
Total number of valid responses	301	162	

Table 13: Written English - Frequency Distribution

The 'speaking an Asian language' item attracted a vastly different response. Singaporean respondents expected graduates to speak an Asian language whereas Perth respondents did not. Nearly half of the Singaporeans expected 'at least one Asian language but would accept a few vocabulary or sentence construction errors provided graduates could make themselves understood'. The other half expected a professional standard of Asian language ability. It is noted that 10% of Perth

respondents indicated that the choice of options available for this item was not suitable. This result indicates that refinement of item options could be considered.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be able to speak an Asian language	83.0	4.9	Yes
speaking at least one Asian language but participants would accept a few vocabulary or sentence construction errors provided graduates could make themselves understood	4.7	48.1	
speaking at least one Asian language easily and use that language in a way that indicated graduates were capable business professionals	2.0	42.6	
speaking at least one Asian language excellently and give the impression of being highly educated in the use of that language	0.3	3.1	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	10.0	1.2	
Total number of valid responses	300	162	

Table 14: Spoken Asian Language - Frequency Distribution

The work environment language alternatives were responded to differently. Although the vast majority of all respondents expected English to be used, Singaporeans expected other languages to be used in the work place, whereas only half as many Perth respondents expected the same working environment. The majority of Perth respondents expected graduates to 'work in an environment where English is the only language used and where business practices treat everyone with equal consideration'. This result replicates the 'speaking Asian language' item. It is noted that 5% of Perth respondents indicated that the choice of options was not suitable thereby indicating that a refinement of item options could be worthwhile.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not work in an environment where English is used	0.3	0.6	Yes
work in an environment where English is the only language used and where business practices treat everyone with equal consideration	55.1	6.2	
work in an environment where English is the official language but other languages can be used, and where business practices are changed to facilitate cultural differences	38.9	85.1	
work in an environment where only a little English is spoken and where an extensive understanding of local languages and cultural practices are most important	0.7	6.2	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	5.0	1.9	
Total number of valid responses	301	161	

Table 15: Multicultural Considerations - Frequency Distribution

Different responses were received to 'effective communication'. Although the majority of all respondents expected graduates to communicate by being friendly and approachable, more Perth respondents expected a 'matter-of-fact and business like'

approach. In addition, more Singaporeans expected graduates to learn from experienced employees. In Perth, young respondents favoured the 'friendly and approachable' approach to effective communications.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be able to communicate effectively at the start of their employment	0.7	3.7	Yes
become effective communicators by learning from other employees who are experienced communicators	7.4	16.1	
communicate effectively by being friendly and approachable so that co-operative relationships develop	60.2	60.9	
communicate effectively by being 'matter-of-fact' and 'business-like' clearly addressing the objective of the communication then asking questions to ensure understanding	30.4	18.6	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	1.3	0.6	
Total number of valid responses	299	161	

Table 16: Effective Communications - Frequency Distribution

Continuous improvement received a similar response from both cities. The majority of respondents expected graduates to 'improve their communications by developing a professional style of communicating'. However, 29% of all respondents expected graduates to improve their own personal communication style. In Perth, most respondents who possessed a University degree expected graduates to improve their own personal communications. In Singapore, respondents holding a management position expected graduates to develop a professional style of communicating. It should be noted that 2.5% of Singaporean respondents indicated that the choice of options was not suitable which suggests that refinement of item options may be useful.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be able to improve continuously their communicative ability	0.0	0.0	No
improve their communications by learning the employers corporate style of communicating	12.7	18.8	
improve their communications by developing their personal style	28.7	28.8	
improve their communications by developing a professional style of communicating	57.7	50.0	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	1.0	2.5	
Total number of valid responses	300	160	

Table 17: Continuous Improvement - Frequency Distribution

The thinking method item received a similar response from both cities. The majority of respondents expected graduates to utilise structured methods of thinking.

However, this majority was spread across expectations to locate the correct solution, to find a range of alternatives, or to propose intuitive solutions. It should be noted that 3.7% of Perth respondents indicated that the choice of options was not suitable, suggesting that refinement of item options should be considered.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not have analysed their method of thinking	2.0	1.2	No
use a structured method of thinking that rationally considers all information and lists a complete set of alternatives so that the correct solution can be found	37.5	34.2	
use a structured method of thinking that views all information as incomplete and therefore offers a range of possible alternatives for consideration	34.8	34.8	
approach each situation intuitively so that creative and unusual solutions are proposed	22.1	28.6	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	3.7	1.2	
Total number of valid responses	299	161	

Table 18: Thinking Method - Frequency Distribution

Knowledge contribution was responded to similarly in both cities with the majority of respondents expecting graduates to take time to become familiar with employer practices. However, a sizable proportion of respondents expected graduates to use an understanding of the ‘world at large’ when applying their specialist business knowledge. In Singapore, more respondents holding a management position expected graduates to take time to become familiar with the employer’s practices.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not possess practical business knowledge	5.7	5.6	No
use an understanding of the ‘world at large’ as graduates apply their specialist business knowledge within our organisation	23.7	30.4	
become familiar with our ways of doing business then apply their specialist business knowledge	68.6	57.1	
immediately apply their specialist business knowledge	1.3	6.2	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	0.7	0.6	
Total number of valid responses	299	161	

Table 19: Knowledge Contributors - Frequency Distribution

The response to ‘creativity’ was not significantly different in Perth and Singapore. The vast majority of respondents expected graduates to be creative. However, this majority was split evenly between a little practical creativity, creative individual contributions, or encouraging team creativity. In Perth, more of the younger respondents expected graduates to use creativity within teams. Singaporean female

respondents expected graduates to be individually creative. In the case of Singaporean respondents who were holders of a management position they expected graduates to be individually creative.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not utilise creativity	0.7	0.6	No
bring a little creativity to their work however graduate ideas must be practical	29.7	25.3	
be creative, innovative and to 'see things differently', and to use their individuality to propose new practical ideas	35.7	43.0	
to encourage team creativity and innovation, and to help teams tackle issues differently so that teams propose new practical ideas	32.7	30.4	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	1.3	0.6	
Total number of valid responses	300	158	

Table 20: Creative Ideas - Frequency Distribution

Initiative was responded to differently in each city. Although the majority of all respondents expected graduates to be team players, more Singaporeans (than Perth respondents) were prepared to encourage independent initiatives and less Singaporeans indicated they would restrict initiative (by limiting decision-making capability). In Perth, more of the Asian language speaking respondents expected graduates to use their initiative in teams.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not apply their initiative	4.4	0.6	Yes
use their initiative as they react to business situations but limit their decision-making ability	36.9	24.1	
be team players who use their initiative to encourage team outputs	40.9	48.1	
use their initiative, make decisions independently and accept personal responsibility	17.4	26.5	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	0.3	0.6	
Total number of valid responses	298	162	

Table 21: Initiative - Frequency Distribution

The 'contributor' item received different responses in each city. The majority of all respondents expected contributions using either thinking, or a combination of thinking and communication. However, in the case of respondents who expected contributions to come from communication, there were more Singaporean than Perth respondents. Also, in Singapore, more respondents possessing a University degree expected contributions from communication. It should be noted that 5.7% of Perth respondents indicated that the choice of options was not suitable and this may indicate that item options could be refined.

Participants expected graduates to;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
contribute using their communicative and/or thinking capabilities	3.0	6.8	Yes
contribute by using their thinking capabilities to propose new ideas	39.8	42.2	
contribute by using their communicative capabilities to improve our business conversations	11.7	16.8	
contribute by combining thinking and communication so that our business conversations are understood fully	39.8	33.5	
or none of the survey options were acceptable to the respondent	5.7	0.6	
Total number of valid responses	299	161	

Table 22: Contributors - Frequency Distribution

Perceptions of Graduate Ability

Respondents were provided with six options for each 'ability' item.

Graduate Performance:

Please circle a number to indicate how well graduates complete these tasks.

Instruction Guide:

- 1 = **fail** (graduates do not have the ability to complete this task).
- 2 = **need help** (supervision is needed to complete this task).
- 3 = **average** (graduates can complete and produce an acceptable result).
- 4 = **good standard** (graduates complete this task professionally).
- 5 = **excellent** (all my expectations are exceeded).
- N = I have **no opinion** about a graduate's ability to complete this task.

Table 23: Options Choices for Ability Items

The last option enabled respondents to avoid the item while the remaining options were intended to indicate perceptions ranging from failure to excellence. Although the data will support more detailed analysis (e.g., the proportion of respondents that indicate 'all my expectations were exceeded'), this investigation was designed to focus on three categories of responses that described whether a graduate would:

- **fail or need help** - graduates did not have ability to complete the task or they need help to complete a task (i.e., 'fail' or 'need help' combined),
- **produce an average but acceptable result** - (i.e., the 'average' option), or
- **achieve a professional or excellent result** - graduates completed this task professionally or they exceeded all expectations (i.e., 'good standard' or 'excellent' combined).

Using these transformed options the frequency distributions were calculated for each sample and the proportions compared. Responses were considered to be dissimilar where statistically significant differences were found between samples.

Writing business letters in English was responded to differently in Perth and Singapore. Over 25% of Perth respondents indicated that graduates failed in this task compared with only 7% of Singaporeans. In addition, a larger proportion of Singaporeans indicated graduates achieved professional results. In Perth, most respondents possessing a University degree indicated graduates achieved an average result.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	25.7	7.7	Yes
produce an average but acceptable result	43.3	47.7	
achieve a professional or excellent result	31.0	44.6	
Total number of valid responses	226	155	

Table 24: Writing Business Letters in English - Frequency Distribution

Preparing detailed written reports in English also received different responses in each city. Nearly 24% of Perth respondents indicated that graduates failed in this task, compared to 10% of Singaporeans. Also, a much larger proportion of Singaporeans indicated graduates achieved average results.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	23.9	9.8	Yes
produce an average but acceptable result	39.0	50.3	
achieve a professional or excellent result	37.1	39.9	
Total number of valid responses	218	153	

Table 25: Preparing Detailed Written Reports in English - Frequency Distribution

Both Perth and Singaporean respondents indicated that graduates were very good at listening to instructions from seniors. However, a sizable proportion of respondents indicated graduates were average but acceptable at this task.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	12.7	3.9	No
produce an average but acceptable result	34.3	42.9	
achieve a professional or excellent result	53.0	53.2	
Total number of valid responses	230	154	

Table 26: Listening to Instructions from Seniors - Frequency Distribution

A similar result occurred in relation to asking relevant questions. The majority of respondents indicated that graduates were professional, however many respondents indicated graduates were average.

Asking relevant questions			
Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	7.9	6.4	No
produce an average but acceptable result	37.4	42.3	
achieve a professional or excellent result	54.7	51.3	
Total number of valid responses	227	156	

Table 27: Asking Relevant Questions - Frequency Distribution

Graduates were considered 'average' at convincing people to accept an idea. The majority of respondents from both cities indicated that graduates were able to convince people to accept an idea but most respondents felt that graduates were average at this task. In Perth, older respondents indicated graduates achieved average results.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	27.0	14.3	No
produce an average but acceptable result	46.4	61.0	
achieve a professional or excellent result	26.6	24.7	
Total number of valid responses	222	154	

Table 28: Convincing People to Accept an Idea - Frequency Distribution

Although the majority of respondents indicated that graduates were able to handle arguments and conflict, most of these respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results. Also, a large proportion of respondents indicated that graduates failed in this task.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	45.7	36.2	No
produce an average but acceptable result	35.4	44.7	
achieve a professional or excellent result	18.9	19.1	
Total number of valid responses	223	152	

Table 29: Handling Arguments and Conflict - Frequency Distribution

Making a formal presentation was perceived differently in Perth and Singapore. Although the majority of respondents from each city indicated graduates could make formal presentations, the Singaporean proportion was larger. Also, less Singaporeans felt that graduates failed at this task.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	27.1	16.2	Yes
produce an average but acceptable result	36.7	41.9	
achieve a professional or excellent result	36.2	41.9	
Total number of valid responses	221	155	

Table 30: Making a Formal Presentation - Frequency Distribution

Converting theory into practical solutions was also perceived differently in Perth and Singapore. While the majority of respondents indicated graduates were average, more Perth respondents indicated that graduates failed. Also, a larger proportion of Singaporeans felt graduates achieved a professional result.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	28.0	18.8	Yes
produce an average but acceptable result	52.9	53.9	
achieve a professional or excellent result	19.1	27.3	
Total number of valid responses	225	154	

Table 31: Converting Theory into Practical Solutions - Frequency Distribution

Respondents from both cities indicated that graduates were able to suggest ideas that lead to valuable contributions. However, this majority was split between average or professional results. In Perth, more respondents with a university degree, compared to those without a degree, felt graduates needed help.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	8.9	7.9	No
produce an average but acceptable result	45.3	55.6	
achieve a professional or excellent result	45.8	36.5	
Total number of valid responses	225	151	

Table 32: Suggesting Ideas that lead to Valuable Contributions - Frequency Distribution

Although the vast majority of respondents in both cities indicated that graduates were very good with new technologies, the Perth response was different to Singapore's; more Singaporeans felt that graduates achieved an average result.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	1.3	2.6	Yes
produce an average but acceptable result	11.0	24.5	
achieve a professional or excellent result	87.7	72.9	
Total number of valid responses	227	155	

Table 33: Using New Technologies - Frequency Distribution

Writing business letters in an Asian language was perceived differently in each city. Over 82% of Perth respondents, compared to 43% of Singaporeans, indicated that graduates fail at this task. Many Singaporeans felt that graduates could complete this task.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	82.0	43.0	Yes
produce an average but acceptable result	12.8	40.8	
achieve a professional or excellent result	5.2	16.2	
Total number of valid responses	78	142	

Table 34: Writing Business Letters in an Asian Language - Frequency Distribution

Getting on with people from different cultures was perceived differently in each city. Over 70% of Perth respondents indicated that graduates were very good at this task. However, in Singapore, 51% indicated graduates were very good and 41% felt they were average.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	8.3	8.3	Yes
produce an average but acceptable result	20.9	41.0	
achieve a professional or excellent result	70.8	50.7	
Total number of valid responses	206	156	

Table 35: Getting on with People from Different Cultures - Frequency Distribution

Planning their personal work schedules was also perceived differently in each city. Over 25% of Perth respondents, compared to only 7% of Singaporeans, indicated graduates failed in this task. In addition, more Singaporeans felt graduates achieved professional results. In Perth, older respondents indicated a professional result was achieved.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	25.2	6.5	Yes
produce an average but acceptable result	43.4	49.7	
achieve a professional or excellent result	31.4	43.8	
Total number of valid responses	226	153	

Table 36: Planning their Personal Work Schedules - Frequency Distribution

The vast majority of respondents in both cities indicated that graduates were able to help teams to produce outcomes. However, this majority was split between an average or professional result.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	16.3	7.3	No
produce an average but acceptable result	42.1	55.6	
achieve a professional or excellent result	41.6	37.1	
Total number of valid responses	221	151	

Table 37: Helping Teams to Produce Required Outcomes - Frequency Distribution

In Perth and Singapore, the vast majority of respondents indicated that graduates were able to gain the acceptance of their work-mates. However, this majority was split between an average or professional result.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	10.5	8.4	No
produce an average but acceptable result	43.2	54.5	
achieve a professional or excellent result	46.3	37.1	
Total number of valid responses	229	154	

Table 38: Gaining Acceptance from their Work-mates - Frequency Distribution

The vast majority of respondents indicated that graduates were able to work successfully with junior staff. However, most respondents indicated that graduates working with junior staff achieved an average result.

Respondents indicated that when attempting this task graduates will;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
fail or need help	16.6	11.5	No
produce an average but acceptable result	46.6	50.0	
achieve a professional or excellent result	36.8	38.5	
Total number of valid responses	223	156	

Table 39: Successfully Working with Junior Staff - Frequency Distribution

Useful Graduate Characteristics

Respondents were provided with six options for each 'characteristic' item.

<p>Useful Graduate Characteristics:</p> <p>Please circle a number to indicate the usefulness of these characteristics in a graduate.</p> <p>Instruction Guide:</p> <p>1 = not useful (I would not want to work with these graduates).</p> <p>2 = can be useful (this characteristic would need careful supervision).</p> <p>3 = useful (a handy characteristic for an employee to possess).</p> <p>4 = very useful (this characteristic should lead to valuable contributions).</p> <p>5 = must have (this is an important characteristic that we need to reach our goals).</p> <p>N = I have no opinion about this activity.</p>
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Table 40: Options Choices for Characteristics Items

The last option enabled respondents to avoid the item while the remaining options were intended to place the characteristics in a range from 'not useful' to 'must have'. Although the data will support more detailed analysis (e.g., important characteristics that are needed to reach goals), this investigation was designed to focus on three categories of response to describe the characteristics that would:

- **not be useful** - respondents would not want to work with graduates (i.e., 'not useful' option),
- **be useful with careful supervision** - respondents felt the characteristic could be useful but it required careful supervision (i.e., 'can be useful' option), or
- **be useful or very useful or must have** - respondents indicated the characteristic was handy or would lead to a valuable contribution or was important (i.e., combining the 'useful' or 'very useful' or 'must have' options).

Using these transformed options the frequency distributions were calculated for each sample and the proportions compared. Responses were considered to be dissimilar where statistically significant differences were found between samples.

The value of ‘working best under close supervision and guidance’ was not well received in Perth or Singapore, however the Singaporeans were more accepting of this characteristic. Over 44% of Perth respondents, compared to 37% of Singaporeans, indicated that this characteristic was not useful. In addition, 35% of Perth respondents, compared to 23% of Singaporeans, felt it required careful supervision.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	44.6	37.3	Yes
be useful with careful supervision	34.9	23.3	
be useful or very useful or must have	20.5	39.4	
Total number of valid responses	258	150	

Table 41: Work Best under Close Supervision and Guidance - Frequency Distribution

Disagreeing with the way the employer ran the business was responded to differently in each city. Perth respondents were less accepting of this characteristic. 30% of Perth respondents, compared to 13% of Singaporeans, indicated that this characteristic was not useful. Although 29% of Perth respondents felt this was a useful characteristic, the Singaporeans were much more accepting, at 47%. In Perth, more male than female respondents indicated this characteristic was not useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	30.6	12.9	Yes
be useful with careful supervision	40.8	40.1	
be useful or very useful or must have	28.6	47.0	
Total number of valid responses	255	147	

Table 42: Disagree with the Way the Business is Run - Frequency Distribution

Graduates that were supportive of employer ideas and methods were considered useful. However, a third of respondents indicated that this characteristic required careful supervision. In Perth, more females than males indicated that this characteristic was not useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	20.2	17.2	No
be useful with careful supervision	31.1	30.5	
be useful or very useful or must have	48.7	52.3	
Total number of valid responses	257	151	

Table 43: Totally Supportive of Employer Ideas and Methods - Frequency Distribution

The vast majority of respondents indicated that graduates who made independent decisions were useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	2.7	1.9	No
be useful with careful supervision	15.2	16.1	
be useful or very useful or must have	82.1	82.0	
Total number of valid responses	256	155	

Table 44: Make Independent Decisions - Frequency Distribution

Working alone with minimal supervision was considered useful by a large majority of respondents. In Perth, more respondents without a University degree, compared to respondents with one, indicated this characteristic was useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	5.1	4.6	No
be useful with careful supervision	16.3	20.9	
be useful or very useful or must have	78.6	74.5	
Total number of valid responses	257	153	

Table 45: Work best Alone with Minimal Supervision - Frequency Distribution

In both cities, the majority of respondents indicated that competitive graduates were useful. However, nearly 30% of respondents indicated that this characteristic required careful supervision. Further analysis suggested that in Perth, more male respondents, compared to females, indicated supervision was needed. In Singapore, more females than males indicated it was useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	26.1	19.7	No
be useful with careful supervision	30.7	27.0	
be useful or very useful or must have	43.2	53.3	
Total number of valid responses	257	152	

Table 46: Competitive and Wanting to be the Winner - Frequency Distribution

Graduates that were happy to participate without special recognition were useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	1.6	0.7	No
be useful with careful supervision	7.4	9.9	
be useful or very useful or must have	91.0	89.4	
Total number of valid responses	256	152	

Table 47: Participation without Special Recognition - Frequency Distribution

The response in Perth to 'not all rules have to be taken seriously' was negative compared to that in Singapore. Over 60% of Singaporeans, compared with 29% of Perth respondents, indicated it was useful. Whereas, a third of Perth respondents, compared to 10% of Singaporeans, indicated the idea was not useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	37.4	10.5	Yes
be useful with careful supervision	33.9	27.3	
be useful or very useful or must have	28.7	62.2	
Total number of valid responses	254	143	

Table 48: Not all Rules have to be Taken Seriously - Frequency Distribution

The response in Singapore to 'not being prepared to bend the rules' was not as accepting as that in Perth. A third of Singaporean respondents, compared to 18% in Perth, felt this characteristic was not useful. In addition, more Perth respondents (44%) than Singaporeans (38%) indicated it was useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	18.1	32.5	Yes
be useful with careful supervision	37.8	29.1	
be useful or very useful or must have	44.1	38.4	
Total number of valid responses	249	151	

Table 49: Not Prepared to 'Bend' the Rules - Frequency Distribution

Graduates that worked only with experienced people in new situations were not considered useful. However, the Singaporean response was not as negative as that in Perth. Nearly half the Perth respondents felt these graduates would not be useful, in addition, only 19% (compared to 37% of Singaporeans) felt they were useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	49.6	39.6	Yes
be useful with careful supervision	31.7	23.5	
be useful or very useful or must have	18.7	36.9	
Total number of valid responses	252	149	

Table 50: Work with Experienced People in New Situations - Frequency Distribution

Graduates that were very confident of their ability to tackle new situations were useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	0.4	0.7	No
be useful with careful supervision	13.6	13.8	
be useful or very useful or must have	86.0	85.5	
Total number of valid responses	258	152	

Table 51: Confident in New Situations - Frequency Distribution

Graduates that said they had a lot to learn were useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	4.7	2.0	No
be useful with careful supervision	10.2	15.0	
be useful or very useful or must have	85.1	83.0	
Total number of valid responses	255	153	

Table 52: Lot to Learn - Frequency Distribution

The majority of respondents indicated that graduates who never make mistakes were useful. However, a large proportion of respondents indicated that this characteristic was not useful. In Singapore, more males than females felt this characteristic was not useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	40.1	30.8	No
be useful with careful supervision	14.5	14.4	
be useful or very useful or must have	45.4	54.8	
Total number of valid responses	242	146	

Table 53: Never Make Mistakes - Frequency Distribution

Graduates that worked only with people from their own country were not considered useful. Although nearly all Perth respondents indicated these graduates would not be useful, 20% of Singaporeans felt they were useful. In Singapore, more males than females indicated that these graduates were not useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	96.0	68.8	Yes
be useful with careful supervision	2.8	11.0	
be useful or very useful or must have	1.2	20.2	
Total number of valid responses	251	154	

Table 54: Work with People from their Own Country - Frequency Distribution

Graduates that were sensitive to cultural customs and traditions were useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	2.8	5.8	No
be useful with careful supervision	7.6	4.5	
be useful or very useful or must have	89.6	89.7	
Total number of valid responses	250	154	

Table 55: Sensitive to Cultural Customs and Traditions - Frequency Distribution

Graduates who worked best in teams where decisions were shared were useful.

