

Graduate employability skills within the public service: A South African case¹

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ABSTRACT

The article reports on an evaluation of graduate employability skills as determined by public service officials within the Free State Province of South Africa. The sample included human resource management officers, directors and chief directors (n=253). A quantitative research methodology was implemented using an unabridged measuring instrument, with a reliability coefficient of 0.97 and inter-item correlation of 0.41. Results indicated that macro-vision skills are the skill set with which respondents were least satisfied followed by research skills as well as technological and environmental literacy. The graduate attributes respondents were least satisfied with were academic skills. Furthermore, the model predicted graduate employability 100%. Pursuant to the results, it is recommended that the study be extended nationally, and that results should be used to inform skills development interventions especially related to public service training.

Keywords: Employability, public service, graduate attributes, critical cross-field outcomes

1. INTRODUCTION

Research has indicated that there was no statistically significant association between skills development in higher education institutions and increased probability of employment (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011 cited in Cranmer, 2006; Jonck & Van der Walt, 2015). Hence, graduate employability has become a highly topical and contested theme as employers are of the opinion that graduates are not suitably prepared for the labour market (Tran, 2015: VI). International debates emphasise graduate employability against the backdrop of educational policy. Accordingly, higher education is implored to prepare graduates for the world of work centred on the basic assumption that higher education ought to play a decisive role in society and contribute to sustainable growth and job creation (Schomburg & Teichler, 2011 cited in Suleman, 2016: 170). The aforementioned arose as a result of global skill shortages and governments internationally expressing concern as the quality of human capital can be perceived as the cornerstone to national well-being (Su & Zhang, 2015). Thus, from a governmental policy perspective employability is mainly concerned with ensuring that employees meaningfully contribute to economic competitiveness (Chiu & Chuang, 2016).

Apart from the policy perspective government, also referred to as the public service, can correspondently be deemed an employer (Abas, 2016) and within the South African context the public service is the largest employer (Sing, 2012) representing 20.8% of the labour market (Department of Research

and Information, 2016). The mandate of aforesaid subsume the implementation of regulatory legislation and service delivery to citizenry within a constitutional framework (Jonck & Van der Walt, 2016). Burger (2005) asserts that service delivery is crucial due to the central role it plays in poverty alleviation and the redistribution of historical segregated privileges. Despite the emphasis on service delivery, Naidoo (2017) indicated that protests relating thereto have been rampant. As such, skills shortages have been cited as a contributory factor impeding service provision within the South African context (Republic of South Africa, 2012). This premise supports that of Burger (2005) which concluded that capacity constraints hinder the responsiveness of service provision. The question arises what would hypothetically be adequate skills and knowledge within the context of the public service which is principally the purpose of the study.

Generic skills, attitudes and behaviours employers require can be defined under the umbrella term 'employability skills' (Knight and Yorke, 2004 as mentioned in Su and Zhang, 2015). Employability skills according to Lees (2002) focuses on two main aspects, namely the ability to get a job as well as the educational concept related to being equipped for a job and being capable of employment. Chiu and Chuang (2016) noted that a high quality labour force should be equipped with professional knowledge as well as work-related capacities, skills, attitudes and characteristics. Hence, employability most often refers to work-readiness. According to Mason, Williams and Cranmer (2009) corroborated by Omar, Manaf, Mohd, Kassim and Aziz (2012) work-readiness includes the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable new entrants to make a contribution to the achievement of organisational objectives. The Public Service Regulations (Republic of South Africa, 2001) defined work-related knowledge, skills and attitudes which are indicative of an employee's ability to meet the inherent requirements of a specific post as competence.

