

A Phenomenological Exploration on Three Skill Area for Employment: Industry Practitioners' Insights

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Abstract

Career readiness among graduates has become an intense focus for higher learning institutions. With the increasing reliance on technology, digital literacy cannot be the only skill that matters in the workplace. Employers and industry leaders became more vocal in highlighting the inability of graduates to confront the skill mismatch and imbalance between the university and fundamental work skills. Along with declining labour markets and the devaluation of degree qualifications as among the impacts of the COVID-19 slump and digitalization, universities are pressured to enhance their graduates' employability. The study aims to explore the debatable work skills through the lived experiences of industry practitioners. The exploration provides a possible framework for work-demand-driven education. A descriptive phenomenological research design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the practical skills at work as demanded by the practitioners. A two-tiered method of interviews was employed to establish the context, relay specific details of the participants' experiences, and contemplate the meaning of their experiences. Results show that a mainstream discourse describes human skills (communication), technical skills, and conceptual skills that help employees thrive in their careers in the brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible (BANI-world) new age of work. Finally, a suggested framework to

promote future work skills-related learning is provided for higher staff and learners of higher education.

Keywords: Future-work skills, three skill area, BANI-world, phenomenology, employment

1. Introduction

Graduate employment is among the significant pursuits of higher learning. Demand-driven education, the third wave of post-secondary education reform, emphasises that university programmes serve as traditional highways to employment (Deegan & Martin, 2018). In 2022, 73 million (14.9%) of global youth were reportedly unemployed (Li, 2022). Countries place greater emphasis on dealing with social risks resulting from unemployment. Through the 14th Five-Year Plan, China puts forward measures to support higher-learning graduates by entering the rural economy and business start-ups (Li, 2022). A needy situation also presents itself among employed graduates. The Department of Statistics Malaysia has confirmed that in 2021, Malaysians' median salary was RM2,250. The amount is too low considering the cost of living in the city is high. One of the reasons Malaysians are underpaid is the deficient creation of high-skilled jobs. The decline in high-skilled job opportunities has spurred an imbalance in graduates' employment. Over the last decade, Malaysia has produced 151,000 graduates annually. Based on the recent Graduate Tracer Study by the Ministry of Higher Education and Khazanah Research Institute, 95% of young employees who work in unskilled jobs are overqualified. Another reason for low pay is a skill mismatch that is highly attributed to communication skills (spoken and written expression), social skills (social orientation and perceptiveness), and physical aptitudes (stamina). These reasons complement the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) claim that employers lament skill imbalances in graduates. This instance is evidence of companies refusing to pay for skillsets they do not need. While many studies and experts suggest inequality and the need for a new economic strategy, they primarily gripe with no urgent solution or at least offer a model that starts the ball rolling for the education-labour market reform model. Artificial intelligence is among the factors that raise work design questions. The elimination of certain jobs, digitalization, and automation require an understanding of how humans should engage with machines (Gagne et al., 2022). In 20 years, the ever-changing world has been described by the emergence of novel terms that put forward guidelines in the face of the uncertainties of an increasingly digitalized and interconnected ecosystem. We are presented with at least three novel models to understand the current state, namely the SPOD (steady, predictable, ordinary, and definite), VUCA (volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous), and recently BANI (brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible). These terms are commonly associated with sustainability concepts and other quests for growth and productivity around technology adoption and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The 4IR, or the Fourth Industrial Revolution, conceptualised by the technological revolution, alters how we work, live, and socialise. Skills of the future, such as artificial intelligence, data science, and machine learning, have become fundamental (Mitchell & Guile, 2021). The changes are not paved over by a system that fits everyone's needs, and it is less clear how the revolution could be integrated into the existing university curricula. In trying to ensure the relevance of university graduates, higher learning institutions and researchers need to accept the idea of acting and adapting to the changes. The university needs to understand how it has changed the patterns and courses of the world of work. The world has advanced significantly, and the past has taught us that a future in which self-organising teams, automation, and outsourcing replace the human resource's function could exist. It is not difficult to imagine a world where the