Respondents indicated that this characteristic would;	Perth %	Singapore %	Significant difference
not be useful	0.0	0.0	No
be useful with careful supervision	7.8	5.2	
be useful or very useful or must have	92.2	94.8	
Total number of valid responses	257	155	

Table 56: Work best in Teams where Decisions are Shared - Frequency Distribution

Ranked Responses

Both the perception and characteristic item responses were ranked and compared to ascertain whether the sample rankings were similar. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was calculated because both scales were ordinal (Churchill 1995,929). Although the coefficient was measured across all sixteen items in each scale, only the 'top 5' rankings were compared. Two rankings were prepared for each scale. The 'worst' and 'best' ability rankings were created from the perception item responses. In addition, the 'undesirable' and 'desirable' characteristics rankings were created from the characteristic items. The correlation coefficients indicated strong and significant associations between the rankings created from the Perth and Singaporean responses.

Perth and Singapore ranks compared;	Spearman's rho	Significant
'worst' ability	0.791	Yes
'best' ability	0.744	Yes
'undesirable' characteristics	0.921	Yes
'desirable' characteristics	0.932	Yes

Table 57: Rankings - Correlation Coefficients

The 'worst' graduate abilities were calculated. Both the Perth and Singaporean respondent rankings were the same. However, Perth respondents were more negative in their assessment of these abilities, than Singaporeans.

Items	Perth		Singapore	
	Sum of 'Fail' and 'Need Help' as % of responses	Rank	Sum of 'Fail' and 'Need Help' as % of responses	Rank
Writing business letters in an Asian language	82.1	1	43.0	1
handling arguments and conflict	45.7	2	36.2	2
converting theory into practical solutions	28.0	3	18.8	3
Making a formal presentation	27.1	4	16.1	4
convincing people to accept an idea	27.0	5	14.3	5

Table 58: Worst Graduate Abilities - Rankings

The 'best' graduate abilities were calculated. Both the Perth and Singaporean respondents selected the same four 'abilities' in their top four. However, the fifth ranked 'ability' was different in each city. Perth respondents ranked 'gaining acceptance from their work-mates' as fifth, whereas the Singaporean ranked it eleventh. The Singaporeans ranked 'writing business letters in English' as fifth, whereas the Perth respondents ranked it twelfth.

Items	Perth		Singapore	
	Sum of 'Good standard' & 'Excellent' as % of responses	Rank	Sum of 'Good standard' & 'Excellent' as % of responses	Rank
using new technologies	87.7	1	72.9	1
Getting on with people from different cultures	70.9	2	50.6	4
asking relevant questions	54.6	3	51.3	3
listening to instructions from seniors	53.0	4	53.2	2
Gaining acceptance from their work-mates	46.3	5	37.0	11
Writing business letters in English	31.0	12	44.5	5

Table 59: Best Graduate Abilities - Rankings

Perth and Singaporean respondents agreed upon the four most undesirable graduates characteristics of graduates. However, there was disagreement over the fifth ranked item. Perth respondents ranked 'realised that not all rules had to be taken seriously', in fifth place. Singaporean respondents ranked 'are not prepared to bend the rules', in fifth.

Items	Perth		Singapore	
	'Not useful' as % of responses	Rank	'Not useful' as % of responses	Rank
only working with people from their own country	96.0	1	68.8	1
only work with experienced people in new situations	49.6	2	39.6	2
work best under close supervision and guidance	44.6	3	37.3	3
never make mistakes	40.1	4	30.8	5
realise that not all rules have to be taken seriously	37.4	5	10.5	9
are not prepared to 'bend' the rules	18.1	9	32.5	4

Table 60: Undesirable Characteristics - Rankings

Perth and Singaporean respondents substantially agreed upon the ranking of desirable graduate characteristics.

Items	Perth		Singapore	
	Sum of 'Useful', 'Very useful' & 'Must have' as % of responses	Rank	Sum of 'Useful', 'Very useful' & 'Must have' as % of responses	Rank
work best in teams where decisions are shared	92.2	1	94.8	1
happy to participate without special recognition	91.0	2	89.5	3
sensitive to cultural customs and traditions	89.6	3	89.6	2
very confident of their ability to tackle new situations	86.0	4	85.5	4
have a lot to learn	85.1	5	83.0	5

Table 61: Desirable Characteristics – Rankings

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The analysis of findings has been partitioned to address separately the four research questions, detailed in Chapter Three. In addition, the last section of this Chapter considers themes that were used by the employers when describing expectations. Given the richness and variety of the data, and the exploratory nature of this study, the answers to each question needed to be more than a concisely summarised statement. Therefore, the answers that are proposed for each question contain descriptions from the Singapore and Perth employers, comparative highlights with supporting tables, as well as a concise summary statement. Although somewhat lengthy this format was designed to provide the literature with descriptions of employer expectations that are steeped in context.

Findings for Graduate Communication

To answer the question ‘What communication capabilities did Singaporean participants expect?’ the following statements are proposed.

Singaporean interviewees expected graduates to communicate effectively as they delivered information and ideas in a manner that was acceptable to recipients. Communication required fluency in a number of languages and graduates were expected to interact successfully with clients and work-mates, using more than one language. Graduates were expected to display a professional standard of written and oral English that was concise, accurate and written plainly. Although participants were attracted to graduates educated overseas, these graduates were expected to be cognisant of the business implications of interaction between local cultural communities. Singaporean participants indicated that managing communication subtleties and being bilingual were so important that it was necessary to employ graduates of local nationality. When communicating, graduates were expected to monitor the communicative activity as a whole and respond to adverse developments as they strove to achieve communicative objectives. Graduates were to ‘contribute’ by calling on practical work experiences to develop continuously their communicative ability. The employers were mindful of the impact graduates would

have on business practices and they expected graduates to improve their ability to manage effectively cultural sensitivities, establish trusting business relationships, embrace learning at work and enhance the professional image of the business.

The Singaporean interview data indicated there were gaps between expectations and perceptions of graduate communication. Participants indicated that:

- a professional standard of English was essential yet participants perceived that some graduates wrote poorly; also, participants commented on a preference for graduates that were educated overseas because these graduates possessed an 'English language ability advantage',
- cultural sensitivity was important and effective communication was declared a major goal: however, participants perceived that some graduates made insensitive statements and that graduates could be arrogant and excessively aggressive; participants indicated that effective communication required bilingual language capabilities and a cultural sensitivity that non-Singaporeans may not possess, and
- both participation and determination were characteristics that would assist graduate success but participants indicated that some graduates displayed a lack of initiative and fortitude.

To answer the question 'What communication capabilities did Perth participants expect?' the following statements are proposed.

Perth interviewees expected graduates to be effective communicators who listened carefully and questioned things they did not understand. Graduates were expected to adjust their communication style to suit particular situations. They were expected to write concisely and speak English very well. Their manner should be constructive and unemotional with an appreciation of cultural norms. Graduates were expected to use communication technology appropriately. Participants wanted effective communicators who could contribute to corporate outcomes. Ideally, graduates would be academically brilliant, have superior communicative capabilities and be able to get on with people. The employers were interested in graduates with Asian language capability, however English fluency was most valued. Graduates were

expected to contribute towards team leadership and to appreciate the value of learning from work experience. Graduates should be prepared to develop a writing style that 'fits' their employment activity. Participants recognised that cultural differences impact on business communications and that adjustments to usual communication practices could be necessary. They also felt that work experience indicated a graduate's potential to contribute early.

The Perth interview data indicated there were gaps between expectations and perceptions of graduate communication. Participants indicated that graduates should:

- be effective communicators; communication delivered in a manner that suited particular business situations was very important, yet participants felt that some graduates lacked knowledge of fundamental communication strategies, and
- have an insight into the nature of people and knowledge of the world-at-large; however, participants indicated that some graduates lacked knowledge of how to implement business practice and that work experience was important because it provided graduates with realistic expectations of work, an appreciation of work place communication and the confidence to work in different environments.

The following table displays the phrases used by employers when discussing graduate communication capability.

Singapore participants	Perth participants
Style of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear and simple • be concise and accurate • use a professional standard of English • write in a plain but professional style • develop a style that will enhance the business's professional image 	Style of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be accurate and understandable • be constructive and unemotional • write concisely • present formally and informally • write and speak English very well • write professionally • display high written standards • clearly address the objective • adjust style to suit particular situations • develop a writing style that 'fits' the business

Table 62: Communication Phrases

Singapore participants	Perth participants
Effective communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participate in communicative activities • put ideas across • try not to be lost for words • ensure customer communicative comfort • consider the opinions of other people • look for communication side-effects • monitor the impact of communications • respond to adverse developments • suggest different approaches 	Effective communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen carefully • question things not understood • understand what is said • encourage shared conversations • tailor messages to suit audiences • ensure recipient comprehension • make communications enjoyable • pickup subtle changes in communicative status • consider the impact on the recipient • critically interpret without offending • get on with people
Cultural implications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate in an acceptable manner • establish trusting and comfortable relationships • interact with people in several languages • fluency in two languages • understand local history • understand how cultural groups interact • understand multicultural issues 	Cultural implications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comfortably work with people at all levels • support team working • influence team outcomes • contribute towards team leadership • recognise that cultural differences impact communications
Managing communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manage cultural sensitivities • achieve communicative outcomes 	Managing communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use technology appropriately • provide small contributions as soon as possible
Learning to communicate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learn by work experience • embrace vocational learning & training • continually develop communicative ability 	Learning to communicate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the influence of cultural norms • understand team practices • adjust to new working situations • appreciate the value of learning at work • learn quickly

Table 63: Communication Phrases - Continuation

When the Singapore and Perth results were compared, differences in the employers' expectations for graduate communication, were revealed. The language environment, English usage and the focus of graduate communication, were the prominent differences.

Language environment. The Singaporeans expected languages other than English to be used by graduates. Both groups expected graduates to work in business environments where English was the major language. However, Perth participants expected English to be the only language used and while business practices would be changed to recognise that people may speak other languages, those practices would treat everyone with equal consideration. The Perth employers also expected graduates to be unemotional in their communicative manner and to be cognisant of Australian cultural norms. The Singaporean participants recognised that English was the official business language, but they expected graduates to interact with people in

languages other than English. They expected graduates to speak at least one Asian language very well, although a few spelling or grammatical errors would be acceptable provided the message was clear.

Standard of English usage. Perth participants expected a higher standard of English usage than Singaporean participants. For the Singaporeans, writing and speaking English very well meant that graduates demonstrated a professional standard of English usage. Although most Perth participants expected a professional standard, many of them expected graduates to display an excellent standard of English usage. While being able to write clearly and concisely satisfied the Singaporeans, many Perth participants expected concise writings and superior communicative ability.

Cultural focus of communications. Singaporean participants expected graduates to communicate using English and local languages whereas Perth participants expected all graduate communications to be in English. Both sets of employers focused upon the effectiveness of communications and the importance of interactions between the people involved in communicative activities. The Perth employers concentrated on the group or organisational cultural impact of effective graduate communications, while the Singaporeans focused on multicultural imperatives for effective graduate communications. The following table displays the phrases used by employers when considering cultural influence on graduate communication capability.

Singapore participants	Perth participants
Graduates were expected to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be bilingual • effectively communicate using a number of languages and know how to interact with people using these languages • manage the communicative subtleties that arise in multicultural situations • understand local history & cultural issues • be cognisant of the business implications of interaction between local societies • understand multicultural issues • improve their ability to manage effectively cultural sensitivities 	Graduates were expected to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be effective communicators who adjust their communication style to suit particular situations • adjust their thinking approach to suit their employment situation • inquisitively question procedure and practice using a constructive manner that suits their employment role • be constructive & unemotional • be able to get on with people • have insight into the nature of people • understand the deeper meaning behind communications • being fluent in English is more important than other language capability • appreciate the influence of Australian cultural norms • recognise that cultural differences impact business communications and that adjustments to usual communicative practice may be necessary • be aware of issues that influence business situations • be knowledgeable of the world-at-large.

Table 64: Cultural Influence Phrases

Communicator or recipient. Perth participants focused on how graduates communicated, whereas the Singaporeans were more concerned with the recipient of the communication. Both groups wanted communications to be friendly and to develop cooperative relationships. However, the Singaporeans expected graduates to communicate in a manner that was acceptable to recipients and, if necessary, graduates would be taught how to do this. Many of the Perth employers expected graduates to communicate in a manner that was 'matter of fact' and 'business-like'; i.e., clearly addressing the communication objective and then, to ensure understanding, asking questions of the recipient.

Finally, to summarise the employers' responses to the question 'What communication capabilities did they expect of a recent business graduate?' the following statements are proposed.

Graduates were expected to:

- work in an environment where the English language was predominant,
- use a standard of English that demonstrated they were capable business professionals,
- communicate in ways that were compatible with their employment role,
- accomplish the objectives that underpinned communicational tasks, and to
- continuously improve their conversational and written abilities.

In addition, Singaporean participants expected graduates to:

- work in an environment where Asian languages were spoken, and to
- use at least one Asian language at a standard that demonstrated they were capable business professionals.

Findings for Graduate Thinking

To answer the question 'What thinking capabilities did Singaporean participants expect?' the following statements are proposed.

Singaporean interviewees expected graduates to use systematic thought processes and to visualise the 'big picture'. They also expected graduates to be rational, critical, and use their common sense when applying business expertise. In the application of thinking, they wanted graduates to become contributors of proactive ideas and to develop continuously their understanding of practical business knowledge. Graduates were expected to embrace opportunities to learn at work, consult with their peers, produce early contributions and develop creative strategies.

The Singaporean interview data indicated there were gaps between expectations and perceptions of graduate thinking. Participants indicated that graduates:

- should develop creative practical strategies but they noted that some graduates had apparently not realised that university business theories must be adapted to suit the local conditions,
- need to embrace opportunities to learn from work experience and training; i.e., a willingness to learn, sincere participation and continuous improvement was expected, however participants indicated that graduates did not appreciate the practicalities of work and that some graduates would not accept guidance, and
- must have good time management skill because it was considered an important professional ability.

To answer the question 'What thinking capabilities did Perth participants expect?' the following statements are proposed.

Perth interviewees expected graduates to propose new ideas as they interpret information, and to offer suggestions. They expected a rational approach to thinking that was defensible and practical. However, graduates were expected to adjust their approach to suit their employment situation. Having an awareness of issues influencing business situations and being able to use new technologies was also expected. Graduates were expected to understand fully their personal learning processes. The employers wanted graduate thinking to contribute to corporate outcomes. To do this graduates needed to learn how to promote their ideas successfully. Graduates were expected inquisitively to question procedures by using

a constructive manner that suited their employment status, and by developing their thinking capabilities through work experience. However, appropriate safeguards that ensured graduate mistakes were not expensive would be installed. Participants also expected graduates to manage their own careers.

The Perth interview data indicated there were gaps between expectations and perceptions of graduate thinking. Participants indicated that graduates were expected to:

- propose ideas, interpret information and offer suggestions; however graduates were expected to match these activities to the realities of their employment situation; although graduates were expected to question practice, this questioning should be mindful of their employment role and status.

The following table displays the phrases used by employers when discussing graduate thinking capability.

Singapore participants	Perth participants
Thinking method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be systematic • describe, analyse, explain, and relate thought processes • be discerning • be critical • use common-sense • use creative thinking with common sense • consider future scenarios • moderate holistic views with practicality • consult with peers Thinking style: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • see the big picture • look at things differently 	Thinking method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a structured approach • interpret information • seek clarification • be creative • be innovative • be rational • assimilate information • incorporate wider business issues • consider personality implications • use new technologies Thinking style: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be adaptive • inquisitively question • be disciplined • try not to 're-invent the wheel' • do not accept everything at face value • handle complexity holistically • be a good listener • challenge the status quo • appreciate different points of view • be outcome focused • demonstrate personal purpose

Table 65: Thinking Phrases

Singapore participants	Perth participants
Thinking outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contribute as soon as possible • produce ideas • produce proactive practical ideas • produce practical strategies • suggest ways around difficulties • successfully defend proposals 	Thinking outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • draw inferences • add value to information • propose new ideas • suggest defensible and practical ideas • offer alternative suggestions • suggest improvements • explain ideas convincingly • participate in planning processes • add a new dimension to problem solving • contribute to corporate outcomes • form client relationships Learning outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learn from mistakes • develop listening techniques • learn how to promote ideas • understand market interrelationships • understand their personal learning process

Table 66: Thinking Phrases - Continuation

When the Singapore and Perth data was compared, differences were observed in the expectations for graduate thinking. The prominent differences were graduate performance, the employers management style and the focus of graduate improvement.

Graduate Performance. Singaporean participants were a little more appreciative of graduate success at practically applying their knowledge. While the Singaporeans indicated more than a quarter of graduates converted theory into practice professionally or achieved excellent results, the Perth employers felt that over a quarter of graduates failed or needed help with this task. In the interview data, the Singaporeans indicated that graduates did not appreciate the practicalities of work, while the Perth employer indicated graduates did not understand how to implement business knowledge.

Employers' management style. The Perth employers favoured a slightly combative approach to idea presentation by graduates. While both groups expected graduates to be rational, critical and to use common sense, the Perth employers expected graduates to produce defensible ideas and offer alternative suggestions. In addition, they expected graduates to focus on important issues, construct concise arguments and to communicate ideas effectively. Words like 'defensible' and 'argument' were not favoured by the Singaporeans who preferred thinking descriptions that were

sensitive to the interrelated nature of their environment. Although both groups expected graduates to follow rules, the Singaporeans were more inclined towards flexible interpretations that, for example, would enable situational contingencies to be handled effectively. The Perth employers chose to emphasise how graduates should conduct themselves. They listed expectations that indicated a concern with managing graduates. For example, they expected graduates to adjust their questioning to suit their employment situation, communicate in an appropriate manner, listen carefully and limit individual interpretations of business situations.

A cultural focus to improvement. The Singaporeans were more concerned about an improving cultural capability. Perth participants focused upon how graduates promote ideas within an organisation and how a graduate's writing style should suit their employment role, whereas the Singaporeans emphasised improvement in a graduate's ability to manage cultural sensitivity and understand local multicultural issues. Even though both groups indicated that graduates were good at getting on with people from different cultures, many Singaporeans felt graduates were only average at this task.

Finally, to summarise the employers' responses to the question 'What thinking capabilities did they expect of recent business graduates?' the following statements are proposed.

Graduates were expected to:

- understand their thought processes,
- exercise their creativity,
- use their initiative,
- base suggestions on their technical knowledge-base,
- contribute practical ideas, and to
- continually learn.

In addition, Singaporean participants expected graduates to:

- possess a very good understanding of the cultural sensitivities that impact their work environment, and to
- offer culturally sensitive contributions.

Findings for Graduate Abilities

To answer the question ‘What abilities did Singaporean participants consider graduates possessed?’ the following statements are proposed.

The Singaporean employers indicated that graduates were confident of their abilities. Graduates had a broad perspective, were able to utilise new technologies very well and they learned quickly. Additional benefits were considered to have accrued to graduates that obtained their education overseas. Also, work experience was seen as a positive adjunct to a graduate’s education. Graduates were good at listening to instructions and asking relevant questions. They were considered average when it came to converting theory into practical solutions, however some graduates were able to do this successfully. They were also considered average at handling arguments and conflict, gaining acceptance from work-mates and working effectively with junior staff. Graduates wrote poorly, achieving only average results when writing business letters and producing reports in English. However, many graduates wrote well, so there was a perception that some graduates were better than others at writing in English. Although many graduates were able to write a business letter in an Asian language, most failed or needed help. Graduates had poor time management skills but many were able to plan their personal work schedule successfully. Consequently, some graduates were considered to be better than others, at time management. They were not very good at applying their knowledge within a local situation. They often made insensitive statements and did not appreciate the practicalities of work. Sometimes graduates displayed a lack of initiative and determination. Also, some graduates had difficulty accepting guidance.

The following table describes the interview and survey data supplied by the Singaporean employers when describing graduate abilities.

