Capacity building: Enhancing strengths rather than filling up the gaps

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Abstract

This article basically tries to explain that capacity building is not a limited base. It doesn't always have to be something that helps in bridging the gap I.e weakness of ones but can be something that helps in enhancing the strengths and capabilities and placing them in the right place. Capacity building of higher educational institution's students is necessary for achievement of their career outcomes. It also contributes in developing human capital required for national economic growth. This study attempts to empirically assess the perception of university students towards capacity building and its measures. The study is based on a survey of 53 students of Amity University, India. The study results reveal that the university students perceive that capacity building is possible. Use of personal qualities, understanding and use of opportunities, and opportunity seeking behavior are identified as major measures necessary for capacity building. Between the two major approaches for capacity building, capitalizing on personal strengths is found to be perceived suitable than filling weakness gap. Male students are found to perceive that building on personal strengths is more important than females. Additionally, the students opine that university life is important period for capacity building so that employability of the graduates enhances.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Opportunities, Bridging the gap, Strengths and capabilities

Introduction

Policy makers have considered that India's competitiveness in the increasingly complex global economy can be enhanced by a rapid expansion of higher education. There's increasing concern about the sky high rates of graduate unemployment on the one hand - and the shortage of specialist skills on the other. In fact, the skills shortage has been identified as one of the biggest obstacles for the government to reach its economic growth targets. The education sector has a critical role to play in any country's development but the role is particularly acute when it comes to those countries that are at the start up or take off stage of development, or those that are seeking to recover from periods of stagnation and slow pace of development (Altbach, 2015). Hence, capacity building of students enrolled in higher education is essential to fulfill the human capital needs of a nation to support economic growth.

Capacity building (or capacity development) is the process by which individuals and organizations obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment and other resources needed to do their jobs competently. It also allows individuals and organizations perform at a greater capacity (larger scale, larger audience, larger impact, etc.). Rajan (1997) state that capacity means having the aptitudes, resources, relationships and facilitating conditions required to act effectively to achieve specified mandates. Capacity is conceptualized at three levels—individuals, work environment or organization, and institutions. The notion of capacity building emerged in the development discourse in the 1980s, where it was related with international assistance for realizing macro-economic growth through technological transfers (Brinkerhoff and Morgan, 2010; Feng, 2006). Nowadays, education systems have to adapt more and more to economic, social and educational changes and capacity building activities are consequently a key objective (Altbach, 2015).

Even though it is an open secret that the capacity development of an individual is no longer linear but multifaceted and largely dependent on the individual, graduate students more often than not look for and expect some input from career counselors, mentors/role models, departments and future employers as they prepare to graduate. Previous studies have suggested that capacity building which is a major determinant of employability is a multi-faceted construct with both internal and external dimensions (Kirschenbaum & Mano-Negrin, 1999; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Internal factors for employability of graduates include vocational or job-related knowledge and skills, build on personal strengths, fill weakness gap, use of personal qualities, and mastery of job search, together with the potential to learn (Lane, Puri, Cleverly, Wylie, & Rajan, 2000). These factors can be encapsulated under the heading of 'self-belief'. The prevailing state of the external labour market may also be significant in terms of perceptions of employability (Kirschenbaum & Mano-Negrin, 1999; Lane et al., 2000; Rajan, 1997). This is the second major dimension of the employability.

Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth (2004) considered capacity development to increase employability as a psycho-social construct which 'subsumes a host of person-centred constructs' as a 'synergistic combination' of opportunity seeking behavior, career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital. The literature on graduate capacity building has not provided clear conceptualization of work readiness among graduate students (Lane, et al., 2000). In a recent review of assessments on work readiness by Feng (2013), they noted that the construct of work readiness is still in its early stages of development. As a result, work readiness is not clearly defined, or measured. It is therefore common to see different conceptual frameworks with some number of skills identified as criteria for determining capacity building for work readiness.

The shift from a paradigm where organizations contribute to and manage the careers of individuals' to a new normal where individuals construct their own careers has seen little research. Individual students have major role in their capacity building (Lane et al., 2000). Interestingly, most studies on the area focus on identifying and measuring the skills and attributes of work readiness. Even though the lists of skills and attributes vary and are labeled differently, some of the common themes that emerge include personal strengths and weakness, personal qualities, opportunity seeking behavior, communication, motivation, initiative, creativity and interpersonal skills (Feng, 2013). However, few studies have focused on capacity building of students.

Higher educational institutions' goal of providing quality education for students is intrinsically linked to developing students for life as well as generating human capital to meet national goals. Moxley, Najor-Durack, and Dumbrigue (2001) asserted that retention in higher education should go beyond keeping students in school to helping students develop and become successful students. There are a number of assessments to determine whether students' knowledge and capacity is expanded in addition to students attesting to either receiving quality education or not. However, preparation of students for post-graduation especially for the world of work by building capacity is hardly assessed among students.