competition for top talent is so intense that the most talented workers need personal agents to manage their careers. The goal is to continue to be ready for that future. In response to increasing pressure from governments and employer groups, universities have adopted a range of generic skill-based learning outcomes, which, when embedded into degree programmes, are expected to increase graduate employability and improve graduate employment outcomes. In addition, many universities now include internships, work placements, and international study in their programmes to enhance graduate employment prospects. However, this somewhat instrumental approach to graduate employability does not consider other critical factors. In recent years, literature still draws on skill mismatches that hinder a demonstrable level of work readiness. This concern has been under-facilitated, or it could be that tertiary education has failed to keep up with the changes (Aljohani et al., 2022; Clarke, 2018; Yunus & Yusuf, 2019). Although this literature is discerning, it hardly values insightful graduates' employability issues and standpoints transcended from real-world applications. Social media sites are rich with social intelligence data. The dramatic use of social media to express views has dramatically reformed how people build networking, decision-making, information-seeking, and connections to the intended audience (Xie & Chao, 2022). The unexploited view from the real-world application causes a lacuna that limits our understanding of the skills or graduate attributes required by employers. This article, thus, critically reviews the viewpoints of professionals, managers, leaders, or career coaches (later addressed as practitioners) on the skillsets to improve graduates' resilience for a thriving and high-performing workforce. Besides those with potential, influential people or industry leaders dove into LinkedIn to share their professional reality virtually. They usually stand out from the crowd within a specific niche with an inconceivable number of connections or followers. The intent to raise the employability of university graduates must also consider employers' or hiring professionals' side of things, such as their approach and attitude to hiring and reviewing job applications, so the university yields effectively. Professional social media sites such as LinkedIn have made their valuable views based on the comments, posts, articles, or documents these industry leaders or career coaches shared. This article captured their insights on the skills or attributes in their social media posts. The data from multimedia benefits the study of its interactivity through interpersonal interaction and human-computer interaction. The interaction on social media is conceived as an essential stimulus for users' internal perception and intentional response through the multi-faceted concepts (engagement and real-time conversation) unavailable in traditional media (Zhu et al., 2022). Also, drawing on the broader work skills literature, this article develops a framework that integrates the three-skill approach and the BANI concept that describes the current world to help explore and elucidate the idea of future work skills.

2. Literature Review

Recently, a revived interest in the skills approach for work proficiency has emerged. Since the early 1990s, many studies have contended that an employee's effectiveness depends on the employee's ability to solve complex organisational problems. Future-ready graduates are critical to the world of work or an organisation.

2.1 The Changing World: BANI

Recently, a revived interest in the skills approach for work proficiency has emerged. Since the early 1990s, many studies have contended that an employee's effectiveness depends on the employee's ability to solve complex organisational problems. Future-ready graduates are critical to the world of work or an organisation. 2.1 The changing world: Bani The rise of new global models that incorporate sustainability themes is something we are currently witnessing. Over the course of twenty years, our concept of the world has notably evolved at least three times: SPOD-, VUCA-, and BANI-world. The VUCA (volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous) world model casts doubt on the conventional notion of sustainability (Lushyn & Sukhenko, 2022). In a situation of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, organisations were long guided by the VUCA concept. In a world that is constantly changing and becoming more interconnected and digital, the phrase primarily serves to provide meaning in the face of uncertainty. However, the COVID-19 pandemic produced a situation for which even VUCA seemed inadequate. The continuing pandemic's worldwide events cannot help but impact individuals who may exhibit symptoms of external turbulence and environmental change. BANI, a new acronym, resulted from this. These two concepts were intended to explain the era's discontent, including the Cold War's aftermath and the COVID-19 outbreak. It is helpful to summarise the current situation in a world undergoing constant change. BANI helps us get ready for new circumstances by enabling us to view things from a different angle.

Table 1. Description of BANI

	Descriptions
Brittle	businesses are fragile and prone to experiencing sudden disruptions.
Anxiousness	the worry brought on by a persistent need to persevere in professional life.
Non-linear	due to a gap caused by time unpredictability; events occur separately and disproportionately. This volatility is why long-term planning is challenging for businesses.
Incomprehensible	when we search for solutions; the results may lead to misunderstandings or be absurd. We risk losing dominance at this moment.

In conclusion, BANI clarifies the predicament that organizations or work in the future must face following COVID-19.