Interview participants indicated that graduates:	Questionnaire respondents indicated that graduates:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• learnt quickly• were confident• had a broad perspective• benefited from an overseas education• gained from having previous work experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• achieved professional results when using new technologies. (Ranked ‘best’ ability)

Table 67: Abilities from Singapore Interviews and Survey

Interview participants indicated that graduates:	Questionnaire respondents indicated that graduates:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> wrote poorly did not understand the practicalities of work made insensitive statements displayed a lack of initiative and determination did not accept guidance did not understand that knowledge must be applied locally demonstrated poor time management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> achieved average results when writing business letters (in English). However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved. (Ranked 5th 'best' ability) achieved average results when producing reports (in English). However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved. failed or needed help writing business letters in an Asian language. However, some respondents indicated that average standard were achieved. (Ranked 'worst' ability) achieved average results when converting theory into practical solutions. However, some respondents indicated professional results were achieved. (Ranked 3rd 'worst' ability) achieved average results when handling arguments and conflict. However, many respondents indicated that graduates failed or needed help. (Ranked 2nd 'worst' ability) achieved average results at gaining acceptance from their work-mates. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved. achieved average results when working with junior staff. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved. achieved professional results when listening to instructions from seniors. However, many respondents indicated that average results were achieved. (Ranked 2nd 'best' ability) achieved professional results when asking relevant questions. However, many respondents indicated that average results were achieved. (Ranked 3rd 'best' ability) achieved average results when planning their personal work schedules. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved.

Table 68: Abilities from Singapore Interviews and Survey - Continuation

To answer the question 'What abilities did Perth participants consider graduates possessed?' the following statements are proposed.

The Perth employers perceived graduates to be confident of their abilities. Graduates had broad perspectives, were able to utilise new technologies very well, were good at listening to instructions and asking relevant questions. They were considered average when it came to converting theory into practical solutions; unfortunately, many graduates failed or needed help with this task. They were also considered average at handling arguments and conflict, gaining acceptance from work-mates and working effectively with junior staff. Graduates wrote poorly achieving only average results when writing business letters and producing reports in English. Many graduates failed or needed help to write in English. The Perth employers did not expect graduates to speak or write using an Asian language. Graduates had poor

time management skills and many graduates failed or needed help to plan their personal work schedules. Often they were not prepared to 'fit into' the corporate structure and did not appreciate the necessity of organisational limitations. Sometimes they lacked communication common sense, did not learn from their mistakes, displayed arrogance and did not know how to implement business practice.

The following table describes the interview and survey data supplied by the Perth employers when describing graduate abilities.

Interview participants indicated that graduates:	Questionnaire respondents indicated that graduates:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> were very good with new technologies did not understand how to implement business practice lacked communication wisdom did not appreciate organisational limitations were not prepared to 'fit into' the corporate structure displayed arrogance possessed bad time management skills were self-confident possessed a broad perspective did not learn from mistakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> achieved professional results when using new technologies. (Ranked 'best' ability) achieved average results when writing business letters (in English). However, many respondents indicated that graduates failed or needed help. achieved average results when producing reports (in English). However, many respondents indicated that graduates failed or needed help. failed or needed help writing business letters in an Asian language. (Ranked 'worst' ability) achieved average results when converting theory into practical solutions. However, many respondents indicated that graduates failed or needed help. (Ranked 3rd 'worst' ability) achieved average results when handling arguments and conflict. However, many respondents indicated that graduates failed or needed help. (Ranked 2nd 'worst' ability) achieved average results at gaining acceptance from their work-mates. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved. (Ranked 5th 'best' ability) achieved average results when working with junior staff. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved. achieved professional results when listening to instructions from seniors. However, many respondents indicated that average results were achieved. (Ranked 4th 'best' ability) achieved professional results when asking relevant questions. However, many respondents indicated that average results were achieved. (Ranked 3rd 'best' ability) achieved average results when planning their personal work schedules. However, many respondents indicated that graduates failed or needed help.

Table 69: Abilities from Perth Interviews and Survey

Finally, to summarise the employers' responses to the question 'What abilities did participants consider graduates possessed?' the following summary is proposed.

<i>Graduates were perceived to be good/very good at:</i>		
•	using new technologies	(Perth respondents assessed this task more favourably than Singaporean respondents)
•	listening to instructions from seniors	
•	asking relevant questions, and at	
•	getting on with people from different cultures.	(Perth respondents assessed this task more favourably than Singaporean respondents)
<i>Graduates were perceived to be average/acceptable at:</i>		
•	converting theory into practical solutions	(Singaporean respondents assessed this task more favourably than Perth respondents)
•	suggesting ideas that lead to valuable contributions	
•	planning their personal work schedules	(Singaporean respondents assessed this task more favourably than Perth respondents)
•	preparing detailed written reports in English	(Singaporean respondents assessed this task more favourably than Perth respondents)
•	helping teams produce required outcomes	
•	gaining acceptance from their work-mates	
•	working successfully with junior staff	
•	writing business letters in English, and at	(Singaporean respondents assessed this task more favourably than Perth respondents)
•	making formal presentations.	(Singaporean respondents assessed this task more favourably than Perth respondents)
<i>Graduates were perceived to be able to:</i>		
•	convince people to accept an idea.	
<i>Graduates were perceived to be poor/very poor at:</i>		
•	handling arguments and conflict, and at	
•	writing business letters in an Asian language.	(Singaporean respondents assessed this task more favourably than Perth respondents)

Table 70: Summary of Graduate Abilities

(Note: for a more detailed table of summarised graduate abilities, see Appendix 12.)

Findings for Graduate Characteristics

To answer the question ‘What characteristics did Singaporean participants consider useful?’ the following statements are proposed.

The Singaporean employers indicated that graduates should be good team players who work hard to achieve shared decisions. However, graduates should also have the capability to make independent decisions. Graduates that needed to work only with experienced employees in new situations were not useful. They should be very confident of their ability to tackle new situations. Graduates needed to be competitive and were expected to win, however this competitiveness could attract supervision. They should be prepared to work with people from other countries and be sensitive to cultural customs and traditions. Graduates that participated with sincerity and not for special recognition would be appreciated. They were expected to be supportive of employer ideas and methods but graduates should be prepared to disagree with the way the business was conducted. However, excessive support or disagreement would attract supervision. Graduates should not use arrogance or aggression. They should be diligent, willing to learn, accepting of change and be continuously improving themselves. Graduates should recognise that they have a lot to learn. While it was useful not to make mistakes, graduates were expected to learn from their mistakes. Although they should be able to accept close supervision and guidance, graduates should also be able to work with minimal supervision. They were expected to have integrity and should not resort to ‘bending the rules’; however, they should recognise that not all rules had to be taken seriously. Graduates were expected to conduct themselves professionally, identify with the organisation’s core values and be committed to quality outcomes.

The following table describes the interview and survey data supplied by the Singaporean employers when describing graduate characteristics.

Interview participants indicated that graduates should:	Questionnaire respondents indicated that graduates:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be a team player • not use arrogance and aggression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were useful when they worked best in teams where decisions were shared. (Ranked most 'desirable' characteristic) • were useful when they were sensitive to cultural customs and traditions. (Ranked 2nd most 'desirable' characteristic) • were not useful when they worked only with people from their own country. (Ranked most 'undesirable' characteristic) • were useful when they made independent decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participate with sincerity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were not useful when they worked only with experienced people, in new situations. However, many respondents indicated that these graduates would be useful. (Ranked 2nd most 'undesirable' characteristic) • were useful when they were happy to participate without special recognition. (Ranked 3rd most 'desirable' characteristic) • were useful when they disagreed with the way an employer ran a business. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would require supervision. • were useful when they were supportive of employer ideas and methods. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would require supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be confident • be competitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were useful when they were very confident of their ability to tackle new situations. (Ranked 4th most 'desirable' characteristic) • were useful when they were highly competitive and always wanted to win. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would require supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be diligent and willing to learn • be accepting of change • continuously improving themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were useful when they said they had a lot to learn. (ranked 5th most 'desirable' characteristic) • were useful when they never make mistakes. However, many respondents indicated that this characteristic was not useful. (Ranked 5th most 'undesirable' characteristic)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be professional in their conduct • have a commitment to quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were useful when they worked best by themselves and preferred minimal supervision • were useful when they worked best under close supervision and guidance. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would require supervision. (Ranked 3rd most 'undesirable' characteristic)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were useful when they realised that not all rules had to be taken seriously. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would require supervision. • were useful when they were not prepared to 'bend' the rules. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would not be useful. (Ranked 4th most 'undesirable' characteristic)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify with the organisation's core values 	

Table 71: Characteristics from Singapore Interviews and Survey - Continuation

To answer the question 'What characteristics did Perth participants consider useful?' the following statements are proposed.

The Perth employers indicated that graduates should be good team players working to reach shared decisions and using their leadership to encourage cohesive groups. However, graduates should also have the ability to make independent decisions. Graduates that needed to work only with experienced employees in new situations were not useful. They should be very confident of their ability to tackle new situations. Graduates needed to be competitive and were expected to win, however this competitiveness could attract supervision. They must be prepared to work with people from other countries and be sensitive to cultural customs and traditions. Graduates that participated with sincerity and not for special recognition would be appreciated. They were expected to be supportive of employer ideas and methods although graduates should be prepared to disagree with the way the business was conducted. However, excessive support or disagreement would attract supervision. Graduates should not use arrogance, be stubborn, selfish or introverted. They should be willing to learn and possess realistic work expectations. Graduates should recognise that they have a lot to learn. While it was useful not to make mistakes, graduates were expected to learn from their mistakes. They were expected to work by themselves with minimal supervision and not require close guidance. Graduates should have integrity and should not resort to 'bending the rules'. They should use their initiative, be assertive, resolute and confident in their ability to work in different environments. They should locate relevant information, focus on important issues, use common sense, construct concise arguments and communicate ideas effectively. Graduates should have an appreciation of work place communication and support the corporate philosophy.

The following table describes the interview and survey data supplied by the Perth employers when describing graduate characteristics.

Interview participants indicated that graduates should:	Questionnaire respondents indicated that graduates:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage cohesive groups using team leadership • understand that using arrogance, being stubborn, selfish and introverted will impede success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were useful when they worked best in teams where decisions were shared. (Ranked most 'desirable' characteristic) • were useful when they were sensitive to cultural customs and traditions. (Ranked 3rd most 'desirable' characteristic) • were not useful when they worked only with people from their own country. (Ranked most 'undesirable' characteristic)

Table 72: Characteristics from Perth Interviews and Survey

Interview participants indicated that graduates should:	Questionnaire respondents indicated that graduates:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support corporate philosophy • have an appreciation of work place communication • be confident to work in different environments • be self-confident and assertive • willing to learn • possess realistic work expectations (assisted by previous work experience) • use their initiative • be resolute • have integrity • find relevant information • construct concise arguments • communicate ideas effectively • focus on important issues • use common sense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were useful when they made independent decisions • were not useful when they worked only with experienced people, in new situations. However, many respondents indicated that these graduates could be useful with careful supervision. (Ranked 2nd most 'undesirable' characteristic) • were useful when they were happy to participate without special recognition. (Ranked 2nd most 'desirable' characteristic) • were useful when they disagreed with the way an employer ran a business. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would not be useful. • were useful when they were supportive of employer ideas and methods. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would require supervision. • were useful when they were very confident of their ability to tackle new situations. (Ranked 4th most 'desirable' characteristic) • were useful when they were highly competitive and always wanted to win. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would require supervision. • were useful when they said they had a lot to learn. (ranked 5th most 'desirable' characteristic) • were useful when they never make mistakes. However, many respondents indicated that this characteristic was not useful. (Ranked 4th most 'undesirable' characteristic) • were useful when they worked best by themselves and preferred minimal supervision • were not useful when they worked best under close supervision and guidance. However, many respondents indicated these graduates could be useful with careful supervision. (Ranked 3rd most 'undesirable' characteristic) • were not useful when they realised that not all rules had to be taken seriously. However, many respondents indicated these graduates could be useful with careful supervision. (Ranked 5th most 'undesirable' characteristic) • were useful when they were not prepared to 'bend' the rules. However, many respondents indicated these graduates would require supervision.

Table 73: Characteristics from Perth Interviews and Survey - Continuation

Finally, to summarise the employers' responses to the question 'What characteristics did participants consider useful?' the following summary is proposed:

<p><i>Graduates were very useful if they:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • worked best in teams where decisions were shared • were sensitive to cultural customs and traditions • happily participated without special recognition • were confident of their ability to tackle new situations • were aware they had a lot to learn • could make independent decisions, and they • worked best by themselves with minimal supervision. 	
<p><i>Graduates were useful if they:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • totally supported employer ideas and methods, and they • never made mistakes. 	
<p><i>Graduates could be useful if they:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • realised that not all rules have to be taken seriously • were not prepared to 'bend' rules • disagreed about the way the business was run currently, and they • were highly competitive and always wanted to win. 	<p>(62% of Singaporean respondents assessed this characteristic useful compared to 29% of Perth respondents)</p> <p>(Perth respondents assessed this characteristic more favourably than Singaporean respondents)</p> <p>(Singaporean respondents assessed this characteristic more favourably than Perth respondents)</p>
<p><i>Graduates were not useful if they:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • worked best under close supervision and guidance • only want to work with experienced people in new situations, and they • would only work with people from their own country. 	<p>(Singaporean respondents assessed this characteristic more favourably than Perth respondents)</p> <p>(Singaporean respondents assessed this characteristic more favourably than Perth respondents)</p>

Table 74: Summary of Graduate Characteristics

(Note: for a more detailed table of graduate characteristics, see Appendix 13)

Themes that Assisted Expectation Description

From a review of the data it was apparent that five themes often were associated with employer expectations for graduates. Within the participating employers' organisational environments, expectations could be categorised using the following themes:

- prior learning,
- continuous learning,
- people practices,
- outcomes, and
- preferred characteristics.

The Singaporean and Perth employers expected graduates to have a number of capabilities that resulted from prior learning experiences; e.g., English and Asian language ability, business expertise gained during university studies, and learning from prior work experiences. They indicated that graduates should continually improve their abilities. Graduates were expected to enhance their professional skills during employment. In addition, they were expected to be committed to their own improvement and to take advantage of workplace opportunities to increase their knowledge and practical experience. The employers expected graduates to support organisational activities and successfully interact with the various people involved with their business. This required advanced interpersonal skills, multicultural awareness, sensitivity and common sense. In essence, it required graduates to participate successfully in an organisation's people practices. The participating employers also wanted graduates to provide positive contributions towards the attainment of corporate objectives. Graduates were expected to use their communication and thinking capabilities to generate ideas, add value to information and realise commercial advantage. In all activities graduates were expected to be mindful of organisational objectives and to monitor the impact of their contributions. The employers indicated that they held preferences for graduates who demonstrated characteristics that were perceived to be useful within their organisations. Characteristics were often linked to the application or delivery of graduate ability;

e.g., communications that could be described as 'friendly', 'sensitive', or 'business-like'.

To further illustrate how these themes were supported by the investigation data, Appendix 14 contains a set of detailed interview and survey findings assembled by theme.

Participating employers from Singapore and Perth have shown that they do expect recent business graduates to utilise effectively their communication and thinking capabilities within organisational environments. They expected graduates to contribute to corporate outcomes by successfully interacting with people in the work place. Graduates were expected to have accumulated capabilities through prior learning and, continuously, to be committed to improving their abilities. The findings have shown that the employers held a range of opinions about the abilities of graduates, and that some graduate characteristics were preferred more than others.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE INVESTIGATION FINDINGS

This investigation provides professional practitioners and researchers with descriptions of the expectations held by participating employers from Singapore and Perth. In addition, perceptions of certain graduate abilities were described together with indications of the graduate characteristics that the employers preferred. It was found that five themes categorised the expectations employers held and that they were encompassed within an organisation's environment. These findings facilitated the projection of a model of expectations. The present Chapter starts with a discussion of the relevance of the opinions of the Singaporean and Perth participants to the wider population of employers; then, a model of employer expectations is proposed. The recommendations that arise from the investigation's findings are followed by a list of employer concerns, suggestions for further research and concluding remarks.

Investigation's Relevance for Employers

The data used in this investigation was sourced from samples of Singaporean and Perth employers. Interview participants were sourced from a university contact list maintained by a business school. Therefore, these participants could be considered, because of their willingness to participate in University activities, to be interested in graduate transition from university to work. Consequently, they may hold biased opinions; e.g., they could be perceived as positively inclined towards graduates that possessed business degrees. The interviewees had to agree to a number of meetings so the inclination to support university activities helped them accept the opportunity cost of participation. Given their association with the university and their acceptance of participant workloads, the interview sample is a convenience sample.

Questionnaire respondents came from the membership of two professional organisations. In Singapore, a census of the membership of a professional association was conducted. In Perth, part of a stratified sample of the membership of a professional association was surveyed. The respondent data should be considered, therefore, to have come from a sample of employers that were members of professional associations.

Consequently, the interview and questionnaire data was not statistically representative of the population of all Singapore and Perth employers. However, the data contains responses from over 470 employers in supervisory or management positions. Their participation indicated the importance they attached to the task of describing expectations. A description of employer expectations based on their responses should be of interest and relevant to professional practitioners. These descriptions provide initial measurements and analysis of Singaporean and Perth employer expectations. They also provide the opportunity to stimulate debate and reflect upon different points of view.

Proposed Model of Employer Expectations

The data provided an opportunity to propose a description of employer expectations based on the themes that surfaced during analysis; i.e., prior learning, continuous learning, people practices, corporate objectives and preferred characteristics. These themes assisted the development of components that assembled into a model of employer expectations.

Component One - Organisational Environment

Business organisations were expected to participate in international, national and local environments. Effective participation in these environments required organisations to adopt community standards; therefore, aspects of an organisation's environment would prescribe employer expectations.

In this investigation, graduates were expected to work in an environment where English was used as the language of business. In Singapore, English was necessary but at least one other Asian language was also required. Other languages were spoken in Perth, but English dominated because of the historical background of Australia. Even though an ability to speak an Asian language was appreciated, Perth employers concentrated on English fluency and their expectations for written English were higher than those of Singaporean employers. However, the importance of understanding how to get-on with people was emphasised, in Singapore; in fact,

some employers felt that multi-cultural understanding was so important that a graduate from another country would not have the necessary knowledge. The multi-language and multi-cultural expectations of Singaporean employers obviously resulted from Singapore's historical background. Consequently, employers described language preferences that were strongly influenced by their national environment. These language preferences are an example of environmentally prescribed expectations. The impact of language preferences on employer expectations highlights the importance of not assuming that English is the only language employers associate with a graduate's communication skills. A graduate's international awareness (B/HERT 1992), (DEETYA 1999) provides an essential foundation (Mayer 1993) for graduates to communicate with culturally diverse people (Guthrie 1994a). Unfortunately, language expectations and the attendant communication environment have not enjoyed a high priority in recent research; for example see DEETYA 2000.

The business activities undertaken by organisations also influenced employer expectations. For instance, employers expected graduates to use a standard of English that indicated they were capable business professionals. An excellent standard of English was expected by some organisations because incomes were strongly influenced by the quality of their English communications. However, a promotional organisation operating in a multicultural environment felt that being multi-lingual was more advantageous than excellence in one language, with the result that English-standard expectations were not as high. Though employers in both venues expected professional English, the actual standard of English was influenced by the organisation's business environment. Therefore, *employer expectations of a new employment role should include the expectations prescribed by an organisation's environment.*

Component Two - Prior Learning

Employers expected business graduates to occupy employment positions where they would make good use of the knowledge gained during prior learning. Employers also expected certain qualifications and experience to be associated with a particular employment role; e.g., accountants were expected to hold professional qualifications that were recognised by relevant accounting associations. Prior learning was

expected to form the foundation of a graduate's professional practice. This expectation supports the comment that graduates should have relevant skills, abilities and potential (Guthrie 1994a). Evidence of successful learning could include formal educational achievements, employment references and personal accomplishments. Therefore, *employer expectations of a new employment role should include prior learning expectations that describe the qualifications and experience requirements of that role.*

Component Three - People Practices

While there could be activities where graduates worked alone as they contemplated a particular task; i.e., relying purely on their thinking ability to assemble information, assimilate that information into their knowledge-base and construct proposals, isolated roles were expected to be reserved for highly specialised and respected individuals. Even so, organisational contributions could result from graduates working by themselves; therefore, *employer expectations for individual contributions should be described.*

However, a very different role was envisaged for recent graduates. They were expected to work with other people, e.g., clients, peers, junior and senior staff, and they were expected to 'fit in' as they applied their knowledge. A vision of graduates working alone and thinking freely did not match the expectations of employers. Instead, graduates were expected to participate in people-centred business practices. Effective participation was perceived to require an understanding of how people communicated, how they reacted in a variety of business situations, an appreciation of prevailing cultural influences, and a holistic approach to the application of knowledge. For example, although a graduate's technical language ability was important, they had to utilise successfully that language within organisational environments. Speaking or writing correctly was not enough. Perth employers emphasised how graduates were expected to conduct themselves within their organisations. Singaporean employers emphasised community interaction and the need for multi-cultural knowledge; i.e., an understanding of community history, issues and social practices. Employers expected graduates to conduct themselves in a manner that was conducive to effective participation. Graduates have raised the

importance of effective participation by calling for study programs that include practical experiences and work placement opportunities (B/HERT 1993a:12,16). Another case of applying knowledge holistically was illustrated when describing graduate communication and thinking. Although it was possible to list graduate communication and thinking separately, they were applied together. Both capabilities were perceived to be a synergistic whole that was manifest in graduate practices. Instead of employers remarking on an 'excellent example of English usage' or a 'complete rational analysis of a particular issue', they were concerned with overall participation. The focus of attention was the activity, not the graduate's communication and thinking used during the event. Graduates were expected to possess communication and thinking capabilities but it was effective utilisation within the context of an organisation's business environment that mattered. Therefore, *employer expectations of a new employment role should include participation expectations that described how the new employee should conduct oneself while participating in people practices.*

Component Four - Useful Characteristics

The characteristics of members that successfully participate in people practices could be used to describe the organisation's preferred characteristics. Individuals who possess these preferred characteristics could reasonably be expected to 'fit in' with the organisation; for example, consideration of thinking styles (Sternberg 1997). During this investigation, it was shown that preferred characteristics could vary from one employer to the next therefore generalised preferences may not suit individual organisations. If a new employee's characteristics were closely matched with the organisation's preferred characteristics then there should be a greater chance of successful employee integration. Therefore, *employer expectations of a new employment role should include the personal characteristics that indicate effective participation in the organisation's people practices.*

Component Five - Outcomes

Employers expected graduates to contribute positively towards organisational outcomes. These contributions were to start early in their employment, with small offerings. However, graduates' contributions were expected to become more

valuable as they participated in practices that influenced organisational success. The process of contributing would enable graduates to fine-tune their professional performances and, as a consequence, augment organisational effectiveness. Describing individual contribution expectations could enhance an overall objective to improve the quality of organisational learning (Lessem 1991). Therefore, *employer expectations of a new employment role should describe the outcomes that were expected to result from employee contributions.*

Component Six - Continuous Learning

Employers expected graduates to improve continuously their ability to apply their knowledge and they expected graduates to embrace opportunities to accumulate practical experience. Continuous learning was considered a normal part of graduate participation. Employers expected graduates to learn by participating in and reflecting upon their work experiences thus providing a practical example of life-long learning (Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994). Although graduates were expected to learn by their mistakes, the magnitude of those mistakes would be carefully managed by supervision and restraint. These constraints should be taken into account when assessing graduate performance. For example, the assessment of a graduate's ability to 'make decisions and solve problems' should consider whether they were empowered to make decisions or provided with sufficient resources to solve problems. An equitable process of comparing individual performances should be used. Employers that participated in this investigation held opinions about the ability of graduates to complete tasks. These opinions were the result of working with graduates. Although employer perceptions could be unanimous, their opinions could also vary; i.e., employers agreed about graduates using new technologies but disagreed about their ability to prepare written reports. Therefore, *employer expectations of a new employment role should include continuous learning expectations that describe the levels of performance expected of the employee and the rate of improvement to be achieved.*

Graphic Model

In summary, employer expectations for new employees were held within an organisational environment and were focused by work place practices. New employees were expected to apply the capabilities they had accumulated during prior

learning. They were also expected to possess personal characteristics that would be useful when they participated in organisational practices. This participation was expected to contribute positive outcomes and to provide employees with continuous learning opportunities.

