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Investigating employer and early career employee perceptions of the development of employability skills during postgraduate study in the UK for students entering the Chinese PR industry (0243)

Programme number: N7

Research Domain: Academic Practice, Work and Cultures

Purpose

The paper aims to contribute to wider consideration of the development of employability skills for Chinese students during postgraduate study in the UK.

Nature of the research

Specifically focused on the public relations industry in China, the study will investigate employers' requirements for employability skills and their perceptions of new graduates' abilities in these areas. Further, these employer perspectives will be compared with the experiences of employees in the early stages of their careers. The fundamental aim is to gain insight to the effectiveness of British postgraduate business programmes in developing employability skills of relevance to the Chinese PR industry.

By December 2013, an initial qualitative study will have been completed. This data will be analysed and discussed in the context of frameworks developed from an in-depth review of employability literature.

Methodology

In-depth interviews will be conducted in Beijing and Shanghai in August 2013 with:

- ◆ 12 to 15 senior managers involved in recruiting and managing new graduates.
- ◆ Eight to 10 HR managers responsible for talent management and graduate recruitment.

- ◆ 20 to 25 staff who studied on a postgraduate business programme in the UK and who have less than two years' relevant work experience in PR.
- ◆ All staff will be selected from the top 20 agencies operating in Beijing and Shanghai, China.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Template analysis will then be used to organise and analyse this data according to common themes.

Rationale for the study

Discussions with a number of recent graduates from a corporate communications and public relations postgraduate programme based in the UK suggest that early career employees working in PR agencies based in China typically work significantly longer hours, have less responsibility and, generally, carry out more menial tasks than their European counterparts. Essentially, they are put through an intense 'training period' for the first few years of their employment in order to develop them into fully-skilled PR professionals.

This situation raises a number of questions:

- ◆ What are the key employability skills required in China, both now and in the future?
- ◆ Do UK-based postgraduate business programmes develop appropriate employability skills for the Chinese labour market?
- ◆ Are students adequately prepared to present and deploy their assets in gaining employment?
- ◆ Could UK postgraduate programmes be adapted to better develop key employability skills through study, thus reducing the current need for an 'on-the-job training period'?

In addition to providing further insight to the potential employability skills gap in China, the results of the study will be used to explore opportunities for

internationalising UK programmes in order to provide a richer and more relevant student experience.

Study findings

The final presentation will review:

- ◆ Capability of new graduates to gain initial employment and maintain employment within the PR industry in China. (Hillage & Pollard, 1998) and (Wang & Lowe ,2011)
- ◆ Skills gaps between employer requirements and graduate competencies (Jackson, 2010)
- ◆ Specific discussion of market-specific issues affecting employability in China. (Heffernan et al, 2010), (Iles et al, 2010) and (Wang & Lowe, 2011)
- ◆ Relevance of existing employability skills frameworks, such as Liu's China National Employability Framework (2010), within the context of an innovative, fast-developing industry.
- ◆ Identification of future employability skills requirements of Chinese employers, as proposed by the Institute for the Future (2011)

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Keywords

employability, China, skills