3. Method

The study attempts to achieve a better understanding and actionable insights. Analyses were conducted on the concepts of future work skills based on the lived experiences of the industry leaders. The empirical phenomenology approach was used in this study, which required participants to recount their lived experiences. It is to ensure that the substance of their experiences is disclosed (Moustakas, 1994). In the current study, a two-tiered strategy of locating descriptions from participants was used, as advised by Giorgi (1997), to allow for context, which was then followed by meaning (Bevan, 2014; Giorgi, 1985, 1997). The study

employed semi-structured and face-to-face interviews, with the researcher attempting to always strike a balance between flexibility and control. The pre-determined questions digressed throughout the interviews to preserve the continuity of certain responses. ATLAS.ti was used to record and transcribe the interviews. To consider the data triangulation approach, interviews were performed twice using the two-tiered method proposed by Giorgi (1997) and two types of data elicitation, namely verbal interviews and document analysis. In addition, data from the descriptions of the document analysis was used to supplement the findings from the interviews. It served to develop a conclusion from a true reflection of the participants and to generate trustworthiness in thematic descriptions. The data in this study was analysed using a systematic thematic analysis, which is a modified model by van Kaam (Moustakas, 1994). It was utilised to lead the phenomenological data analysis, which included data reduction analysis, imaginative variation, and lastly, synthesising the meaning and essences from the data. Empirical phenomenological analysis includes finding and recognising the relationships and data flow between people, groups, organisations, and other related information entities. The network nodes are the groups and people, while the links represent the relationships between the nodes. It analyses human relationships through visual and quantitative means. Throughout the three dimensions of analysis, this qualitative study identified network activity by the connections the nodes have directly, distinguishing centralised networks, or central nodes, and removing unconnected sub-networks to reach data congruence, or the hub.

4. Results

In the present study, responses from informants that are characterised by common professional experience duration and ranks in an organisation or industry were identified. Table 1 tabulates industry practitioners that are identified to explore their perspectives on work skills.

Table 2. Informants/Industry practitioners

Professional	Current position	Sector	Work/professional experience duration
P1	Manager	Agriculture	Over 25 years
P2	Executive	Power and utilities	Over 10 years
P3	Chief Executive Officer	Technology programmes	Over 30 years
P4	Manager	Construction	Over 15 years
P5	Founder of digital agency	Digital marketing/ information and communication	Over 20 years
P6	Chief Executive Officer	Real estate and business services	Over 30 years

The words or phrases that are being concentrated on are likely to convey the practitioners' perspective on the attributes and skills required in their organisations and current workforces worldwide. Additionally, future work-related themes were examined to demonstrate how they reveal the demands and needs of the BANI world. A similar pattern was discovered in the interviews, meaning that the theoretical saturation has been reached. Ritchie and Lewis (2003)

suggested that it is ideal for accumulating information until the analysis achieves theoretical saturation, as further investigation will not guarantee an additional revelation of the issue. In the description dimension, their authentic responses regarding three attributes job hunters need to make them employable and future workplaces and employers' demands were extracted. As depicted in the following figure, the skills are described accordingly.

Table 3. Three skill area

Professional	Technical skills	Human skills	Conceptual skills
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry specific • Mathematic for prediction • Technological skill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proficiency in English for communication • Interpersonal skills/ ability to co-exist together in diversity • Leading by example (strive to prove yourself first) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination to learn even after being ridiculed • Innovative to create an automatic method • Setting direction for those who are keen to follow
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keyboard shortcuts to automate work/ to sort and filter data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use sophisticated vocabulary for communication with clients, and stakeholders, during interviews and presentations • Build connections and be helpful • Volunteer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set career goals • Proactive in materialising the goal • Set career strategies
P3			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a direction and speed up • Be competitive (public pressure is good) • Generate value for organisation • Speak up • Learn from mistakes
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both technical and verbal skills • Use A.I. tools to fit job roles • Seek upskilling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy and appealing to emotion • Be persuasive and manipulative (ignite interest and incite movement) • Resolve conflicts with colleagues • Communications skills: active listening, effective communicator (still appealing to emotions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-driven but flexible • Choose peace of mind
P5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital marketing skills • Value creator • Create brands that evoke emotions and personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurs that give back to society • Spread positivity • Lasting, authentic relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the WHY (the purpose) and HOW (the differentiator) rather than the WHAT (the product or service) • Be visionary • Be creative • Be persistence • Do the hard jobs • Know your worth • Challenge the status quo • Be adaptable and focused
P6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in people's development/ empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn critical life skills (such as swimming) besides academics while at university • Perform opportunity assessment in decision making

To comprehend how future work may be characterised by brittleness, anxiousness, nonlinearity, and incomprehensibility (BANI), because these characteristics embody fundamental worries about the future and what they mean for relationships between people in the evolving workplace context, the discussion on the findings is centred on the primary forms of work skills.