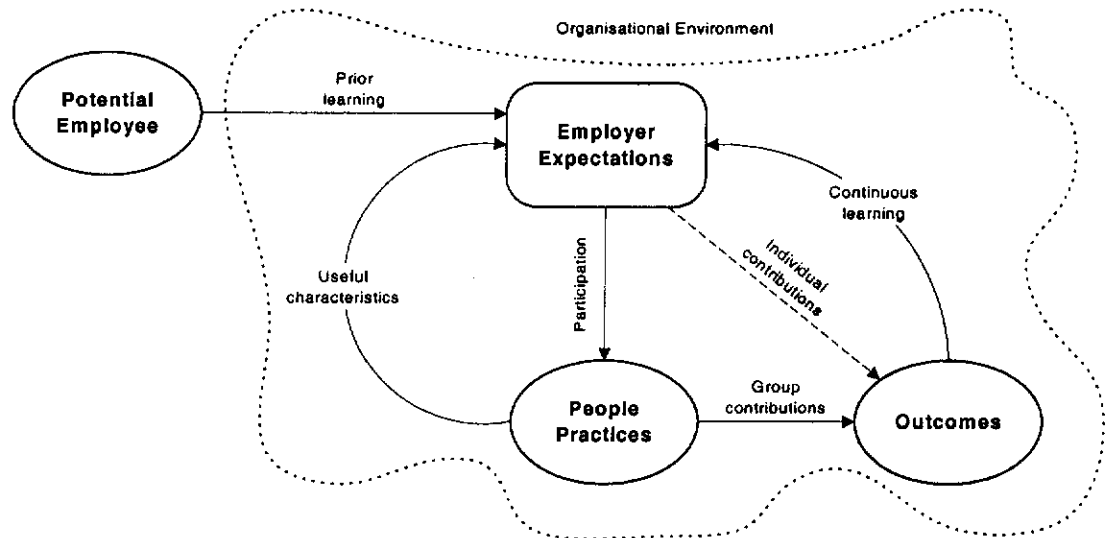


Figure 3: Model of Employer Expectations for New Employees

The contention is that the model suggests that employer expectations would include:

- environmental expectations prescribed by an organisation's surroundings,
- prior learning expectations describing qualifications and experience requirements,
- participation expectations describing behaviour during organisational practice,
- the preferred characteristics of employees,
- outcomes expectations describing employee objectives, and
- continuous learning expectations describing employee assessment.

Model Implications for Professional Practitioners

Employers could use this model to improve recruitment processes by attempting to match a prospective employee's capabilities with employer expectations. In order to define important or critical expectations, employers would need to consult descriptions of organisational objectives, practices and environment. This strategic information would then be coordinated with the practices and outcomes associated with a specific employment role, to produce the role expectations. Many

environmental expectations and preferred characteristics could be applicable across the organisation. However, most of the prior learning, participation and outcome expectations would relate to a specific role. This model provides practitioners with a generic encapsulation that could assist the description, comparison and realisation of employer expectations.

Recommendations for Professional Practitioners

Graduates were expected to possess a standard of English that enables them to be perceived as 'capable business professional'. Participants in this investigation were unimpressed, generally, with graduate English performance; i.e., too many respondents indicated that graduates were average or worse, at writing letters or reports. *University business schools should consider introducing minimum standards of achievement in written English.* Students should be required to pass an exit English examination before graduation; i.e., similar to the requirements of some universities in the United States of America (Western Washington State University 2000; University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire 2000). Descriptive statistics of the exit examination should be reported to employers so that they were confident all graduates attained an appropriate and acceptable standard of English ability.

Employers also indicated that graduates lacked communication common sense; i.e., in the workplace. Graduates could not rely on technical language ability alone because they were also expected to know how to use appropriate communication strategies. The intention was for graduates to realise communicational objectives using the English language in a professional manner. While it was important to be able to use English correctly, it was also necessary to achieve positive business outcomes. *Universities should consider increasing the academic status of assessment processes that demonstrate communication strategies experientially. Business practicums could be introduced or students could be encouraged to obtain employment experience through part-time work or study deferment.* These experiences would help students to appreciate the importance of communicating in ways that were compatible with employment roles. Although business graduates should already embrace the ideas of 'continuous and life-long learning' (Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994) they need to appreciate the value of learning at work.

Raising the academic status of assessed professional experiences could emphasise the importance of learning opportunities at work.

Employers expected graduates to understand their thought processes. Although this may sound like an obvious declaration, appreciating the strengths and weakness of the processes an individual uses to notice, assimilate and reflect on information, was considered an important facet of a graduate's ability to add value to an organisation. *Universities should consider increasing the academic status of learning experiences that surface and reflect on an individual student's thought processes.*

Employers expected graduates to work effectively with people, to project their ideas convincingly, to convert theory into practice and to provide acceptable leadership. Educational experiences that provided direct contact with business environments or realistic simulations of business could improve student ability to contribute practical ideas. Assessments that required students to work in isolation were obviously intellectually useful; however, employers expected graduates to apply their capabilities within people centred activities. *Universities could assist graduate employability by assessing a student's business practice skills.* Employers regarded work experience as an important indicator of a potential employee's ability to 'fit' into their organisation. A positive assessment of student business practice skills could add employability value to business graduates.

The major differences between the Singaporean and Perth employers were centred on language. In Singapore, there was a requirement for graduates to speak at least one Asian language, in addition to English. Given the national background of Singapore, this was not unexpected. The lack of interest in Asian languages amongst Perth employers appeared to stem from their reliance on English being the language of international business and the dominance of the English language in Australia. Both employer groups were concerned about the ability of graduates to communicate effectively within their organisational environments. Perth employers expected an insight into the nature of people and knowledge of the world-at-large to underpin communications. Singaporean employers focused on the importance of cultural sensitivity in effective communications. A graduate's ability to conduct themselves in a professional manner was important to both employer groups. However, the

assumptions behind what constituted 'professional manner' were different. Perth employers wanted graduates 'to get on' with people in a business like and unemotional way as they adjusted their communication style to suit particular situations. Singaporean employers wanted graduates to interact with people as they pursued communication objectives, but in a less direct way. The Perth employers were on the side of an efficient 'straight to the point' communication style while Singaporean employers favoured a sensitive more personal communication style. Both employer groups wanted effective communications and they expected graduates to have the common sense to conduct themselves appropriately. Graduates were expected to know how to interact with people in a manner that was appropriate to a particular business situation. Employers were understandably concerned with their primary organisational environment, however there was acknowledgement of international business and they expected graduates to cope in different business climates. Therefore, *Universities should not only assist business students to develop their professional manner and their insight into the 'nature of people' but also encourage an appreciation of the varying cultural influences upon communications when business is conducted locally and internationally.*

The Perth employer group was concerned that graduates should 'fit in' at work. They commented on aspects of graduate manageability and the unrealistic expectations graduates held for their employment conditions. Perth employers appeared to be more concerned with authoritarian control than Singaporean employers. Also, innovation and creativity attracted less enthusiasm amongst Perth employers than with Singaporean employers. Perth employers concerns about managing graduates could be symptomatic of an open and inclusive working environment that was strained by enthusiastic, yet inexperienced, graduates. For example, as perceived by some employers graduates could hold unrealistic workplace expectations due to their lack of work experience. Singaporean employers may have chosen not to dwell on control issues because most Singaporean graduates expected to join teams as junior members, and they do not normally 'rock the boat'. The Singaporeans did comment that recent graduates needed to be more confident and that they must participate in meetings. The acceptance of innovation and creativity by Singaporean employers may have been influenced by the recent promotions covering these issues, e.g., conference promoting critical/creative

thinking (National Institute of Education 1998). Nevertheless, the findings may be indicating a hardening of attitude towards the management of graduates by Perth employers. Conversely, Singaporean employers may be prepared to relax their management of new graduates and encourage more initiative and creativity.

Employers should consider encouraging graduates to describe the comparative merits of challenging current practices and compliance with current practices, thereby seeking a balanced approach to the infusion of initiative and creativity.

In summary, the following recommendations are suggested for professional practitioners:

- University business schools should consider introducing minimum standards of achievement in written English.
- Universities should consider increasing the academic status of assessment processes that demonstrate communication strategies experientially.
- Business practicums could be introduced and students could be encouraged to obtain employment experience through part-time work or study deferment.
- Universities should consider increasing the academic status of learning experiences that surface and reflect on an individual student's thought processes.
- Universities could assist graduate employability by assessing student business practice skills.
- Universities should not only assist business students to develop their professional manner and their insight into the 'nature of people' but also encourage an appreciation of the varying cultural influences upon communications when business is conducted locally and internationally.
- Employers should consider encouraging graduates to describe the comparative merits of challenging current practices and compliance with current practices, thereby seeking a balanced approach to the infusion of initiative and creativity.

Employer Concerns

The employers from Singapore and Perth were concerned that some business graduates displayed one or more of the following characteristics:

- wrote English poorly,
- were poor at writing in an Asian language,
- lacked fundamental communications strategies,
- used interpersonal actions that were insensitive, arrogant and excessively aggressive,
- had difficulty achieving the level of multi-cultural capabilities expected of an employee, especially if the graduate was not of local nationality,
- only wanted to work with people from their own country,
- lacked initiative and determination,
- lacked knowledge of how to implement business practice,
- were only average at convincing people to accept ideas,
- were poor at handling arguments and conflict,
- lacked appropriate formal presentation skills,
- were not able to adapt business theories to local conditions,
- were not mindful of their junior role, status and the need to 'fit in',
- did not accept guidance or appreciate practical limitations,
- were requiring close supervision and guidance,
- did not value learning at work,
- were not taking the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, and
- had time management skills needing improvement.

These concerns may indicate weaknesses in prior learning but, equally may indicate a need for more formal induction programmes by employers. Nevertheless, Universities could amplify their emphasis on the value of work experiences, especially when reviewing curricula and determining student work experience criteria. However, Universities provide learning environments where students take responsibility for their own learning and, unfortunately, some students may choose not to take full advantage of these learning opportunities. Therefore, weaknesses in

the prior learning of individual graduates could result from influences other than University curricula and assessment processes. Nevertheless, the concerns raised by employers about some graduates, indicate that significant underachievement of employer expectations is perceived in a wide range of graduate skills.

Further Research

The proposed model of employer expectations could be useful in University curriculum delivery and assessment as well as in employee selection processes. However, before expectations of an integrated recruitment process could be achieved further research would be required to:

- develop more accurate measures of assessing the range and quality of employer relevant generic skills achievement by students,
- establish a list of contextually relevant generic skills from which employers could develop a profile for potential employees in their industry and organisations,
- determine the critical organisational practices that require the potential employee's participation in order to describe essential generic skill requirements,
- clarify the behaviours and characteristics that are essential for beginning employees to achieve appropriate organisational outcomes,
- establish how successful recruitment processes are in selecting appropriate employees by using contextual generic skills criteria, and
- compare the employer perceptions of the graduate's performance over a period of time, say six monthly reviews over two years.

Because Australian universities are a major provider of business education within the South East Asian region (DEETYA 1997b) Australians should consider how regional employer expectations differ from Australian employer expectations. This information could provide universities with useful curricula feedback; e.g., this investigation both found language and cultural differences between employer expectations in Singapore and Perth. Therefore, conducting research in other South

East Asian countries would provide detailed insight into regional employer expectations.

The questionnaire data indicated that some of the items would benefit from further refinement. A small proportion of respondents indicated that available options did not provide them with a suitable choice. Also, some of the item choices did not sufficiently differentiate response alternatives. This suggests that some of the questionnaire's option descriptors for the communications and thinking items require refinement or separation.

The items describing employer perceptions of graduate ability indicated that employers could identify graduate performance; therefore, if the item list was developed as a comprehensive list of employer specified critical tasks, the data could be used to calculate an index of employer satisfaction. The extensive literature associated with the ServQual concept could provide useful guidance in this regard (Genestre & Herbig 1996; Buttle 1996; Ruby 1996). Provided the items were inclusive of regional employer expectations, this index could provide useful national comparisons. Many of the tables detailed in this investigation provide a rich resource for the development of new items concerning graduate ability. Therefore, a schedule of employer specified critical graduate tasks should be constructed and administered to employers so that expectation and perception could be described as an index of employer satisfaction; a second use of such an index could provide employers with a 'before' and 'after' employment view of the graduate which could be used for performance management.

The items describing useful graduate characteristics indicated that employers could describe the graduate characteristics they consider appropriate for their organisation. A comprehensive range of graduate characteristics that describe the behaviour employers encourage and dislike, could be used to calculate a compatibility index between graduates and employers. Provided the items included regional considerations, this index could provide useful national comparisons. Many of the tables detailed in this investigation provide a rich resource for the development of new items of graduate characteristics. Therefore, a schedule of the graduate

behaviour employers encourage and dislike should be constructed and provided for employers so that potential graduate compatibility could be identified and effected.

The present investigation concentrated on employers' descriptions of their expectations of new graduates. However, there are other participant opinions that could provide insight into the transition of graduates to work. Data gathered systematically from new graduates, employed graduates, educators, professional associations and employers could be assembled and used to describe the alignment between employer expectations and the graduate's achievement of those expectations. Therefore, an exploration of the dissemination of employer expectations amongst the various stakeholders could encourage the use of alignment activities intended to assist graduates in the attainment of those expectations.

Employers that participated in this investigation held differing expectations for the standard of a graduate's English usage and their ability to use other Asian languages. Formally assessing newly employed graduates would yield information about their actual ability. New employees could complete an assessment during orientation and a follow up assessment at a later date. This data would indicate how well new employees match employer expectations; in addition, improvement could be described. Therefore, an assessment instrument that objectively measures language utilisation ability could be constructed and administered to new employees with the intention of describing achievement at the commencement of their employment and at a later date; results could be used for performance management review purposes.

The concept of effective communication attracted numerous comments during this investigation. The ability of graduates to communicate appropriately in particular business environments and achieve the underlying objective was important to employers. This complex task was aligned with 'common sense' by employers. They indicated that providing graduates with useful communication strategies required descriptions of critical business situations and the performance standard expected. As communication takes place within an organisation many factors could influence the activity, viz., participants, agendas, cultural influences, responsibility, restrictions and incentives. Effective communication in a specific situation, for a particular organisation, suggests that a significant amount of contextual

organisational knowledge needs to be attached to generic communication strategies. Therefore, defining the interface between organisational environments and communication practices could allow 'appropriate ways of communicating' to be identified and transferred to students as communication strategies.

Concluding Remarks

This investigation provided descriptions of the employer expectations that ranged from individual quotes and item responses, to summary tables and statements. Expectations for graduate communication and thinking, the perception of certain graduate abilities and an indication of the characteristics employers would prefer graduates to possess have been described. In addition, a model of employer expectations was proposed. Although this investigation was exploratory, the results can provide graduates, universities, policy-makers and employers with an indication of the potential that arises from surfacing employer expectations within context. Also, the potential for investigating the expectations of employers outside Australia has been identified.

All the interviewed employers pointed out that the process of describing their expectations was useful for them because it helped them clarify the outcomes they expected. Employing a graduate was seen as a long term and substantial investment. Therefore, they wanted graduates to perform effectively and successfully integrate with their organisation. The idea of matching graduate and employer expectations as early as possible was well received by participants. Although graduates have to balance a number of influences as they seek their personal goals, employers felt that graduates should assign importance to employer expectations. Employers were also keen that prior learning experiences be geared to preparing graduates to satisfy employment expectations. They expected university business schools to direct academic and practical assessments towards the roles employers require business graduates to fulfil once employed. In effect, the participating employers wanted graduates to surpass their expectations.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: SCANS 2000 – Workplace Know-how

From the United States of America; originally formulated by Elizabeth Dole when Secretary to the Department of Labour, in 1990.

Workplace Competencies – Effective workers can productively use:

- **Resources** – they know how to allocate time, money, materials, space and staff.
- **Interpersonal Skills** – they can work in teams, teach others, serve customers, lead, negotiate, and work well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- **Information** – they can acquire and evaluate data, organise and maintain files, interpret and communicate, and use computers to process information.
- **Systems** – they understand social, organisational, and technological systems; they can monitor and correct performance; and they can design or improve systems.
- **Technology** – they can select equipment and tools, apply technology to specific tasks, and maintain and troubleshoot equipment.

Foundation Skills – Competent workers in the high-performance workplace need:

- **Basic Skills** – reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking and listening.
- **Thinking Skills** – the ability to learn, to reason, to think creatively, to make decisions, and to solve problems.
- **Personal Qualities** – individual responsibility, self-esteem and self-management, sociability, and integrity.

(SCANS 2000).

Appendix 2: A European Approach to Life-long Learning

From the Business/Higher Education Round Table

Definitions were provided for:

- **Training** - knowledge along with the skill or ability to do the job. It can be gained through studies, working or apprenticeship and is job specific.
- **Education** - knowledge that is not related to any specific job. It gives tools and critical thinking (e.g., theoretical knowledge) to understand, learn and apply new skills and competencies.
- **Operational capabilities** - help employees to do today's jobs with today's skills, usually gained and improved through training.
- **Strategic capabilities** - help employees to learn tomorrow's jobs and tomorrow's skills, usually gained and improved through training.
- **Life-long learning** - education and training for working adults who already have fundamental education and/or experience. It enhances professional competence. Studies are pursued parallel to the working career in order to improve, widen and complement existing skills and to provide the individual with operational and strategic capabilities.

(B/HERT 1993b:5).

Appendix 3: Mayer – Key Competencies

Key Competencies, for effective participation in emerging patterns of work and work organisation (Australian):

- **collecting, analysing and organising information** (the capacity to locate information, sift and sort information in order to select what is required and present it in a useful way, and evaluate both the information itself and the sources and methods used to obtain it),
- **communicating ideas and information** (the capacity to communicate effectively with others using a range of spoken, written, graphic and other non-verbal means of expression),
- **planning and organising activities** (the capacity to plan and organise one's own work activities, including making good use of time and resources, sorting out priorities and monitoring one's own performance),
- **working with others and in teams** (the capacity to interact effectively with other people both on a one-to-one basis and in groups, including understanding and responding to the needs of a client and working effectively as a member of a team to achieve a shared goal),
- **using mathematical ideas and techniques** (the capacity to use mathematical ideas, such as numbers and space, and techniques, such as estimation and approximation, for practical purposes),
- **solving problems** (the capacity to apply problem-solving strategies in purposeful ways, both in situations where the problem and desired solution are clearly evident and in situations requiring critical thinking and a creative approach to achieve an outcome), and
- **using technology** (the capacity to apply technology, combining the physical and sensory skills needed to operate equipment with the understanding of scientific and technological principles needed to explore and adapt systems).

(Mayer 1993:3).

Appendix 4: Core Attributes – Australian Universities

The missions, values, quality achievements and key performance indicators are published and comparable across the Australian higher education sector (DEETYA 1999:24-352). Most Australian universities were found to describe similar core attributes that they hoped their graduates would possess:

- **Thinking skills** – be willing to challenge current knowledge and thinking, have conceptual skills, have problem solving skills, be creative and imaginative thinkers, be able to combine theory and practice, and be able to reflect in and evaluate their own performance.
- **Communication skills** – (were included under the heading ‘knowledge skills’), an appropriate level of literacy and numeracy skills, be able to identify, access, organise and communicate knowledge in both written and oral English, have good listening skills, have an international awareness, and have the ability to use appropriate technology to further the above.

(DEETYA 1999:13).

Appendix 5: Profile of a Life-Long Learner

The lifelong learner should exhibit the following qualities or characteristics to some degree:

An inquiring mind:

- a love of learning,
- a sense of curiosity and question asking,
- a critical spirit, and
- comprehension-monitoring and self-evaluation.

Helicopter vision:

- a sense of the interconnectedness of fields, and
- an awareness of how knowledge is created in at least one field of study, and an understanding of the methodological and substantive limitations of that field.