Hence, this study aims to examine student's perceptions on capacity building in Indian context. In this study capacity building has been examined from the perspective of individual students. This study therefore investigated the perceptions of workforce readiness of university students in terms of capacity development. This will be contributing to the progress towards developing more a resilient and prepared workforce to meet the demands of the Indian economy in the future.

Methodology

The primary purpose of this study is to empirically investigate perceived capacity building for work readiness among students at Amity University, Gurgaon, India. The target population for this study was all Amity University students. The university serves diverse populations and their students come from different socioeconomic and school backgrounds. A total sample of 53 students studying

MBA, B. Sc., B. Tech, BJMC and BBA at the university was used for this study using convenience sampling. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. The survey instrument had personal and academic information and items that measured perceived measures for capacity building for work readiness of university students. It contained 5 items for measures perceived to be necessary for capacity building on a three point scale (1= Agree, 2 = Neutral, and 3 = Disagree). The measures were building on personal strengths, gap filling, seek opportunities, use of opportunities, and use of personal qualities. The survey took about 5 - 10 minutes to complete all sections. The response rate was 86%. The data has been analyzed employing descriptive and inferential statistics. The independent samples t-test is used to examine differences on perceptions towards capacity development by gender.

Results and Discussion

The Table I exhibits the descriptive statistics for opinion of university students on measures required to enhance capacity building among university students. The mean values reveal that the students perceive that building capacity is possible as reflected by the associated mean score of 1.23. There are two major approaches for capacity building. The first is to capitalize and enhance strengths to build capacity while the second is to fill the weaknesses. The results indicate that the first approach of building on individual qualities is perceived to be better approach for capacity building.

Table I: Descriptive Statistics for Capacity Building Items

Item No.	Measures	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Capacity Building is Possible	53	1	3	1.23	.466
2	Personal Strengths	53	1	3	1.72	.769
3	Filling Gap	53	1	3	1.64	.653
4	Seek Opportunities	53	1	3	1.21	.495
5	Understanding and Use of Opportunities	53	1	3	1.17	.427
6	Use of Personal Qualities and Resources	53	1	3	1.15	.411
7	20's as a Suitable Period for Capacity Building	53	1	3	1.25	0.515

All the mean scores are lower than 2, the neutral point anchor, which reveal that the respondents agree the necessity of the measures for capacity building. Capitalizing on personal strength, filling gap in weaknesses, seeking opportunities, use of opportunities, and use of personal qualities are all perceived to be necessary elements for capacity development. Among them, use of personal qualities is found to be perceived as the most important measures followed by understanding and use of opportunities, and opportunity seeking behavior. The university life is perceived to be suitable period for capacity building for the students.

Table II presents the mean scores of various capacity development measures by gender and examines the differences in the mean scores using Independent Samples T-test. The output of the inferential test reveal that statistically significant difference in mean scores is found in case of items "Personal Strengths" and "Filling Gap" by gender. Female students are found to have stronger perception in necessity of both building on strength and filling weakness gap for capacity building.

Table II: Differences in Perceptions Towards Capacity Development by Gender

Item No.	Measures	Mean Scores		T-Stat	Sig.
		Male	Female		
1	Capacity Building is Possible	1.17	1.29	- 0.926	0.359
2	Personal Strengths	1.83	1.58	2.02*	0.049
3	Filling Gap	1.76	1.50	2.10*	0.031
4	Seek Opportunities	1.24	1.17	0.544	0.589
5	Understanding and Use of Opportunities	1.17	1.17	0.048	0.962
6	Use of Personal Qualities and Resources	1.17	1.13	0.415	0.680
7	20's as a Suitable Period for Capacity Building	1.31	1.17	1.010	0.317

** The statistics is significant at 5 % level of significance.*

For all remaining measures the null hypothesis of no significant difference in mean scores by gender can't be accepted at conventional level of significance. Hence, both male and female students are found to have similar perception on importance of measures opportunity seeking, use of opportunities and use of personal qualities for capacity building.

Table III presents the output of chi-squared test employed to examine association between preferred capacity development approach and gender. The two capacity development approach considered are enhancing strengths and filling weakness gap. The table also presents output of cross-tabulation between gender and capacity building approach.

Tabel III: Association Between Capacity Development Approaches and Gender

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Capacity Building Approach	Enhance Strengths	93.1%	91.7%	92.5%
	Fill Gap	6.9%	8.3%	7.5%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
χ squared = 0.039 (Sig. 0.844)				

The results indicate that both male and female university students perceive enhancing strength is suitable approach for capacity building. The value of chi-square statistics is not found to be significant; hence, no association is identified between preference for capacity building approach and gender.

Conclusion

Capacity building of higher educational institution's students is essential to develop them into human capital required for national development. The study results reveal that the university students perceive that capacity building is possible. Use of personal qualities, understanding and use of opportunities, and opportunity seeking behavior are identified as major measures necessary for capacity building. Between the two major approaches for capacity building, capitalizing on personal strengths is found to be perceived suitable than filling weakness gap. Male students are found to perceive that building on personal strengths is more important than females. Additionally, the students opine that university life is important period for capacity building so that employability of the graduates enhances.

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