4.1 Technical Skills

Technical skills are the specialised knowledge and proficiency needed to carry out activities and use equipment and programmes in practical settings. Almost every sector and industry need a wide range of technical abilities. In the agricultural sector, a combination of physical work by humans and mathematics is required to calculate each process of producing an end product. For example, precise estimation is necessary to know when an agricultural product is ready to be harvested and for quality control. Most of the processes are manual and done by humans. In line with the focus on imparting skills that matter in the workplace, P1 suggested that universities and research centres may fundamentally investigate the possibility of automation in determining when the product is ready for the following process until the final stage of producing or manufacturing the agriculture product. The primary goal of computer technology is to speed up work. Proficiency in technology and keyboard shortcuts is a great method to automate work, increase productivity, and perform data filtration for handling big data (P1 and P2). Hence, it is incumbent on higher learning institutions to try to tilt the odds in favour of the soon-to-be graduating students by providing a holistic education that focuses on all skills (P6).

4.2 Human Skills

The practitioners identified that coaching is one of the essential skills for getting the best out of the workforce. Interest in workforce development or empowerment (P2; P6), such as active listening, especially when resolving conflicts (P4), and being empathetic (P4; P5) Employees will feel encouraged in their advancement if effective communication is present in the workplace (P1, P2, and P4). Paying attention to interpersonal communication, such as persuasion and manipulation (P2; P4), advantages the organisation that may result from co-existence in diversity (P1), including increased interest and innovation (P4). Human skills, or the ability to relate to others, include genuinely caring for others by giving back to society and maintaining a good relationship with customers (P6). Especially in marketing, despite digitalization, connection with humans needs to last (P6) and personality is prioritised in product creation. P.I. highlighted that in creating values, a visionary entrepreneur puts customers' needs first and products that could evoke emotions. Leading by example can foster goal achievement when in charge of a project or a team (P1). Leaders model the conduct they want their team to exhibit by showing the strategy (P2) rather than merely encouraging team members to strive for it.

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skills.

4.3 Conceptual Skills

The ability to see an organisation's big picture is referred to as having conceptual skills. Workforces can consider why they are undertaking a project before getting started, how it ties to the organisation, and how it affects the surrounding environment. Setting direction and goal driven is crucial to foster work progress (P1; P2; P4). Setting strategies include understanding the organisational purpose and the uniqueness and values of the services or products rather than merely what the organisations produce (P5; P6).

As described by the practitioners, strategic planning is the ongoing organisational process of using the information at hand to outline a company's desired course. This procedure is intended to set priorities, allocate resources wisely, align shareholders and staff, and guarantee that corporate objectives are supported by factual justification.

The probabilities unfolded are evidence that future employment is susceptible to more changes. The workforce needs to be competitive, proactive, innovative, and visionary (P1; P2; P3; P4; P5) to tilt the balance by being adaptable, staying calm and persistent despite being ridiculed (P1; P5; P6). Interestingly as highlighted by P5, Henry Ford envisioned they needed a car before the first car was invented. Apple was invented as a personal computer for everyday people who did not know it would be a device they needed. This factor makes up the biggest challenge in entrepreneurship, to imagine a market that does not exist.

As for creativity, the current and future generations should not take work as a routine only through this they can increase creativity (P1; P2; P6). Being creative is essential to solving clients' challenges and fixing problems.

4.4 The Essence: Employability Skills and BANI-World

The CDA deployed in the study provides new-fangled information on the potential convergence of trends in work and education. While the pathways to employment may not be linear, the original perspectives from the remarkable industry practitioners and leaders offer another (if not complete) spectrum of how to reconfigure a demand-driven education. By considering the emerging routes to employment driven by the global economy, industry, and automation, the findings responded to the entangled trends in three-skill areas. These relevant skills exemplify the reactions to the contests of the overwhelming new world, or the BANI world. Higher levels of dependency on digitalization and artificial intelligence (A.) do not call for eradicating all tasks.