Information literacy:

- knowledge of major current resources available in at least one field of study,
- ability to frame researchable questions in at least one field of study,
- ability to locate, evaluate, manage and use information in a range of contexts,
- ability to decode information in a variety of forms; written, statistical, graphs, charts, diagrams and tables, and
- critical evaluation of information.

A sense of personal agency:

- a positive concept of oneself as capable and autonomous, and
- self-organisation skills (time management, goal setting, etc).

A repertoire of learning skills:

- knowledge of one's own strengths, weaknesses and preferred learning style,
- range of strategies for learning in whatever context one finds oneself, and
- an understanding of the differences between surface and deep level learning.

(Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994:43-44).

Appendix 6: CREST – Critical Enabling Skills, Singapore

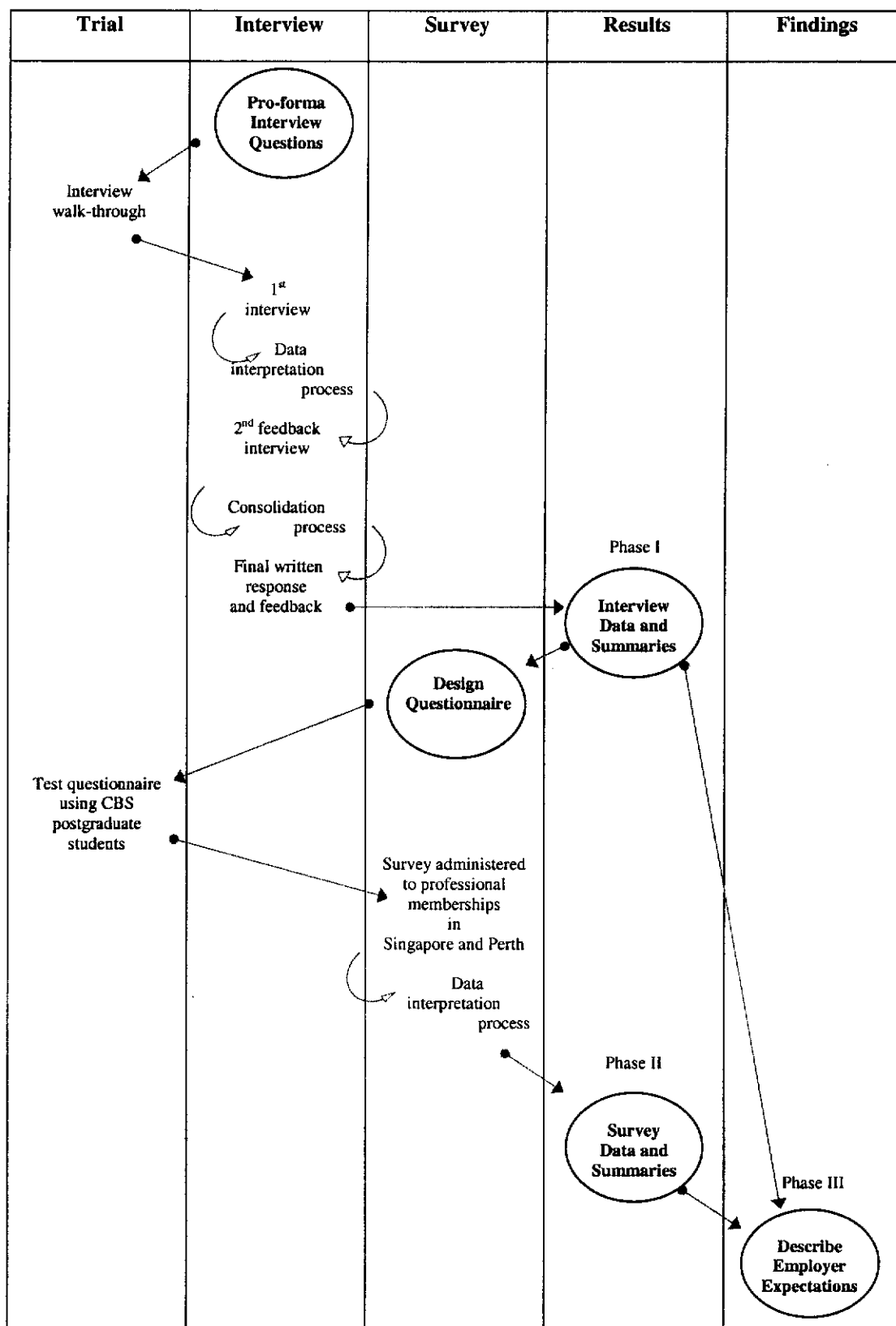
Skill	Description
1 Learning-to-learn	To independently acquire and apply new knowledge and skills required for meeting constantly changing needs.
2 Literacy Reading Writing Computation	To raise proficiency in reading, writing and computation for interpreting, analysing and using more complex information and data.
3 Listening and Oral Communication	To learn from co-workers and customers, understand needs and explore new opportunities.
4 Problem-solving and Creativity	To go beyond conventional approaches, offer novel solutions and make the leap to innovation.
5 Personal Effectiveness Self-esteem Goal setting and motivation Personal and career development	To take personal responsibility for self-development and meeting the changing needs of the organisation.
6 Group Effectiveness Interpersonal Teamwork Negotiation	To achieve synergy among team members for achieving higher performance.
7 Organisational Effectiveness and Leadership	To understand values and systems, take the lead and make decisions that support the organisation's goals.

(CREST 1999:4).

Appendix 7: Schedule of Relevant Published Skill Descriptions

Key Competencies Mayer 1993	Desired Characteristics of Business Graduates BHERT 1992, BHERT 1993a, BHERT 1995	Skills and attributes expected of new graduate recruits Guthrie 1994a	Key transferable skills Allan 1996	Qualities or characteristics of a life-long learner Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994	Self-reliance skills Hawkins 1995
<p>Working with others and in teams The capacity to interact with other people both on a one-to-one basis and in groups, including understanding and responding to the needs of a client and working effectively as a member of a team to achieve a shared goal.</p> <p>Using mathematical ideas and techniques The capacity to use mathematical ideas, such as number and space, and techniques, such as estimation and approximation, for practical purposes.</p> <p>Solving problems The capacity to apply problem-solving strategies in purposeful ways, both in situations where the problem and the desired solution are clearly evident and in situations requiring critical thinking and a creative approach to achieve an outcome.</p> <p>Planning and organising activities The capacity to plan and organise one's own work activities, including making good use of time and resources, sorting out priorities and monitoring one's own performance.</p> <p>Communicating ideas and information The capacity to communicate effectively with others using the range of spoken, written, graphic and other non-verbal means of expression.</p> <p>Collecting, analysing and organising information The capacity to locate information, sift and sort information in order to select what is required and present it in a useful way, and evaluate both the information itself and the sources and methods used to obtain it.</p> <p>Using technology The capacity to apply technology, combining the physical and sensory skills needed to operate equipment with the understanding of scientific and technological principles needed to explore and adapt systems.</p>	<p>Theoretical knowledge in a professional field</p> <p>Ability to apply knowledge to workplace</p> <p>A broad background of general knowledge</p> <p>Specific work skills</p> <p>Capacity to make decisions & solve problems</p> <p>Capacity to work with minimum supervision</p> <p>Capacity to learn new skills and procedures</p> <p>Capacity to use computer technology</p> <p>General business knowledge</p> <p>Capacity for co-operation and teamwork</p> <p>Communication skills (e.g. writing, speaking)</p> <p>Understanding of business ethics</p>	<p>Cognitive attributes and skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - logic and orderly thinking - quantitative thinking, numeracy - data analysis and reporting - independent, reflective and critical thinking - curiosity, imagination and lateral thinking - creativity and flair - capacity for generalisation and synthesis <p>Communication attributes and skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - preparation of written communications to meet particular needs or formats (e.g. research analyses / summaries, memos, official correspondence, business letters) - effective oral communication - presentation of data to meetings (including use of overheads and/or audio-visual equipment, as required) - public speaking skills - effective listening skills - comprehension - effective use of electronic communication <p>Interpersonal attributes and skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - loyalty to other personnel - understanding of relations with superiors - capacity to manage the work of others - team working, group planning skills - friendliness and empathy - capacity to relate to people with varied backgrounds - tact and diplomatic skills, negotiation skills <p>Work organisation/situation attributes & skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self-organisation, time-tabling, scheduling - patience and persistence - capacity to define problems in a practical way - goal direction, i.e. problem solving motivation and skills - evaluation and review - capacity to intuit solutions - quickness and efficiency of response - confidence - flexibility and adaptability - entrepreneurial flair, capacity to imagine possible new approaches or avenues - client orientation and sensitivity - capacity to work unsupervised, take responsibility - capacity to take initiatives, to handle the unexpected - capacity to handle and manage pressure 	<p>The ability to:</p> <p>Communicate effectively</p> <p>Organise</p> <p>Gather information</p> <p>Use information technology</p> <p>Act independently</p> <p>Work teams</p> <p>Numeracy</p>	<p>An inquiring mind</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a love of learning - a sense of curiosity and question asking - a critical spirit - comprehension-monitoring and self-evaluation <p>Helicopter vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a sense of the interconnectedness of fields - an awareness of how knowledge is created in at least one field of study, and an understanding of the methodological and substantive limitations of that field <p>Information literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of major current resources available in at least one field of study - ability to frame researchable questions in at least one field of study - ability to locate, evaluate, manage and use information in a range of contexts - ability to retrieve information using a variety of media - ability to decode information in a variety of forms; written, statistical, graphs, charts, diagrams and tables - critical evaluation of information <p>A sense of personal agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a positive concept of oneself as capable and autonomous - self-organisation skills (time management, goal setting etc) <p>A repertoire of learning skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of one's own strengths, weaknesses and preferred learning style - range of strategies for learning in whatever context one finds oneself and - an understanding of the differences between surface and deep level learning 	<p>The self-reliant graduate is aware of the changing world of work, takes responsibility for his or her own career and personal development and is able to manage the relationship with work and with learning throughout all stages of life.</p> <p>Self-awareness</p> <p>Self-promotion</p> <p>Exploring and creating opportunities</p> <p>Action planning</p> <p>Networking</p> <p>Matching and decision making</p> <p>Negotiation</p> <p>Political awareness</p> <p>Coping with uncertainty</p> <p>Development focus</p> <p>Transfer skills</p> <p>Self-confidence</p>

Appendix 8: Chart of Investigation Process



Appendix 9: Example of Survey Introductory Letter

Date

Dear ##### Member

The ##### is co-operating with the Curtin Business School (CBS) in a research study that will describe **employer expectations of business graduates**.

We strongly encourage you to participate in this important study:

Study Objective – This study asks employers to describe what they expect from recent graduates with regard to communication and thinking capabilities. Universities have a proud reputation of producing capable graduates but they are concerned that employer expectations of graduate capabilities may not be realised. This study will produce very useful information for employers, government planners, universities and students.

Results – In recognition of your participation in this study, the findings of this research will be sent to you (if you tick the relevant box in the demographics section).

Time – It will only take a few minutes of your time.

Completion – The opinion of employers is the basis of the research project therefore; if you are not able to participate in this survey please ensure that a colleague completes the questionnaire.

To participate in this important study please use one the following alternatives:

Fax Back – Complete the questionnaire and fax it to 1800 ### ## (no charge fax number) or +61 8 9### #### as soon as possible.

Post Back – Complete the questionnaire and mail it to ####, as soon as possible.

E-mail Back – Go to <http://www.cbs.curtin.edu.au/research.html> and click the hyperlink called "Employer Expectation - research questionnaire" to download CBS-###.doc. Please open the WORD document; complete your responses to the questions then save the file. Finally, send an email to #####@cbs.curtin.edu.au with the file attached, as soon as possible.

If you have any enquiries please email #####@cbs.curtin.edu.au or telephone ????? ?????, on +61 8 9### ####. Thank you for your valuable co-operation.

Yours sincerely

(Signed by the Researcher and a Senior Executive of the Professional Association.)

Appendix 10: Example of Survey Questionnaire

Describing Graduate Communication:

Please tick one box in each of the following six categories to describe your expectations for graduate communication.

Note: Throughout this questionnaire the word GRADUATES means 'people who have completed a Bachelor Degree in Business, during the last 12 months'.

Spoken English: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not expect graduates to speak English.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to speak English but I would accept a few vocabulary or sentence construction errors provided they could make themselves understood.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to speak English easily and use a standard of English that indicates they are capable business professionals.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to speak excellent English and to give the impression of being highly educated in the use of the English language.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Written English: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not expect graduates to write in English.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to write in English but I would accept a few spelling or grammatical errors provided the message was clear.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to write in English easily and use a standard of English that indicates they are capable business professionals.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to write excellent English and to give the impression of being highly educated in the application of the English language.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Spoken Asian Languages: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not expect graduates to speak an Asian language.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to speak at least one Asian language and I would accept a few vocabulary or sentence construction errors provided they could make themselves understood.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to speak at least one Asian language easily and use that language in a way that indicates they are capable business professionals.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to speak at least one Asian language excellently and to give the impression of being highly educated in the use of that language.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Effective Communications: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not expect graduates to communicate effectively when they start their employment.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to become effective communicators by learning from our experienced communicators.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to communicate effectively by being friendly and approachable so that co-operative relationships develop.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to communicate effectively by being 'matter-of-fact' and 'business-like' clearly addressing the objective of the communication then asking questions to ensure understanding.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Multicultural Considerations: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to work in an environment where English is not used.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to work in an environment where English is the only language used and where business practices treat everyone with equal consideration.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to work in an environment where English is the official language but other languages can be used, and where business practices are changed to facilitate cultural differences.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to work in an environment where only a little English is spoken and where an extensive understanding of local languages and cultural practices are most important.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Continuous Improvement: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not expect graduates to learn much about communicating.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to improve their communications by learning our corporate style of communicating.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to improve their communications by developing their personal style.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to improve their communications by developing a professional style of communicating.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Describing Graduate Thinking:

Please tick one box in each of the following five categories to describe your expectations for graduate thinking.

Note: Throughout this questionnaire the word GRADUATES means 'people who have completed a Bachelor Degree in Business, during the last 12 months'.

Thinking Method: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not expect graduates to have analysed their method of thinking.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to use a structured method of thinking that rationally considers all information and lists a complete set of alternatives so that the correct solution can be found.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to use a structured method of thinking that views all information as incomplete and therefore offers a range of possible alternatives for consideration.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to approach each situation intuitively so that creative and unusual solutions are proposed.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Initiative: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to follow instructions and obtain authorisation before changing those instructions.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to use their initiative as they react to business situations but I would limit their decision-making ability.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to be team players who use their initiative to encourage team outputs.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to use their initiative, make decisions independently and accept personal responsibility.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Knowledge Contributions: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not expect graduates to have practical business knowledge.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to use an understanding of the 'world at large' as they apply their specialist business knowledge within our organisation.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to become familiar with our ways of doing business then apply their specialist business knowledge.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to immediately apply their specialist business knowledge.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Contributors: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not expect graduates to contribute until they have accumulated considerable working experience.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to contribute by using their thinking capabilities to propose new ideas.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to contribute by using their communicative capabilities to improve our business conversations.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to contribute by combining thinking and communication so that our business conversations are fully understood.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Creative Ideas: (Please tick one box only.)
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not want personal opinions or ideas because I prefer facts and rational explanation.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to bring a little creativity to their work however their ideas must be practical.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to be creative, innovative and to 'see things differently', and to use their individuality to propose new practical ideas.
<input type="checkbox"/> I expect graduates to encourage team creativity and innovation, and to help teams to tackle issues differently so that teams propose new practical ideas.
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above answers suit my expectations.

Demographic Section:

(Please tick the relevant boxes)

My gender is: ☐ female ☐ male

My age is: ☐ less than 31

☐ 31 to 40,

☐ 41 to 50

☐ greater than 50

Do you hold a University degree? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is your first language English? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you speak an Asian language? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you hold a management position? ☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ Tick this box, if you would like to be sent the results of this research. (Remember to enclose your business card, so that I can mail the results to you. Note: your information will not be used for any other purpose.)

Graduate Performance:

Please circle a number to indicate how well graduates complete these tasks.

Instruction Guide:

- 1 = **fail** (graduates do not have the ability to complete this task).
 2 = **need help** (supervision is needed to complete this task).
 3 = **average** (graduates can complete and produce an acceptable result).
 4 = **good standard** (graduates complete this task professionally).
 5 = **excellent** (all my expectations are exceeded).
 N = I have **no opinion** about a graduate's ability to complete this task.

Writing business letters in English.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Convincing people to accept an idea	1	2	3	4	5	N
Writing business letters in an Asian language.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Planning their personal work schedules	1	2	3	4	5	N
Listening to instructions from seniors	1	2	3	4	5	N
Getting on with people from different cultures.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Asking relevant questions.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Making a formal presentation.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Using new technologies (telecommunications, computers and software).	1	2	3	4	5	N
Converting theory into practical solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Handling arguments and conflict.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Gaining acceptance from their work-mates.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Helping teams to produce required outcomes.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Preparing detailed written reports, in English.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Successfully working with junior staff.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Suggesting ideas that lead to valuable contributions.	1	2	3	4	5	N

Useful Graduate Characteristics:

Please circle a number to indicate the usefulness of these characteristics in a graduate.

Instruction Guide:

- 1 = **not useful** (I would not want to work with these graduates).
 2 = **can be useful** (this characteristic would need careful supervision).
 3 = **useful** (a handy characteristic for an employee to possess).
 4 = **very useful** (this characteristic should lead to valuable contributions).
 5 = **must have** (this is an important characteristic that we need to reach our goals).
 N = I have **no opinion** about this activity.

Graduates who work best under close supervision and guidance.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who realise that not all rules have to be taken seriously.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who say that 'they have a lot to learn'.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who are happy to participate without special recognition.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who are not prepared to 'bend' the rules.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who will only work with experienced people in new situations.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who disagree with the way you currently run the business.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who will only work with people from their own country.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who are totally supportive of your ideas and methods.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who make independent decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who are sensitive to cultural customs and traditions.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who work best by themselves and prefer minimal supervision.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who work best in teams where decisions are shared.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who never make mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who are highly competitive and always want to be the winner.	1	2	3	4	5	N
Graduates who are very confident of their ability to tackle new situations.	1	2	3	4	5	N

Appendix 11: Survey Items with Significantly Different Demographics

Concept	Gender	Age	Uni' Degree	English B/ground	Asian Language	Management Position
Spoken English						
Spoken Asian Languages						
Multicultural Considerations						
Written English			Perth			
Effective Communication		Perth				
Continuous Improvement			Perth			Sing'
Thinking Method						
Knowledge Contributions						Sing'
Creative Ideas	Sing'	Perth				Sing'
Initiative				Perth	Perth	
Contributors			Sing'	Perth		
Writing business letters in English.			Perth			
Convincing people to accept an idea		Perth				
Writing business letters in an Asian language.						
Planning their personal work schedules		Perth				
Listening to instructions from seniors						
Getting on with people from different cultures.				Sing'		
Asking relevant questions.						
Making a formal presentation.						
Using new technologies (telecommunications, computers and software).						
Converting theory into practical solutions.						
Handling arguments and conflict.						
Gaining acceptance from their work-mates.				Sing'		
Helping teams to produce required outcomes.						
Preparing detailed written reports, in English.						
Successfully working with junior staff.						
Suggesting ideas that lead to valuable contributions.			Perth			
Work best under close supervision and guidance.				Sing'		
Realise that not all rules have to be taken seriously.						
Say that 'they have a lot to learn'.						
Are happy to participate without special recognition.						
Are not prepared to 'bend' the rules.						
Will only work with experienced people in new situations.						
Disagree with the way you currently run the business.	Perth					
Will only work with people from their own country.	Sing'					
Are totally supportive of your ideas and methods.	Perth					
Make independent decisions.						
Are sensitive to cultural customs and traditions.						
Work best by themselves and prefer minimal supervision.			Perth			
Work best in teams where decisions are shared.						
Never make mistakes.	Sing'					
Are highly competitive and always want to be the winner.	Perth & Sing'					
Are very confident of their ability to tackle new situations.						

Chi-Square test of independence between demographics and survey items

Appendix 12: Abilities, Expanded Findings

What abilities did participants consider graduates possessed?

<p><i>Graduates were perceived to be very good at:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using new technologies • listening to instructions from seniors • asking relevant questions, and at • getting on with people from different cultures. 	<p>(the Perth respondent's assessment of graduate ability to complete this task was more favourable than Singaporean respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 73% of respondents felt graduates achieved a professional result. In addition, 25% indicated average results were achieved.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 88% of respondents felt graduates achieved a professional result. In addition, 11% indicated average results were achieved.</p> <p>53% of respondents felt graduates achieved a professional result. In addition, 37% indicated average results were achieved.</p> <p>53% of respondents felt graduates achieved a professional result. In addition, 39% indicated average results were achieved.</p> <p>(the Perth respondent's assessment of graduate ability to complete this task was more favourable than Singaporean respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 51% of respondents felt graduates achieved a professional result. In addition, 41% indicated average results were achieved.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 71% of respondents felt graduates achieved a professional result. In addition, 21% indicated average results were achieved.</p>
<p><i>Graduates were perceived to be good at:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • converting theory into practical solutions • suggesting ideas that lead to valuable contributions • planning their personal work schedules 	<p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of graduate ability to complete this task was more favourable than Perth respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 54% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 27% indicated professional results were achieved.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 53% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 19% indicated professional results were achieved and 28% felt graduates failed in this task.</p> <p>50% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 42% indicated professional results were achieved.</p> <p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of graduate ability to complete this task was more favourable than Perth respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 50% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 44% indicated professional results were achieved.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 44% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 31% indicated professional results were achieved and 25% felt graduates failed in this task.</p>

Continuation - What abilities did participants consider graduates possessed?