Despite extensive literature review on employability skills, a paucity of studies has investigated the aforesaid in government agencies (Abas, 2016). The current study attempts to address the lacuna by developing and testing a statistical model to predict graduate employability skills within the public service. The investigation is based on the following research question: 'What skills do the public service as employer require from graduates?' The significance and contribution of the study are related to the public service training expenditure which was extrapolated to the amount of R2.8 billion in the 2017/2018 financial year (National Treasury, 2015). As value for money is a Batho Pele principle premised on the understanding that service delivery improvements (of which skills development is one) should strive to be done with the same amount of resources or less (Krajnc, 2007). It stands to reason that to develop skills cost effectively would require knowing which skills are keystone.

2. CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY

Netshitenzhe (2011: 5) quoting Weiss (2010) noted that 'South Africa has set itself the unusual and challenging goal of becoming a developmental state'. One characteristic of a developmental state that is pivotal to employability skills would be the creation of a highly educated and efficient bureaucracy that facilitates growth and development (Njiru, 2008). Evans (2010) as cited in Burger (2014: 3) argued that the 'public service within the construct of a 21st century developmental state should underscore human capabilities and therefore increase capability-expanding services'. Intrinsically, the two main aspects that are related to employability skills when taking into account the National Development Plan (NDP) which is the articulation of South Africa's long-term vision would be the resource intensive economy vis-à-vis a knowledge economy and service delivery constraints.

As such, the NDP stated that irregular public service performance could be attributed to amongst other skills discrepancies and inappropriate staffing. More importantly, the state lacks a clear vision for where the next generation of public servants will emanate from and how specialist skills will be reproduced (Republic of South Africa, 2012). However, an aspect that is not touched on would be the hypothetical skills that would be required by the next generation of public servants. The Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) refers to employability skills specifically, graduate employability skills under the heading 'A skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path' (Republic of South Africa, 2014: 22). Per se, the MTSF stated that graduates of the post-school system should have adequate skills and knowledge to meet the current and future needs of the economy and society at large (Republic of South Africa, 2014).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Knight and Yorke (2004) according to Su and Zhang (2015: 3) perceived employability as a 'set of achievements, namely skills, understandings, and personal attributes that would ideally make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations' (Su & Zhang, 2015: 3). Yorke and Knight (2006) went on to describe employability as a construct that encompasses four broad interconnected facets, namely: skillful practices, domain specific specialisation, effectual views about personal identity and self-worth as well as meta-cognition. Hence, graduates should not only have subject-related knowledge but also be able to apply what they have assimilated in the educational process (Selvadurai, Choy & Maros, 2012). The organisational return of investment linked to quality employability skills encompass increased job performance, better working conditions and or status for entrants as well as adhering to the expectations of the employer (Abas, 2016). Chiu and Chuang (2016) furthermore elaborated by indicating that employability skills could also reduce monitoring costs and increase profitability.

As labour is seen as a factor of production from an employer's perspective representing the demand side (Jonck & Van der Walt, 2015) two theoretical frameworks can be utilised to underpin the study, namely the Human Capital Theory and the Job-Matching Theory (Verecio, 2016). Bridgstock (2009) as indicated by Jonck (2014: 266) noted that the Human Capital Theory underscores education as a primary economic enabler and essential for participation in the global economy. More specifically, an income-based Human Capital Theory (viz. the quality of the labour force in terms of skills and knowledge) was utilised which emphasise the value of expected returns of a country's human capital in terms of the output it can generate. These outputs subsume increased employability, decreased unemployment, increasing the income-based gross domestic product (viz. tax, wages and salaries), as well as the knowledge and skill endowment (Jonck, 2014).

The Job-matching Theory argues that the primary aim of education and training is to prepare graduates for job-related tasks (Verecio, 2016). The theory furthermore suggests that a mismatch between employer expectations and actual skills levels significantly influence productivity, wages and the ability to gain meaningful employment. Hence, the skill requirements of employers must be comparable to graduates' skills. Job-matching can also be seen as the degree to which graduates are able to utilise knowledge and skills within the work context (Barnard, Veldhuis & Rooij, 2001).