Technical abilities that require specialised education for manual labour do not fall into disuse. Manual labour is often associated with semiskilled or unskilled workers. Although A.I. and work automation can be applied to nearly any job, humans still need to acquire a wide range of technical abilities. This accords with earlier observations that A.I. could perform most jobs in most industries, yet not all tasks could be replaced (Gagne et al., 2022). Technical abilities are the specialised knowledge and proficiency in a particular activity and using specific equipment and programmes in practical settings. Many entry-level jobs across industries call

for fundamental technology abilities, such as using Google Drive for cloud computing, keyboard shortcuts, and accessing social media sites. Similarly, Lazim, Mahmood and Toshio (2023) assert that proficiency in computer skills is essential so staff may better grasp how to operate and monitor the ever-changing system, including work planning and decision-making, which later contributes to the enhancement of the quality and the overall performance of the organisation. Programming languages, technical writing, and data analysis are a few examples of more sophisticated technical talents that a career may demand.

The nonlinear concept was discussed along with education and training. Thus, essential skills for the workplace of the future are the hardest to teach in traditional classroom settings since there is no information on how to encourage their growth on a large scale. The most crucial abilities are also highly contextual, and how they grow on the job will differ significantly from how they develop in a classroom. Instead, in promoting holistic education, educators must experiment with novel approaches to integrating classroom learning with professional experience. Teaching is repetitive but dynamic when intertwined with the outer world—outside the university building. As a result of this transition, educators will need to take on new responsibilities, develop the specialised skills necessary, or adopt competency-based education to succeed in the classrooms of the future. A BANI environment necessitates a concentration on soft skills and relational features, which is consistent with the strategic focus of internal communication (Tanya & Lucinda, 2022). Adaptability is not an isolated skill and has been emphasised in the current education system due to its impacts on academic performance (Awee et al., 2022). Higher levels of uncertainty call for more adaptable behaviours. Social, team-oriented, and network-oriented behaviours are vital to relating to critical work aspects. To comprehend how future work might align with future graduates' or employees' needs, the fundamental ideas in self-determination theory explain that meeting the three psychological demands of competence, autonomy, and relatedness affects job motivation and results. Positive outcomes are more strongly correlated with intrinsic and internalised incentives than with extrinsic and less internalised motives (Gagne & Deci, 2005). The future of work is marked by greater uncertainty and dependency, which may impact these requirements and incentives. There is widespread and expensive agreement that these parameters require better, but no concrete answers exist (Leahy et al., 2022). Hence, a positive organisational culture is widely acknowledged to depend on effective internal communication. Employee engagement and well-being, commonly defined as the precursors of workforce productivity, are influenced by internal communication and organisational culture. As the COVID-19 epidemic continues to have an unprecedented impact on educational provision, belonging has gained significance in higher education learning contexts. The notion of belonging has gained importance in higher education learning contexts in an anxious world (Press et al., 2022). The findings revealed that in communications, besides workforce empowerment, the nature of the current and future workplace is a good reminder to always be mindful of emotions. Emotions are what turn us inward or away from reality. In some situations, we try to solve issues through our emotional lens. In working with others, emotions have communicative functions that turn tricky when we fail to communicate our feelings and create cascading misinterpretations. Hence, in resolving conflicts and inciting movements (e.g., to achieve organisational goals), make

everyone in the organisation feel included, and this can be achieved by practical communication skills or being a persuasive and active listener. The most fundamental of our psychological and physiological requirements have become almost universally acknowledged as crucial aspects that must be considered and examined in times of disruption, estrangement, and isolation—after all, knowing where, with whom, and how we belong are crucial components of our existence and a key motivator for learning and self-actualization (Press et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

In this empirical phenomenological exploration, it was discovered that many subjects on which the available data are inadequate to provide definite judgements. If the following recommendations for research are applied, more logical decisions on the work and future work skills framework will be possible.

Currently, richer data of insights could be generated with the deployment of web-scraping and data mining. A phenomenological inquiry provides initial exploration but at least four analytic techniques are available for the effective quantitative determination of components in work skills or the future of work in multimedia content. These techniques utilise Natural Language Processing (NLP), a means of communicating with an intelligent system that uses a natural text. It can be used to carry out various functions on these smart tools. The process of detecting and analysing the original structure of the words in a sentence is known as Lexical Analysis. Syntactic Analysis is the process of identifying the grammar and relationships between the many words accessible. Semantic Analysis can be used to extract the text's exact meaning or dictionary meaning. Alternatively, discourse Integration for meaning matching and word reinterpretation using Pragmatic Analysis. Given recent developments in machine learning and NLP and the availability of relatively inexpensive tools, continuing research and development should be conducted to devise a satisfactory approach for analysing work-related and future work skills.

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