Graduates were perceived to be good at:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> preparing detailed written reports in English 	<p>(the Singaporean respondents assessment of graduate ability to complete this task was more favourable than Perth respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 50% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 40% indicated professional results were achieved.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 39% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 37% indicated professional results were achieved and 26% felt graduates failed in this task.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> helping teams produce required outcomes 	<p>48% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 40% indicated professional results were achieved.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gaining acceptance from their work-mates 	<p>48% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 43% indicated professional results were.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> working successfully with junior staff 	<p>48% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 38% indicated professional results were.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing business letters in English, and at 	<p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of graduate ability to complete this task was more favourable than Perth respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 48% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 45% indicated professional results were achieved.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 43% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 31% indicated professional results were achieved and 26% felt graduates failed in this task.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> making formal presentations. 	<p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of graduate ability to complete this task was more favourable than Perth respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 42% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 42% indicated professional results were achieved.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 37% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 36% indicated professional results were achieved and 27% felt graduates failed in this task.</p>
Graduates were perceived to be able to:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> convince people to accept an idea 	<p>52% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result. In addition, 26% indicated professional results were achieved and 22% felt graduates failed in this task.</p>
Graduates were perceived to be poor at:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> handling arguments and conflict, and at 	<p>42% of respondents felt graduates failed in this task. In addition, 39% indicated average results were achieved.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing business letters in an Asian language. 	<p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of graduate ability to complete this task was more favourable than Perth respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 43% indicated they failed in this task. In addition, 41% of respondents felt graduates achieved an average result.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 82% of respondents felt graduates failed in this task.</p>

Appendix 13: Characteristics, Expanded Findings

What graduate characteristics did participants consider useful?

<i>Graduates were very useful if they:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> worked best in teams where decisions were shared 	93% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 7% indicated it required careful supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> were sensitive to cultural customs and traditions 	90% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 6% indicated it required careful supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> happily participated without special recognition 	90% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 8% indicated it required careful supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> were confident of their ability to tackle new situations 	86% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 14% indicated it required careful supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> were aware they had a lot to learn 	84% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 12% indicated it required careful supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> could make independent decisions, and they 	82% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 16% indicated it required careful supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> worked best by themselves with minimal supervision. 	77% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 18% indicated it required careful supervision.
<i>Graduates were useful if they:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> totally supported employer ideas and methods, and they 	50% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 31% indicated it required careful supervision and 19% would not want to work with these graduates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> never made mistakes. 	49% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 14% indicated it required careful supervision and 37% would not want to work with these graduates.
<i>Graduates could be useful if they:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> realised that not all rules have to be taken seriously 	<p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of the usefulness of graduates with this characteristic was more favourable than Perth respondents)</p> <p><i>Singapore:</i> 62% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 27% indicated it required careful supervision and 11% would not want to work with these graduates.</p> <p><i>Perth:</i> 29% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 34% indicated it required careful supervision and 27% would not want to work with these graduates.</p>

Continuation - What graduate characteristics did participants consider useful?

<p><i>Graduates could be useful if they:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> were not prepared to 'bend' rules disagreed about the way the business was currently run, and they were highly competitive and always wanted to win. 	<p>(the Perth respondent's assessment of the usefulness of graduates with this characteristic was more favourable than Singaporean respondents) <i>Singapore:</i> 38% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 29% indicated it required careful supervision and 33% would not want to work with these graduates. <i>Perth:</i> 44% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 38% indicated it required careful supervision and 18% would not want to work with these graduates.</p> <p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of the usefulness of graduates with this characteristic was more favourable than Perth respondents) <i>Singapore:</i> 47% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 40% indicated it required careful supervision and 13% would not want to work with these graduates. <i>Perth:</i> 29% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 41% indicated it required careful supervision and 30% would not want to work with these graduates.</p> <p>47% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 29% indicated it required careful supervision and 24% would not want to work with these graduates.</p>
<p><i>Graduates were not useful if they:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> worked best under close supervision and guidance only want to work with experienced people in new situations, and they 	<p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of the usefulness of graduates with this characteristic was more favourable than Perth respondents) <i>Singapore:</i> 39% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 23% indicated it required careful supervision and 38% would not want to work with these graduates. <i>Perth:</i> 20% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 35% indicated it required careful supervision and 45% would not want to work with these graduates.</p> <p>(the Singaporean respondent's assessment of the usefulness of graduates with this characteristic was more favourable than Perth respondents) <i>Singapore:</i> 37% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 24% indicated it required careful supervision and 39% would not want to work with these graduates. <i>Perth:</i> 19% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 32% indicated it required careful supervision and 49% would not want to work with these graduates.</p>

Continuation - What graduate characteristics did participants consider useful?

Graduates were not useful if they:

- would only work with people from their own country.

(many Singaporean respondents felt this characteristic was useful)

Singapore: 20% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 11% indicated it required careful supervision and 69% would not want to work with these graduates.

Perth: 1% of respondents felt this characteristic was useful. However, 3% indicated it required careful supervision and 96% would not want to work with these graduates.

Appendix 14: Investigation Data Assembled by Themes

Prior Learning

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate a professional standard of written and oral English that was concise and written plainly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> speak Asian languages and know how to interact with people when using these languages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> use clear and simple communicative techniques know how to apply communication skills (acquired during overseas education), locally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> use systematic thought processes consider issues rationally and critically use common sense when applying their business expertise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> have a technical knowledge-base be competent in their primary work task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speak and write English easily, using a standard of English that indicated they were capable business professionals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> speak at least one Asian language. Respondents were split on the standard they expected. Approximately, half indicated that a few spelling or grammatical errors would be acceptable provided the message was clear. However, many respondents expected a standard that indicated graduates were capable business professionals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> have analysed their thinking method but there was not a clear preference for one approach to thinking. Respondents were split between; a highly rational complete information approach, a method that recognises incomplete information and an approach that was creative and intuitive. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved professional results when using new technologies. (Ranked 'best' ability)

Table 75: Prior Learning from Singapore Interviews and Survey

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> write concisely speak English very well <ul style="list-style-type: none"> value English fluency more than other languages possess superior communicative capabilities use rational thinking that was defensible and practical offer alternative suggestions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> use communications technology appropriately utilise new technologies be familiar with major business issues understand the 'world at large' be academically brilliant process information effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> speak and write English easily, using a standard of English that indicated they were capable business professionals. However, many respondents expected an excellent standard that indicated graduates were highly educated in the usage of English. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not speak an Asian language. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> have analysed their thinking method but there was not a clearly preferred approach to thinking. Respondents were split between; a highly rational complete information approach, a method that recognises incomplete information and an approach that was creative and intuitive. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved professional results when using new technologies. (Ranked 'best' ability)

Table 76: Prior Learning from Perth Interviews and Survey

Continuous Learning

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop their communicative ability improve their ability to manage cultural sensitivities and to establish trusted relationships develop their practical business knowledge embrace work experiences as learning opportunities embrace vocational learning have a commitment to continual improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve their communications by developing a professional style of communicating. However, many respondents expected the development of a personal style of communicating. In addition, a minority expected the adoption of a corporate communication style.

Table 77: Continuous Learning from Singapore Interviews and Survey

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopt a written style that was appropriate to their employment appreciate the value of work experience develop thinking capabilities through vocational experience (limitations would be applied to restrict the cost of graduates learning 'by mistake') learn to promote ideas within the organisation constantly strive for self improvement have a comprehensive understanding of their personal learning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve their communications by developing a professional style of communicating. However, many respondents expected the development of a personal style of communicating. In addition, a minority expected the adoption of a corporate communication style.

Table 78: Continuous Learning from Perth Interviews and Survey

People Practices

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interact with people in languages other than English deliver information and ideas in a manner that was acceptable to recipients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work in an environment where English was the official language but other languages could be used, and where business practices were changed to facilitate cultural differences communicate effectively by being friendly and approachable so that cooperative relationships develop. A minority of respondents expected graduates to be 'matter of fact' and 'business-like' clearly addressing the communicative objective and then asking questions to ensure understanding. In addition, a smaller group of respondents expected graduates to learn how to communicate effectively from experienced employees. Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results when making formal presentations. However, many respondents indicated professional results were achieved. (Ranked 4th 'worst' ability)

Table 79: People Practices from Singapore Interviews and Survey

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understand the implications of multicultural issues and local societal interaction be active participants manage their communicative processes and respond to adverse developments communicate effectively consult with peers to develop creative but practical strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved professional results when getting on with people from different cultures. However, many respondents indicated average results were achieved. (Ranked 4th 'best' ability) be team players who use their initiative to encourage team outputs. Many respondents indicated that making independent decisions would be encouraged. Also, a minority of respondents indicated they would encourage initiative but limit decision-making ability. Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results when helping teams produce required outcomes. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved. Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results when convincing people to accept an idea. (Ranked 5th 'worst' ability) become familiar with the corporate 'way of doing business' before applying their specialist business knowledge. Also, many respondents expected graduates to use an understanding of the 'world at large' as they apply their specialist business knowledge.

Table 80: People Practices from Singapore Interviews and Survey - Continuation

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be prepared to make cultural adjustments to communications communicate in a constructive and unemotional manner that was appreciative of Australian cultural norms get on 'easily' with people provide team leadership contribute through participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work in an environment where English was the only language used and where business practices treat everyone with equal consideration. However, many respondents indicated that graduates would work in an environment where other languages could be used and where business practices were changed to facilitate cultural differences. communicate effectively by being friendly and approachable so that cooperative relationships develop. However, many respondents expected graduates to be 'matter of fact' and 'business-like' clearly addressing the communicative objective and then asking questions to ensure understanding. Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results when making formal presentations. However, many respondents indicated graduates failed or needed help. (Ranked 4th 'worst' ability) Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved professional results when getting on with people from different cultures. (Ranked 2nd 'best' ability) be team players who use their initiative to encourage team outputs. Many respondents indicated that they would encourage initiative but limit decision-making ability. Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results when helping teams produce required outcomes. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved.

Table 81: People Practices from Perth Interviews and Survey

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote ideas within the prevailing corporate culture • adjust their issue resolution methods to suit the employment situation • question practice and procedure in a constructive manner that suited the employment situation • communicate in a manner that suited the business situation • listen carefully and question things not understood • adjust communications styles to suit particular situations • understand the deeper meanings behind communication activity • have an insight into the nature of people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results when convincing people to accept an idea. (Ranked 5th 'worst' ability) • become familiar with the corporate 'way of doing business' before applying their specialist business knowledge. Also, many respondents expected graduates to use an understanding of the 'world at large' as they apply their specialist business knowledge. • Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved professional results when listening to instructions from seniors. However, many respondents indicated that average results were achieved. (Ranked 4th 'best' ability). • Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved professional results when asking relevant questions. However, many respondents indicated that average results were achieved. (Ranked 3rd 'best' ability).

Table 82: People Practices from Perth Interviews and Survey - Continuation

Outcomes

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contribute early (in employment) by providing proactive ideas based on business expertise • suggest ways around difficulties • consider future scenarios • visualise the 'big picture' • look at things differently • achieve communicative objectives • use communication activities to contribute • embrace organisational values • enhance the organisation's professional image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • utilise creativity to propose practical ideas. Respondents were split on how the creativity would be manifest. Most respondents expected graduates to be creative, innovative and individually propose new ideas. Many respondents expected graduates to encourage team creativity and innovation. A minority of respondents expected only a little creativity. • contribute by using their thinking capabilities to propose new ideas. However, many respondents expected contribution to results from a combination of thinking and communication. • Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results when suggesting ideas that lead to valuable contributions. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved.

Table 83: Corporate Objectives from Singapore Interviews and Survey

Interview participants expected graduates to:	Questionnaire respondents expected graduates to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • present challenging and innovative interpretations • limit individual interpretations of business situations • contribute early (previous work experience was a predictor of ability to contribute early) • propose new ideas • contribute to corporate outcomes • interpret information • add value to information • manage their own careers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • utilise creativity to propose practical ideas. Respondents were split on how the creativity would be manifest. Most respondents expected graduates to be creative, innovative and individually propose new ideas. Many respondents expected graduates to encourage team creativity and innovation. A minority of respondents expected only a little creativity. • contribute, but respondents were split about what capabilities should be used. A majority expected graduates to contribute by using their thinking capabilities to propose new ideas. Also, many respondents expected contribution to result from a combination of thinking and communication. A minority of respondents expected contributions to result from communication. • Note: Respondents indicated that graduates achieved average results when suggesting ideas that lead to valuable contributions. However, many respondents indicated that professional results were achieved.

Table 84: Corporate Objectives from Perth Interviews and Survey

Appendix 15: Interview Assembled Quotes – Singapore

Singapore – Communication, 1

"able to communicate clearly and precisely; a practical style of speaking that clearly and simply addresses the objective of the communication; sensitive to the impact of the communication on the person they are speaking to; communicate effectively both within our organisation and with our clients; if they are not able to communicate in a clear manner to their audience (across different cultures), they will not effectively communicate; strong communication capabilities - someone who can put their ideas across in a convincing manner both orally and in written form; not be lost for words; express themselves clearly, to write fluently and to be able to distil the essential points from any conversation or set of instructions, and communicate the appropriate responses well; graduates need to be able to communicate clearly; transmit information effectively; using the language in a manner (or style) that the customer prefers; make other people feel comfortable in a conversation; a complete communicative ability is required; and an ability that spans a number of languages as well as knowledge of appropriate ways of using language." (Singaporean responses - communicative requirements)

Singapore – Communication, 2

"high standard of English; a professional standard of English communication is expected", by clients; "writing must be accurate, grammatically correct and business-like (there's no need to be flowery at all); speak well and to confidently use business language in English; must be fluent in written and spoken English; very good communication skills in English (that is to write well, have good grammatical skills, be able to speak well and able to understand what others are saying); what matters most is being brief, concise and to-the-point; they have to be able to arrange their ideas in a systematic way, use correct English without grammatical errors or spelling errors and to be confident to stand up and give a presentation; very fluent in English; communications should be as succinct and concise as possible (brevity is enough) - brief explanations of ideas and an ability to summarise quickly, concisely and accurately; very good command of the English language; clear, concise, grammatically acceptable and plain English; written English should be error free with correct syntax used in sentence construction; written skill in English is essential; a high standard of English; written communication becomes important when liaising with", other professionals, "in this case, there is a technical method used when constructing the communication, and this form of writing is not flowery or excessively descriptive, it is direct and to the point; be able to communicate in English." (Singaporean responses - communicative requirements)

Singapore – Communication, 3

"graduates may be required to make a presentation to an audience that might not understand English well; be culturally sensitive with their

communications; this is important because we live in a multiracial, multicultural society so although I would not put it as the most important factor, cultural awareness is expected; business graduates should be technically knowledgeable, but that knowledge would include cultural perception; I am most concerned about the way they communicate, because if they are not able to communicate in a clear manner to their audience (across different cultures), they will not effectively communicate; be able to make themselves understood by a wide range of people; our employees must be fluent in two languages; appreciate the cultural sensitivities and business etiquette, and to know how to express these appropriately; understanding the ways of doing business and the traditional levels of respect that are socially/culturally appropriate is important; many conversations take place in Mandarin (because of the nature of this particular practice); most of our clients are Chinese educated and a sizeable proportion of them do not speak English; be able to communicate in English and Mandarin; be able to speak to customers in their language; this may require the ability to 'break-out' into different dialects, or it may need the graduate to conform to a style of speech that is culturally appropriate for a particular circumstance (i.e., formal, respectful, friendly, etc); I would not employ a graduate from a different nationality; there are simply too many communication subtleties that a non-Singaporean would not understand; therefore a non-Singaporean would be at risk of not making the customer feel comfortable." (Singaporean responses - communicative requirements)

Singapore – Communication, 4

"need to be able to survive by themselves and get things done; listening skills are important as well because they provide the channels for verification/clarification; put forward a proposal in a structured manner so that the party reading or receiving the information can fully understand the thinking process; must be very concerned about the purpose of the organisation (e.g., objectives, etc), and be very focussed on what is to be communicated; listening and questioning skills to be able to put forward intelligent questions (leading questions) in a tactful manner; first impressions are important (for example, does the graduate give the impression that they can be trusted?); be able to make customers feel comfortable; to increase and maintain levels of trust and to be able to get ideas across to customers." (Singaporean responses - communicative requirements)

Singapore – Communication, 5

"involve the people they are talking with and to be careful not to 'take over' the conversation; be sensitive to the implications or the effect of their communication; I don't want people to just sit there quietly, I expect them to contribute and I prefer not to have negative people around me; knowledge of local languages can develop a level of comfort and trust that often provides an ability to get along with the other party; able to conduct various types of discussions effectively; in discussions with clients, customers, or peers, different situations demand composure and perhaps a different tack; there are different approaches to asking questions and seeking clarification while at the same time not assuming too much; it requires being able to see another

person's point of view and to help them feel comfortable; if the communication is not accepted by the audience there is little chance of it being effective; understanding the audience is closely linked to effective communication; what are the body languages?; there are professional ways of 'doing'; there may be long term implications that result from a communication to a particular audience and I expect a graduate to be sensitive towards this sort of potential side-effect; think about what they really want to communicate, then to speak in terms or in ways that help understanding of the concepts and issues; extract the necessary information from the client without wasting time on 'ramblings'; not just the ability to speak in English but to do so in a manner that is harmonious; knowing when to allow the client to keep talking and when to focus the conversation - this requires a certain firmness but it has to be handled correctly;" we are, "attracted towards graduates that have academic ability as well as communication skills; this sensitive approach to communication will be progressively improved as graduates gain experience with us; new graduates need to learn to communicate at all levels; a graduate is expected to quickly learn special issues or practices that may be associated with the intended audience; a lot to learn about effective communication in a professional practice." (Singaporean responses - communicative desired)

Singapore – Communication, 6

"an English advantage for graduates who picked foreign education; we need graduates from a cross-cultural background; I wouldn't say we are attracted to people from universities other than Singapore universities, but what I would say is that we are attracted to people who are from reasonable, well-known international universities (well-known for not only their academic sight but also for their multicultural staff and students); graduates should be aware of history, how cultures and societies live together in this part of the world - be it Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia, the historical concepts are very important." (Singaporean responses - communicative desired)

Singapore – Communication, 7

"an advantage to have a working knowledge of Bahasa Indonesia; a good working knowledge of Mandarin or Singaporean is advantageous; bilingual and be able to write quite well in both languages; written skills in English is essential but written ability in another language is not that important; although I require graduates to be able to communicate in English and Mandarin, other languages are important." (Singaporean responses - communicative desired)

Singapore – Communication, 8

"a young brash graduate selling our services to a very traditional trading company manager (whose English may be mediocre), then we may have a problem; managers may prefer to deal with someone who can communicate in their own language; I would not employ graduates if I didn't think they could manage this sort of cultural difficulty; graduates may be required to make a presentation to an audience that might not understand English well;

there are many cultural sensitivities to worry about in Singapore and Malaysia; there is a need to understand another person's heritage, culture and working styles; in the Asian context there is an element of 'face'; face requires a sensitivity to the person (a particular person), their cultural and social standing so that offence is not inadvertently given; in a western context if an idea is flawed you tell that person straight away those ideas are flawed; however, in Asia there is a different approach, there are ways of saying these things that graduates need to know and they must assimilate into the working environment before you can effectively work; being Singaporean helps because they have grown up with this cultural sensitivity therefore graduates who are not Singaporean are disadvantaged when compared with Singaporeans, unless they have been exposed to an education system that emphasises cultural diversity and have had extensive experience of social contacts within Singapore; an Australian graduate would be given much more liberty (from a cultural awareness point of view) than a Singaporean would be given (e.g., An Australian graduate having dinner with Muslims and who brought pork to the table would be told immediately that pork is not acceptable but there would be little offence taken; however, Singaporeans are expected to be able to identify that a person is a Muslim therefore serving pork would cause a big problem); westerners are initially given more leeway but they are expected to respect cultural practices as they become more experienced working within Asia; it is common in Asian society for seniors to dominate juniors but I want the communication to be effected in a manner that does not make the junior feel inferior; we are thinking of making the ability to speak Mandarin fluently an employment requirement in this practice; using ways of communicating that suggests, "I'm one of you guys because I know how we speak naturally amongst ourselves", it is a way of saying, "you're one of us or I'm one of you"; a Singaporean would fare better and would have an advantage over an Australian in terms of language and culture, I would expect the same advantage to work in favour of Australians in Australia; the bottom line is there could be a certain level of discrimination; communication has to be effective, a person wanting to form a trusting and comfortable relationship with a person from another culture has a difficult task ahead of them; it could be done but it would take time and depend upon individual personality characteristics; companies employ people in certain parts of the world with relevant national backgrounds (or cultural backgrounds) so that these employees can be effective; while it is possible for a non-Singaporean to communicate in a 'comfortable way', the communication will be different; a non-Singaporean will always be seen as 'outside our culture'." (Singaporean responses - communicative practice)

Singapore – Communication, 9

"graduates are here to learn and they must take advantage of opportunities to build on their experience by participating in review sessions, this in turn encourages them to communicate effectively; we provide training so that graduates learn these skills; there will be a period when training is given to brush up on language skills, social etiquette, working with people from other countries and an immersion program of about one or two weeks; we do this by understudying seniors; some of our employees can receive a scholarship to

study overseas but we would require them to pick up a third language; in the process of studying that language we would expect them to build an understanding of another culture and lifestyle; I not only expect our employees to speak the language but to have gained a basic idea of cultural aspects that would be useful for us to know; to learn the subtlety of communication practice within organisations but they must learn fast; *they have to learn how to interact with peers and how to effectively put forth their knowledge; they have to get used to an organisation's way of doing things (organisation culture).*" (Singaporean responses - communicative practice)

Singapore – Communication, 10

"I encourage an open approach that does more than exchange information; *communications are also relationship building opportunities; to be sensitive to the impact of the communication on the person they are speaking to;* I want graduates that contribute, get involved, who can think things through and can see a little bit more than just day to day issues, however they must do these tasks in a manner that is sensitive to their audiences; *to project a professional image on behalf of our organisation;* able to transmit information effectively (to juniors), yet this transfer should not be conducted in a condescending manner; communications should not be imposed." (Singaporean responses - communicative practice)

Singapore – Thinking, 1

"analytic in their thinking processes (for example, graduates should be able to take an inadequate brief, think through the issues, locate necessary information); *to relate information, explain what they have done and the reasons why they took a particular approach; be able to arrange their ideas in a systematic way;* to think when they make statements, substantiate those statements, handle problems of conflict, be able to tackle new situations and to locate what they think is the cause of the problem, then suggest possible solutions; I do not expect them to make decisions without guidance but I expect them to be able to identify causes of particular problems (especially in their area of expertise); *to take an issue and approach it from various angles,* to look at a problem from a macro perspective, consider a number of ways to tackle the problem, look at the nitty-gritty, *be able to understand the issue and think fast; to be able to defend their recommended solution; organise their thoughts logically and analyse a situation with a focus upon organisational objectives,* but at the same time balancing the needs of the societies in which we live; to think about what they're doing and saying." (Singaporean responses – thinking required)

Singapore – Thinking, 2

"*they should see the large picture, have an ability to listen, be aware of what's going on around them,* understand what the client wants and relate client requests to what is practically possible; I expect business graduates to be more pragmatic; *be able to deal with concepts and ideas; be able to conceptualise issues and to see the big picture (that is, how the various pieces in the puzzle fit together); to crystallise the big picture to its essentials but*

always bearing in mind the ultimate objective; I do not want graduates to be confined or restrictive in their thinking, yet I don't want them to be overly radical either; be able to provide clients with good commercial advice (commercial in both the sense that the advice is commercially practical for the client and commercially prudent for this office); they must be able to appreciate a holistic view of whatever they are concentrating on." (Singaporean responses – thinking required)

Singapore – Thinking, 3

"to possess a fairly 'well-rounded' thinking ability that is based on listening, understanding and relating to people (i.e., being able to effectively communicate with people); to advise, cajole, give ideas, encouragement; communicative ability requires an enquiring mind and the communication skills necessary to produce an effective report depends upon critical thinking and an understanding of how to present ideas," therefore, "*be discerning enough to ask leading, intelligent questions and to seek clarification whenever necessary*"; can suit and adapt their thinking towards the expectations of the person they are communicating with; be open-minded and have the confidence to put forward a concept then listen and see whether it was understood; must be open-minded, be prepared to embrace new experiences and *to learn as much as possible*; have an alert mind and the confidence to talk and seek the advice from work colleagues; *use common sense as they dispense advice*;" use "a particular way of thinking that is associated with their area of business speciality (i.e., thinking marketing, thinking accounting, thinking administration, etc.)." (Singaporean responses – thinking required)

Singapore – Thinking, 4

"I want ideas; *come up with ideas; suggest new business ideas*; I want new ideas." (Singaporean responses – thinking required)

Singapore – Thinking, 5

"to be able to understand client requirements," so that graduates can "*contribute to our planning, and to do this effectively they need to be constantly thinking about what we do; this sort of thinking would indicate to me that the graduate is really committed to us*"; I do expect them to be able to contribute (within their area of business expertise) right from the start of their employment; *I also want ideas that consider our business ten years down the road*; I prefer proactive not re-active thinking; new graduates provide us with an ability to look at things from a new angle, think of a new approach, *suggest a way round difficulties, to achieve something in a different way*; if a new graduate can advise additional approaches to solving a particular problem then this is a major plus for the office and fresh thinking is a very important aspect; *I am always looking for graduates with that little bit of extra wisdom, they look at things a little bit differently and come up with different solutions, therefore they have the ability to provide the office with strategic (commercial) advantage*; I want new ideas but the graduate must defend, explore and convince me that the new path is worthwhile; to do more

than just follow instructions; I want to see a graduate demonstrate personal initiative; display their thinking ability, but there is a fine line between positive contribution and arrogance." (Singaporean responses – thinking desired)

Singapore – Thinking, 6

"to keep learning, adapting and absorbing useful ideas; *I want them to learn from a mistake and move on; allowing learning is most important and I have found that this form of learning has a very healthy effect on employee morale;* I expect graduates to be constantly upgrading themselves by taking advantage of opportunities to acquire new thinking or knowledge; *graduates should realise that the knowledge they acquired at university is simply a starting point;* be ready to listen to an alternative point of view; manage their performance; recognise areas that require development and set themselves towards the task of gaining necessary knowledge and understanding; *adapt to our practices and to have the capability to constantly learn from their experiences.*" (Singaporean responses – thinking desired)

Singapore – Thinking, 7

"apply common sense; *a nice balance between creativity and pragmatism is what I am looking for;* I would like them to think about issues and to come up with alternative reasonable solutions; I do not want graduates to offer solutions that require substantial investment or are unachievable (solutions should be practical);" however "I am thinking of unstructured problem situations here because if the issue is structured then solutions are already known (therefore not much creative thinking is necessary); *I appreciate simple, practical ideas; a refined form of common sense;* experience is important, but common sense enables the graduate to adapt situations towards practical alternatives; diligent graduates with a lot of common sense can (to a certain extent) see the way ahead and guide the client towards a successful conclusion." (Singaporean responses – thinking desired)

Singapore – Thinking, 8

"I expect graduates to need time to ease themselves into our way of doing things; *there is a learning curve;* they will attend meetings (and client presentations) and watch the way senior staff present their cases; there are techniques that we have developed to help us target and focus upon a client's needs (because often clients have difficulty explaining their requirements), therefore *I expect new graduates to require training;* I want graduates to be able to think things through and to be able to understand the rules and the ways of thinking in our business; they need to accept that they are working in a particular environment with guidance (my expectation is to give general guidance then the graduates must work things out); *I do provide 'room' to make mistakes and as far as possible I will try not to shake a graduate's confidence;* *I expect to spend a lot of time with new graduates providing leadership as they learn about our organisation;* *graduates have a lot to learn about our organisation (the way we do things) and our customers;* by suiting and adapting their thinking to particular situations while at the same

time being mindful of their colleagues and our customers, new graduates will be accepted into our family (organisational family) and therefore have the opportunity to influence the way we do things; graduates often learn by mistakes, the key is to manage the control parameters and case monitoring in a manner that allows the graduate to develop and provide innovation, but not place the firm in a situation of unacceptable risk," therefore "*I expect graduates to understand the importance of this internal procedure and embrace the process enthusiastically*; new graduates are trained in these matters (for example, I would see a client with the new graduate attending as a junior, in this way they can participate in the process of working with clients while at the same time gaining confidence and allowing me to observe their abilities to work effectively with the client and to embrace the mentoring process); I also expect graduates to make mistakes (but try to limit them to small in-expensive mistakes); *mistakes handled the right way can be a powerful learning experience for the recent graduate.*" (Singaporean responses – thinking practice)

Singapore – Thinking, 9

"I encourage graduates to *present small pieces of work as soon as possible*," and have them "receive client requests and construct a brief (description of client requirements) that can be used by other staff as we all work towards satisfying the client's needs; we have short delivery cycles, however, I still *expect a contribution very early in their employment*; I don't want people to blindly follow my lead, I want their ideas too; quite often my idea will prevail (more than fifty percent of the time) however I may be 'behind the times' or 'out of touch' and on these occasions *I expect staff to explain why my idea is not appropriate*; I expect them to get on with their work; it's important that they are sociable, but graduates must know where to draw the line so that they have a professional manner and approach to their work; advice to be practical and the graduate must remember that we are running a business; the ability to look ahead is important because if a certain path is not possible we may need to revise our advice quickly (this requires an alert mind and the confidence to talk and seek the advice from work colleagues); *I also expect graduates to consult with me (or a delegated senior), regularly*; graduates are normally given parameters within which to work, if a perimeter is breached (or likely to be breached) then graduates must consult their senior quickly, in our business, mistakes can lead to expensive legal suits." (Singaporean responses – thinking practice)

Singapore – Thinking, 10

"sometimes decisions are a consequence of the facts associated with the brief but there are creative inputs so it is important to be helpful to the creative people (I want to make clear that I do expect a business graduate to guide creative staff); *I ask for lateral thinking from my creative staff but I would expect business graduates to practically temper creative advice in a constructive and supportive manner* (an awful lot of time can be wasted by work being progressed to the client presentation stage when it should have been stopped earlier); we encourage people, *we want people to have initiative and be creative*, and we are confident our guidance is good enough to catch

anything that goes too far; graduates need to recognise that their solution may not hold for very long because the environment is constantly changing; *I encourage creativity but it must be practical; in Asia, there are always constraints and a framework within which to work, so creativity is sort of managed because we cannot afford proposals that are very elaborate and do not work*; in small business it is very difficult to have an exclusive mindset with a particular focus (i.e., thinking marketing, or thinking accounting, or thinking administration)" therefore, "small business requires employees who can think holistically and use their initiative." (Singaporean responses – thinking practice)

Singapore – Importance, 1

"English is essential" but "other languages are useful" and "cultural sensitivities are important; it is very important to be aware of our multicultural dimensions, aware of the history, how cultures and societies live together in this part of the world - be it Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia, the historical concepts are very important; *graduates need to be sensitive to the idea that the cultures have variations that must be handled otherwise people will be 'rubbed-up' the wrong way, so I think the cultural aspect is very important and graduates must be able to understand the nuances that go on in this part of the world*; cultural respect can be very important because many people are Muslim or vegetarian and they could be placed in a situation where their cultural practices (i.e., ways of eating) are being highlighted as different; understanding the ways of doing business and the traditional levels of respect that are socially/culturally appropriate is important; *I expect graduates to understand what is happening during the communication and be aware of the cultural issues involved.*" (Singaporean responses – importance)

Singapore – Importance, 2

"communication skills are the most important, because *there is no point in you being able to think creativity if you are not able to express your ideas easily*; the most important requirement is that graduates communicate effectively with a client (i.e., the client understands the graduate and vice versa); when we communicate with our clients, it is important for us to observe whether they have understood us; so we are sensitive to whether our client is comfortable with the English language; verbal communication might be more important than written communication when considered in the sense of client understanding; *written communication becomes important when liaising with fellow" professionals*; "communicative ability is most important; for a sales role the most important attribute I expect a graduate to demonstrate is confidence that they can communicate in a manner that makes other people (customers) feel comfortable; a more technical role (e.g., an Accountant), requires an ability to communicate specialised concepts and information (from their technical area) to people without a technical background; communication skills are very important and *the ability to think about the communicative situation (in terms of what is trying to be achieved)*, is obviously also very important; the ability to be able to apply discipline (or specialist) knowledge to the communicative situation is another factor." (Singaporean responses – importance)

Singapore – Importance, 3

"graduates must *bring it all together*; I expect graduates to be really aware of how they communicate and think; common sense is important, as is a well-rounded outlook; so *it all has to come together in an effective communication*." (Singaporean responses – importance)

Singapore – Importance, 4

"the ability to *keep learning*, adapting and absorbing useful ideas is important; to think about how we can do things successfully in the future; thinking ahead is very important; the ability to look ahead is important; being a good listener is a very important requirement in our business; a graduate's listening ability is also very important; ability to get on with other people, specifically with their work colleagues; *to improve they must have a very good attitude to learning by seeking continual improvement*." (Singaporean responses – importance)

Singapore – Importance, 5

"it is quite important for the graduate to *know their job well enough to actually gain the respect of customers*." (Singaporean responses – importance)

Singapore – Importance, 6

"when graduates communicate, they demonstrate their values (e.g., like open-mindedness), *as a representative of our organisation we are concerned about this demonstration*, it is therefore very important that the graduate *accepts our organisational values*." (Singaporean responses – importance)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 1

"I turn down some graduates because their *writing ability is simply not good enough*; concerned about the writing ability; many graduates are able to speak effectively and they can relate things well, but *when it comes to putting their ideas down on paper many do not live up to my expectation*." (Singaporean responses – bad communications)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 2

Singaporean – Perceptions of graduate ability, 1 "over confident or brash graduates, *they don't think of the repercussions of their statements*; although they are young and confident, in their excitement they forget to be culturally sensitive." (Singaporean responses – bad communications)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 3

"I tend to prefer Singapore graduates from overseas universities; their study

in a foreign country seems to have given them a broader outlook on life and a bit more personal confidence; perhaps these things result from mixing with students from different backgrounds and exposure to international travel (and therefore other cultures or ways of living); *the English abilities of these 'overseas' graduates are better too*; graduates from overseas universities tend to speak up because they've been in an environment where people are expected to do that naturally." (Singaporean responses – good communications)

"I have noticed that graduates from Singapore Universities seemed to be much more nervous than Singapore graduates from somewhere else." (Singaporean responses – bad thinking)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 4

"lots of *confidence*." (Singaporean responses – good communications)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 5

"I am disappointed that graduates seem to *want to be told everything and they don't seem to have much initiative*." (Singaporean responses – bad communications)

"I am sometimes disappointed that recent graduates will not think through a problem, but I will not let them get away with that;" graduates "need to have a commitment to finding out things and sometimes their ability does not come up to my expectation; *I often feel that new graduates do not have enough initiative, they expect to be guided all of the time, wanting somebody to hold their hand*; some graduates have to be encouraged to express themselves and they often need a little push to put forward their ideas (not enough initiative and willingness to do things independently); I would like to see them express their ideas voluntarily; some graduates have problems when faced with major obstacles or they 'hit the deep end', in these situations they lack follow up and don't seem to be able to think round the problem; some graduates have difficulty handling pressure; taking more personal initiative (i.e., be prepared to take a risk)." (Singaporean responses – bad thinking)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 6

"graduates often do not appreciate the time frames that apply in the 'world of work'; *graduates do not understand business practice*, they tend to focus on" their area of expertise with an "inability to focus on the business aspects of" company practice; "graduates often get side-tracked by a client's problems (e.g., a client that says they will not be able to pay and new graduates do not seem bothered by this); I have to emphasise to new graduates, 'do a good job for the client but you owe it to yourself to get paid'; sometimes we are charitable but at the end of the day if we remain charitable the firm will close down." (Singaporean responses – bad thinking)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 7

"many graduates fail to understand that they have *to adapt a package of knowledge gained overseas to the Singaporean context*; being trained in another national context is fine but the new knowledge has to be adapted to the Singaporean ways of getting things done." (Singaporean responses – bad thinking)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 8

"some graduates think that they know everything but learning is so very important; the extent to which a new graduate's advice is accepted depends upon their organisational superiors" and "the superior allocated to mentor the graduate will attempt to provide guidance so that wild suggestions are tempered with reality" however, "*sometimes new graduates find it hard to accept advice*." (Singaporean responses – bad thinking)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 9

"new graduates are *not very good at managing their time*." (Singaporean responses – bad thinking)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 10

"I am very *impressed with graduate knowledge of the world at large*, they are more aware of their surroundings and have a broader perspective." (Singaporean responses – good thinking)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 11

"graduates with work experience seem to understand the importance of learning in an organisational environment and they *adapt very quickly*." (Singaporean responses – good thinking)

Singaporean – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 12

"*graduates do learn quickly* and they do seem to be continually looking to improve their abilities." (Singaporean responses – good thinking)

Singaporean – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 1

"being seen to be hard working; being sociable yet knowing where to draw the line, *a professional manner and approach to their work*, being serious when required and committed to their task and being prepared to learn; being sincere helps graduates to make their point and have it accepted; graduates will be successful if they can identify with our organisation's core values; *an element of sincerity*; graduates should be 'personable' and generate a feeling of trust; *not mind doing mundane stuff when necessary*;" being "*team members who try to get projects off the ground and make them succeed*; need

a bit of stamina and be able to take a couple of hard knocks; readiness to learn about the job and to clarify what is not clear; ability to perform well in their job, to complete their organisational duties in a timely manner but with a commitment to quality; handle change effectively; able to work with other people; graduates must be honest, display their integrity, be an effective team member, have a competitive leaning that provides a preference for winning and have good technical ability; graduates also need a certain amount of stamina and determinism to follow up and follow through issues, being prepared to achieve a result whether negative or positive." (Singaporean responses – success characteristics)

Singaporean – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 2

"confident enough to speak out at meetings, I don't want people to just sit there quietly, I expect them to contribute; graduates need confidence and they should be self-starters, positive, optimistic and generally a happy person, these sort of characteristics amount to a person who can get on with other people; I want staff to co-operate with each other so it is important that graduates are confident, positive, go-ahead type people; although graduates often display confidence in their ability to do the job there is another type of confidence that enables a person to speak out at meetings, this confidence grows with experience but the really successful graduates have this ability as a personal trait; a vast difference between a graduate educated overseas and a graduate educated locally (this difference is more than just English fluency), their personal communication skills, social etiquette and the way they carry themselves seems to display a more open-minded, broad-minded and confident demeanour; confident in their ability to get on with people." (Singaporean responses – success characteristics)

Singaporean – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 3

"if graduates are unsure they must speak up; I expect them to ask for guidance and not to feel that asking is a reflection of incompetence, I see asking as an important part of the process of learning; I prefer to discuss rather than give a lesson because discussions allow creative thinking to flow; if a graduate is very quiet and likes to be alone to do their work, this type of person will not fit into a marketing job very successfully; I try to develop strengths and ensure that confidence is not lost; There will be projects that fail or even projects that are completely messed up, but graduates must be able to learn quickly and move on if they are to survive; graduates must realise that an undergraduate degree is only a starting position, they still have a lot to learn." (Singaporean responses – fail characteristics)

Singaporean – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 4

"some graduates don't want to take the time to listen to another person's point of view; sometimes graduate expectations are vastly out of whack with the real world, they feel that because they graduated the company owes them a living or their movement up the corporate ladder will be very fast; unrealistic

ideas, *graduates who think too highly of themselves, who keep their ideas to themselves, who just attempt to impress for selfish reasons, will have difficulty succeeding*; some business graduates demand attention (e.g., 'I want to do this particular area of work and no other'); *arrogance will lead to failure.*" (Singaporean responses – fail characteristics)

Singaporean – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 5

"I have employed a couple of 'highly strung' individuals and this characteristic led to personality clashes and shouting matches, I'm not saying that we should all be bosom buddies (there is always going to be some conflict) because I also encourage healthy debates where staff are expected to defend their proposals, however *I want us to work in a pleasant business-like manner and not be overly aggressive.*" (Singaporean responses – fail characteristics)

Singaporean – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 6

"the worst thing that could happen is for the graduate to *'cover up' a problem* and to try and sort it out 'quietly' with the client; *lying about their abilities* (i.e., saying they can write well when they cannot)." (Singaporean responses – fail characteristics)

Appendix 16: Interview Assembled Quotes – Perth

Perth – Communication, 1

"I expect graduates to present themselves well in a communicative situation, this could be *a formal or informal situation where they would present their ideas in an effective manner*; I expect graduates to encourage a shared conversation; *I expect graduates to be aware of the importance of team culture and to appreciate that practices and therefore communicative methods may change depending upon the individuals that make up a team*; to prepare and present a successful presentation; to communicate easily with fellow employees and customers; to conduct a simple presentation effectively (introduce themselves, make eye contact, make the audience feel at ease and achieve the presentation objective); *quickly feel comfortable with people at all levels* (peers, colleagues in high positions, managers, partners and our external clients); to be effective in the way they communicate; graduates should be able to *convey an idea in a communication that is accurate, understandable and relevant*; to be very good at verbal communication as well." (Perth responses – communicative requirements)

Perth – Communication, 2

"understand what is being said to them, requested of them or communicated to them, *if they don't understand then I expect graduates to elicit sufficient information for them to assess very accurately what is being communicated to them, listening is therefore an important part of communication*; think beyond and behind what is being said; learn from what's going on and catch up quickly; an effective communication requires awareness of whether (and how well), the message has been received therefore, *I expect graduates to tailor their message towards different groups of people*; while the message is being delivered I expect a graduate to be actively listening to the conversation and not just talking at the recipient(s); to completely understand their communicative impact on people, this understanding enables graduates to *adjust communicative actions to suit particular situations in a dynamic and reactive manner*; sensitive to the effect that their interactions might have on other people; listen to instructions; be able to adapt their personal communication style according to the medium and the audience." (Perth responses – communicative requirements)

Perth – Communication, 3

"able to understand written text (and the implicit meaning within that text); write in a concise and easily understood form without being verbose or too brief; *to communicate in English and I expect a high level of written and oral capability*; effectively communicate using the English language; to write and speak English very well; to write concisely and *to address the points they are making clearly*; a high standard of English usage; to utilise high English standards when communicating orally; a very high standard of English is obviously essential; possess excellent written communication ability; *the*

ability to highlight key points in a succinct but effective way; use suitable language; our written English language standards are very demanding; to have high oral and written communication abilities; to write concise, brief, professional and business-like reports rather than lengthy descriptions (however the report should also be as interesting as possible); all communications take place using the English language; written communication (to be literate in their written ability with high level grammatical usage), oral communication (be able to express themselves and be articulate); all communications to be made in English." (Perth responses – communicative requirements)

Perth – Communication, 4

"facts and information are to be presented in a way that appeals to the audience (i.e. identify key points quickly); to say what they think in a constructive and unemotional manner, they must be able to demonstrate their knowledge without being bombastic or dictatorial, (i.e. talking over the top of people or showing off)." (Perth responses – communicative requirements)

Perth – Communication, 5

"we have employees from different countries, therefore I expect a graduate to be able to work effectively with them using English (which is our dominant language); an understanding of the Australian way of describing things, because my staff need to express themselves in Australia; the ways of communicating (e.g., body language, etc) are a part of the cultural background that must be appreciated; I do not require graduates to have knowledge of other languages." (Perth responses – communicative requirements)

Perth – Communication, 6

"to identify an appropriate medium for communication; to utilise appropriate technologies that assist communication." (Perth responses – communicative requirements)

Perth – Communication, 7

"I am looking for graduates that will contribute to corporate outcomes; it is not enough for a graduate to be academically brilliant; they have to be well-rounded; I look for graduates with communication abilities that appear to be effective and efficient; we are looking to recruit graduates with superior written communication ability; I look for work experience as an indicator of a graduate's ability to communicate with people; it is more than being able to speak or write well, it's about showing that they can get on in different environments." (Perth responses – communicative desired)

Perth – Communication, 8

"communicate with people in a way that is understood but *in a manner that does not offend the recipient*; I expect graduates *to think beyond what is being said*, (e.g. what interpretation should be used and what weight should be attached to the comment); is it a valid thing to say, and what is really behind what is being said; I pay attention to body language to gain a feeling of how they conduct themselves during an activity." (Perth responses – communicative desired)

Perth – Communication, 9

"a second language may be handy, *a graduate with other language ability would be looked upon favourably but it is not something that we really would look at as a reason to select someone for employment*; my interest" would be "aroused by an individual who is fluent in an additional Asian language, however *if a graduate has an Asian language as their primary language and their English is not that good, then I would not be as impressed*; I suppose that I would be slightly more lenient on someone from an Asian background (in terms of the subtleties of the Australian culture)." (Perth responses – communicative desired)

Perth – Communication, 10

"to communicate *leadership that promotes effective team outcomes* and to develop an effective working group, this requires an understanding of team culture (the ways or practices that the team uses to get things done); *communications need to be appropriate for the group* (e.g., words that the group can relate to), if the group is to effectively attain its goals, consequently, I expect graduates to demonstrate this communicative leadership." (Perth responses – communicative desired)

Perth – Communication, 11

"while I accept that *graduates will need time to appreciate all the social subtleties active within an environment* that is new (to the graduate); I accept that confidence (in their communicative ability within our organisation) will take time to develop; I do realise that graduates will require *a period of learning to enable them to adapt to our ways of upholding our professional image*; new graduates would not be called upon to present until they have had some experience; *as graduates will be learning new tasks I expect that mistakes will occur (this is an important part of learning provided the mistakes are not huge)*, I accept that they must fine tune their abilities via learning experiences within our company; I do expect graduates to require on-the-job training in how to write a suitable proposal; a particular style that needs to be learnt from this office but I expect graduates to be able to pick up the technique easily." (Perth responses – communicative practice)

Perth – Communication, 12

“I don’t like my employees using slang expressions however provided they can write a lucid letter and report, I’m happy; *use their own style of writing as long as it is effective*, internal communications do not have to be perfect but they must be able to achieve the communicative objective (for example, in internal notes, I am not worried about spelling mistakes or grammatical errors as long as the communication makes sense - even so, I expect graduates to minimise these sorts of mistakes.); *I encourage graduates to adopt a style of communication that best suits their temperament, as long as that style is professional and enhances our corporate image*; bad language (rude or harsh language) is not used within our operations; if the grammar’s not quite right, we have a journalist/editor who can restore the wording as long as the information is factually correct, the nature of our documents necessitates very high standards of both content and presentation, they have to be absolutely accurate and communicated in such a way that unfair political mileage cannot be made from our comments; *we expect graduates to adopt a particular writing style that is consistent with our organisational requirements*, the technical nature of our reports requires a consistency in presentation standard and the quality of the content; there is a significant amount of verbal communication associated with our reports, essentially this involves confirming the contents of a document because the process of information acquisition is well defined.” (Perth responses – communicative practice)

Perth – Communication, 13

“our new graduates are generally not exposed to non-English speaking cultures; the manner of pursuing business in Asian cultures is quite different to the approach taken within Australian, *companies must pursue what they consider is the right way to do business, therefore it becomes a question of how their way of business is communicated between different cultures*; I acknowledge that a graduate's cultural background could influence the way they conduct a communication (for example, some graduates may require encouragement to contribute to conversations), a cultural influence that I noticed during that period was that these engineers were not comfortable saying no, therefore whenever a question was asked that I thought would receive a negative answer, I was careful to construct it so that a 'yes' answer would indicate a negative response.” (Perth responses – communicative practice)

Perth – Communication, 14

“new graduates will need time to adjust to our working environment but *I look for small contributions to effective team work early*; I accumulate an impression of a ‘well rounded individual’ from the interview and discussion but *I don’t know for sure how they will perform until they’re put in a workplace environment, this is why work experience is an important indicator for me.*” (Perth responses – communicative practice)

Perth – Thinking, 1

“graduates should demonstrate open thinking (prepared to consider something new), analytical thinking (rational and structured argument), a broad mind (challenges the accepted way of doing things) and questioning; a graduate is expected to start out pushing a line or arguing in a certain way (I don’t say arguing in the sense of anything other than putting a view), but during the discussion graduates may change their view, graduates are expected to embrace this learning process; *be good listeners and to be able to take information from other people, re-interpret that information then apply it to a different set of circumstances*; I expect graduates to actively listen to what is being communicated and if necessary *obtain explanations to improve understanding*; another indication of active listening is the confirmation of ideas, concepts and instructions during the communicative process; *I expect graduates to really listen and to apply necessary filters, pick up on what is important, reconstruct it and then feed it back for confirmation; it is a form of listening that is focused upon the intention of the communication and it therefore requires extensive thinking ability*; realise that they are here to learn; the ability to listen and reason are very important; being able to understand because sometimes people are hearing but not understanding or hearing but not really listening because of preconceived expectations, *a quality of openness in their thinking; if they really want another person’s view, they have to ask questions, understand the answers (challenge answers if necessary) and perhaps offer alternatives; to pick up on comments, draw inference and follow leads.*” (Perth responses – thinking requirements)

Perth – Thinking, 2

“to think their way through issues, *they have got to communicate their thinking*; to approach problems a little differently and to think logically utilising a fairly structured problem solving process; *to be logical, structured and rational in their thinking but with an ability to be creative, innovative and to approach an issue from a different point of view; graduates must be able to absorb and assimilate information then produce further information with added value*, (i.e. knowledge), to gather information and make connections; to be rational because a graduate who is too creative or too innovative without the ability to rationalise could become a maverick and may become a liability; to gather information and think carefully about that data with the objective of producing cohesive comment that results from focussed thinking with consideration of the implications and issues that impact the outcome; *I do not want individualist interpretations of information or personal impressions about situations, I expect graduates to apply a very rational, logical and structured approach to their thinking as they construct arguments for a report*; thinking that is sound, rigorous and accountable; I am looking for challenging responses (perhaps tackling an issue a different way) and new concepts; to think things through, listen to what is going on, understand the situation and then come up with reasonable suggestions; *the ability to see the way something is done then to understand why it is being done that way, then to step away and seek improvement and finally articulate that improvement.*” (Perth responses – thinking requirements)

Perth – Thinking, 3

“graduates must be able to describe the way they identified the issue and how their thoughts developed; understand how their learning happens, especially within complex environments where problems and solutions may not be easily defined; graduates need to be self-aware of their cognitive processes, their thinking processes, how they arrive at things and how they tackle things. To have considered ‘I learn in this way; I listen in this way; this is how I manage to remember things; this is how I manage to think about things’, if a graduate has not thought about these issues after so many years of study then I would have difficulty in recruiting that person; *they need a good understanding of how they learn, how they remember things and why they communicate in a particular way.*” (Perth responses – thinking requirements)

Perth – Thinking, 4

“*a well-rounded person*, (i.e. academic ability, extra curricula activities, part-time work experience, travel and interests that are not singular in nature), I expect graduates to have an *awareness of the world at large so that they can appreciate ‘the big picture’ and relate to the complexity of real life situations*; to ‘see’ the whole situation, look at the people involved both within the organisation and outside, understand the interrelationships between the organisation and the market as well as our internal relationships, be aware that cultural backgrounds impact on the way people communicate; need to work in teams, they must bear in mind differences within the teams; to get along with people without big-noting themselves; *a holistic approach to thinking.*” (Perth responses – thinking requirements)

Perth – Thinking, 5

“to handle new technologies very well and to be able to *construct solutions that make the best of these technologies.*” (Perth responses – thinking requirements)

Perth – Thinking, 6

“to influence what we do and to suggest continuous improvement within the organisation; *graduate naivety can be a benefit to our organisation, the fresh ideas are not attached to historical (organisational) influences*; challenge the ‘status quo’ (in thinking) and can incorporate large concepts into practices that actually change our organisation; to contribute towards our planning process and to accept joint ownership of the resulting strategies; *to enhance the creative thinking component of our structured approach to problem solving*; I expect graduates to live up to their potential, unfortunately, super intelligent graduates can end up being very average contributors; *I do not expect graduates to stay in their comfort zone, I want them to challenge our ways of doing things even if they have to do it from the outside; to add value by understanding business issues and forming long-term client relationships*;

graduates need to eliminate personal bias and be outcome focussed; although we insist upon a highly structured writing process, there is an opportunity for graduates who can add that little bit extra - extra in terms of insight based on the facts; *thinking and communication are obviously linked abilities, it is easier to see how a graduate communicates than to see how a graduate thinks.*" (Perth responses – thinking desired)

Perth – Thinking, 7

"to learn how to effectively *contribute within our organisation*; to defend their ideas and views and to be able to promote their ideas in an effective manner (within this organisational culture); *it is hard to think about graduate thinking without talking about learning as well*; I expect people who have gone through tertiary education to have learnt something about thinking, learning and communication, indeed, when I recruit graduates I look for indications of these abilities; challenging is a major part of their learning; *the ability to do something, learn from the experience and go on to apply the lesson.*" (Perth responses – thinking desired)

Perth – Thinking, 8

"I expect *graduates to own their career*; individuals need to show me that they know themselves (i.e., know their capabilities and know why they do things in particular ways)." (Perth responses – thinking desired)

Perth – Thinking, 9

"put questions in a way that encourages other people to think about themselves and their practices, graduates would say, 'please explain to me because I don't understand how to do this job better and I need to know how to do it better', as part of the process of getting superiors to question themselves; *if graduates are too aggressive in the beginning of their employment, they may attract a negative reaction from their peers and superiors however, an inquisitive manner and an approach that involves others would attract a positive reaction from peers and superiors*; while I use structured planning processes to guide our daily operations we often use brainstorming (unstructured techniques) to supplement the process and I expect graduates to contribute enthusiastically; graduates can go as far into left field as they want, as long as the journey adds to the conclusion; a proportion of our work is compliance based with a set of structured rules to follow to achieve effective results; there are pre-tested and pre-tried methodologies that have to be applied consistently around the world, therefore we need disciplined graduates, but *we also encourage graduates not to accept everything at face value; so whilst it is necessary to apply standard methodologies and not to reinvent the wheel, we encourage constructive questioning*; the information they accumulate is highly critical to the report's content - *there is a clearly defined process and set of criteria that are negotiated before a study commences; given this agreement, the study is undertaken in a disciplined and transparent manner*; after obtaining relevant

information and assembling a set of comments the report's conclusion should be self evident, this process is very, very structured because we are dealing with perceptions and agencies who have different views, pressures and requirements; the primary focus is to concentrate on the agreed project, in fact, the project is extensively described before it is started allowing a considerable proportion of the report to be placed in a template, when an issue outside the scope of the current project is noticed, that issue will be recorded for consideration at another time." (Perth responses – thinking practice)

Perth – Thinking, 10

"I view their intellect and thinking ability as a powerful set of tools that need to be guided towards the right direction; I look at three things; how well they've performed at university (their level of degree); how well they conceptualise issues (the ability to see the way something is done, then to understand why it is being done that way, then to step away and seek improvement and finally articulate that improvement); *if mistakes are not made then nothing will change, if they have approached the issue genuinely and with a view to improvement, any mistakes will be viewed as a learning experience, however, if they make mistakes because they can't be bothered doing the necessary research, they won't learn from that*; individual commitment to their learning and awareness that they need to develop themselves; I want graduates to develop both their leadership potential and their ability to facilitate the resolution of issues; *I allow people to make mistakes but of course there has to be decision points (places where decisions can be discussed before implementation), the amount of latitude associated with a decision point will depend on my perception of an individual's overall ability (i.e., knowledge and experience)*; I like to treat decision-making as a joint task (so if I don't agree it will not be implemented)." (Perth responses – thinking practice)

Perth – Thinking, 11

"how well they listen (being able to understand because sometimes people are hearing but not understanding or hearing but not really listening because of preconceived expectations); *listening is part of thinking because if you're not listening, you are not allowing the communication to influence your thought processes, listening is part of communication because by listening you are showing others that their responses are received* and this helps you to judge whether your communication was successful." (Perth responses – thinking practice)

Perth – Importance, 1

"interpersonal communications are important; *how a communication is delivered is very important* as well (i.e., demeanour, body-language, appropriate social conduct); our business is about selling expertise and knowledge, therefore the way graduates communicate will make or break

them within our organisation; *it is the way graduates gather the information and what they commit to paper, that is important*, I expect the communication to read well and look good but it is what is being said that is most important; communication is very important because we do a lot of team-work and (as a further complicating factor) our staff come from various cultural backgrounds, so I expect more than just the technical ability to communicate well (i.e., written and oral), I expect effective communication, *actually being able to get a communication across successfully, whether it's to a customer or a work-mate; to think first and then communicate their ideas successfully to their audience*; if they are working by themselves then this is mostly a thinking process, if they are dealing with other people then they are communicating and thinking, at the same time; *I expect graduates to be able to 'think on their feet' and communicate effectively.*" (Perth responses – importance)

Perth – Importance, 2

"understand exactly what people are getting at and that's not just listening to the words they are using, it is the (real) meaning behind the words that is important, *I expect a graduate to be alert to the possibility of a deeper meaning*; the most important skill would be analytical thinking - being able to analyse and understand an issue that could impact a project; *demonstrate effective information processing, an awareness of other people and a multidimensional appreciation of the world at large.*" (Perth responses – importance)

Perth – Importance, 3

"a very important change-agent role; *participation is important to me, I expect graduates to join our planning processes*, I don't expect them to contribute to everything but I really want ownership of the group decision; *leadership is not that important.*" (Perth responses – importance)

Perth – Importance, 4

"I am looking for indications of thinking ability, a capacity to handle complexity, self awareness, a willingness to learn, self knowledge and *a desire for constant improvement.*" (Perth responses – importance)

Perth – Importance, 5

"*confidence is important*, some graduates are very confident, some are over-confident and some are not confident at all." (Perth responses – importance)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 1

"*lack the wisdom required for real communication, I would define wisdom as an understanding of perceptual processes* (i.e., understand differences between people); lack of basic fundamental knowledge about how to work

with other people; technically confident but lack communication ability; clarity and conciseness has proved to be a major problem in their written work; do not understand or accept the style and rigour imposed by this office; considerable variation in the quality of graduates with respect to their communication ability.” (Perth responses – bad communication)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 2

“some graduates fall into a trap of *assuming that people who do not express themselves perfectly in English have less intellectual capability*; I continue to be surprised by the number of application letters I receive that have grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and poor attention to detail, I get the feeling that some graduates feel applying is an automated process and that it will not be competitive (i.e. turn up to interviews in inappropriate attire, a little unkempt in their appearance, slouching in chairs, etc), I interpret this behaviour as a form of arrogance and ignorance.” (Perth responses – bad communication)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 3

“the interpersonal skills that graduates display are actually fairly good, graduates generally have self-assurance in that they will look you in the eye and talk to you, shake your hand firmly, introduce themselves, ask questions and are inquisitive, they’re not meek, mild, shy and retiring types of people, graduates who can make a favourable first impression seem to be those with this sort of self-confidence; *graduates seem to portray a greater level of self confidence.*” (Perth responses – good communication)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 4

“*new graduates will be given limited decision making power and they will not have autonomy*, they will have to comply with our organisational direction, *sometimes graduates have difficulty accepting that there are limits* to what they can do initially, (given their knowledge and experience); some graduates expect a clearly defined management hierarchy, we have a very flat organisational structure and this does not suit some graduates; when it came to learning they were argumentative beyond a reasonable level, it was as if they assumed that no one had asked questions before, or they assumed that there could not be reasons why things were done in a particular way, or they assumed that supervisors could not possibly be more knowledgeable than themselves; I expect graduates to show inquisitiveness but being overly argumentative conveys a sense of arrogance and that the graduate does not recognise their place in the team; *we have strong structures in place yet, (for some graduates) the requirements just do not sink in, it seems re-education of the graduate is required to enable them to succeed within our structures.*” (Perth responses – bad thinking)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 5

“possess lots of theory and knowledge but *lack an understanding of how to effectively implement that knowledge*; little appreciation of what the world of work is really like (that is, what we expect graduates to do in the work environment); many young graduates are full of themselves (with all their new flash business ideas), and some are totally incapable of listening to all the issues surrounding an assignment; rather than considering all the information young graduates often jump to the first solution that pops into their mind, unfortunately, once a solution has formed, selective hearing often sets in; graduates that went straight from school to university take longer to develop (as effective employees) than graduates that picked up some work experience along the way.” (Perth responses – bad thinking)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 6

“I have noticed that some graduates have *an inability to learn from previous mistakes*.” (Perth responses – bad thinking)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 7

“*an incapacity to do things within specified timeframes*.” (Perth responses – bad thinking)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 8

“graduate computer skills are excellent, *they pick up new technologies very quickly*, I am impressed with their ability to use productivity software (e.g. spreadsheets, presentation software and databases) and they are very good at research topics using new technologies (i.e. the Internet).” (Perth responses – good thinking)

Perth – Perceptions of Graduate Ability, 9

“*very good general business understanding and framework* from which to launch their careers.” (Perth responses – good thinking)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 1

“graduates need the ability *to relate to other people using friendliness and controlled aggression (in a socially acceptable way) and so as to be assertive without being offensive*; graduates must be prepared to muck in (being prepared to do whatever is necessary to complete our tasks), the factory often gets very busy and sometimes they need a hand, it should be a natural thing for upstairs to help the downstairs (factory) if they are under pressure; to get involved, share information, fit in, *be individualistic but become part of the team*; I do empower employees so that they can make decisions, some employees love this, others prefer more structure; I pay attention to body language to gain a feeling of how they conduct themselves during an activity;

commitment to group dynamics (graduates who encourage cohesive groups, who ensure group members are not left out and who consider the group as a collection of individuals with different strengths and weaknesses); the ability to get on with people, take instructions, give instructions, lead and to listen, are essential to teamwork participation, listening skills are particularly important because graduates will be expected to sit with a client, talk to them and get them talking.” (Perth responses – success characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 2

“I have noticed a higher turnover of younger graduates than graduates with four or five years work experience therefore, we deliberately target graduates in their late twenties; work experience is an important factor in the recruitment situation, a graduate that has accumulated work experience (even working in fast food outlets) is likely to have a more realistic expectation about our work environment; impressions of self-confidence are more evident amongst mature aged graduates, (e.g. graduates who are not in their early twenties); work experience as an indicator of a graduate’s ability to communicate with people, it is more than being able to speak or write well, it’s about showing that they can get on in different environments.” (Perth responses – success characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 3

“need self-confidence; self-esteem (i.e. feeling happy about themselves) enables self-confidence, some graduates are self-confident without arrogance; confidence in their technical and teamwork abilities.” (Perth responses – success characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 4

“a willingness to learn, good work ethics and tenacity; seem to be prepared to take the initiative and instigate a new idea; be honest; personal discipline is a key ingredient; high ethical standards (professional and personal), basically I am looking for honesty; even if they’ve had a couple of failures it will be their desire to keep going that will impress me, it shows a commitment to learning and self-improvement; a preparedness to learn and develop as their experience within our organisation builds and to use their common sense.” (Perth responses – success characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 5

“communication abilities that appear to be effective and efficient;” a graduate who can “gather relevant information, glean out the important issues, construct an argument in a clear and concise manner with a sound structure that flows and reads well, will be very attractive to us;” we “recruit graduates with superior written communication ability.” (Perth responses – success characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 6

“I am wary of the overly confident graduate; over-confidence, fragility, stubbornness, rigidity and unrealistic expectations; self-confidence should not be confused with arrogance, graduates may feel comfortable with themselves and be self-assured, but they may also think that the world owes them a living; graduates that appeared to be totally focused on what they can get out of our organisation will not strike us as favourable; there’s nothing wrong with being confident but new graduates need to be mindful of where they are in the overall structure of things, some graduates expect to be director within two or three years, a little reality can help stop confidence being viewed as arrogance by their colleagues; over confident graduates have to modify their expectations, some have an expectation that they’ll get a job and within a couple of years they will be the managers; in the last couple of years, the personal expectations of graduates seems to have been too high (even unrealistic); a pre-conceived idea that because they have a degree that makes them better than someone else, then they would not fit well into our organisation culture.” (Perth responses – fail characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 7

“some graduates are not prepared to get their hands dirty (for example, if their rubbish bin is full I would like to think that they would empty it); the ivory tower attitude can creep out occasionally, we are a small business and multi-skilling (mucking-in) is part of the culture, a graduate who will not share information or tries to retain information to build a power base would be very destructive in a small business, selfishness would not work well here, while it may be a characteristic that is useful in other organisations I do not believe it is healthy within a small business.” (Perth responses – fail characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 8

“our organisational philosophy is for overt support for private enterprise and strong criticism of anything that is anti-private enterprise or anti-business, therefore we expect graduates that join us may constructively question our organisational philosophy but that they will be basically supportive; graduates who strongly disagree with our philosophy would not have a long career with us.” (Perth responses – fail characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 9

“graduates that like to work alone without consulting or communicating with colleagues; some individuals may choose to drop out by saying ‘well I’m an individual and I’ll not take any risks so I’ll keep low and hide out of the way where nobody will bother me’.” (Perth responses – fail characteristics)

Perth – Useful Graduate Characteristics, 10

“a ‘yes’ man interpersonal strategy would definitely lead to failure.” (Perth responses – fail characteristics)

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