Against this background, graduate employability hinges on the question of what do graduates need to know and the application of knowledge to be competent at their chosen profession? Graduate attributes (GA) and critical cross field outcomes (CCFO) are the two broad classifications under the ambit of graduate employability skills (Jonck & Minnaar, 2017; De Jager, 2004). Graduate attributes are an umbrella terms used to incorporate phrases such as 'key skills', 'generic attributes', 'basic skills', 'key competences', and 'transferable skills' (Du Preez & Fossey, 2012). The term 'graduate attributes' is intended to embrace a broad range of generic personal and professional qualities, skills and dispositions, coupled with the ability to understand discipline-related knowledge (Thompson, Treleaven, Kamvounias, Beem & Hill, 2008). Critical cross field outcomes on the other hand are the basic generic outcomes, which underscore all teaching and learning (De Jager, 2004). Thus, what should the graduate be able to do (Jonck, 2014: 267)? Within the context of the South African Government, GAs and CCFOs are referred to as critical skills (Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority, n.d.).

4. METHODOLOGY

The primary null hypothesis was:

Employability skills including graduate attributes and critical cross field outcomes do not statistically significantly predict the employability of graduates as determined by public service employers in the Free State Province.

This was further expounded to ascertain how much variance in employability skills can be explained by each graduate attribute in isolation.

4.1 Research design

An embedded mixed-method research design was implemented although only the quantitative results were elaborated on for the purpose of this article. The rationale is aligned to the objective of the study which was to develop a statistical model based on quantitative data. Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011) explain that in a mixed-method design quantitative and qualitative data are collected within a traditional single design. Furthermore, the research design can be classified as a cross-sectional and an *Ex Post Facto* research design. In terms of the first mentioned, data collection took place at a single point in time, without repeat measures. The research design could be classified as *Ex Post Facto* by virtue of the fact that respondents belonged to the different independent variables prior to the commencement of the study.

4.2 Sample and procedure

Data were gathered from a sample of 253 respondents representing a population of 75 825 consisting out of 60 355 provincial (Free State Department of Treasury, 2016) and 15 470 municipal public servants (Statistics South Africa, 2016). By virtue of the fact that employers' views were solicited the designation of respondents were critical and care was taken to ensure that only those respondents in management positions or responsible for recruitment be included in the sample which influenced the population size. The sample included human resource management officers (n = 59; 23.6%), directors (n = 171; 68.4%), and chief directors (n = 20; 8%) from the Free State Province, Mangaung area which is the capital of the province. Note that three respondents did not answer this question. A total of 142 (56.8%) respondents were male and 108 (43.2%) female. In terms of the

age of participants, 11.2% (n = 28) was in their twenties, 45.6% (n = 114) in their thirties, 35.2% (n = 88) in their forties, 6.8% (n = 17) in their fifties and 1.2% equaling three respondents were 60 years and above. The majority of the sample had some form of tertiary education, as such 6.4% (n = 16) had only an upper secondary school education. While, 56.8% (n = 142) of the sample held either a diploma or degree, 23.6% (n = 59) had an honours' degree, 11.6% (n = 29) had a masters' degree and 1.6% (n = 4) was in possession of a doctoral qualification.

The procedure entailed requesting postgraduate students from a Research Methodology class at a local higher education institution to distribute the measuring instruments. It is assumed that non-random convenient sampling was used to compile the sample. To ensure the rigour of this process each questionnaire had to be validated (i.e. stamped) by the department, although the specific respondents remained anonymous. Without the signed validation form the questionnaire was eliminated from further analysis. All ethical protocols were observed. Participation was voluntary, and all responses kept confidential. Anonymity was assured especially as fieldworkers were utilised and the main researcher did not have direct contact with respondents.

4.3 Measuring instrument

Data were gathered by means of an unabridged questionnaire based on an employability skills model that was developed as part of a doctoral study, with a reliability of 0.97 and an inter-item correlation of 0.405340 as reported by De Jager (2004). The target population of the study included industry partners associated with a Faculty of Management Sciences at a university. The self-administered survey consisted of three sections, including a section that dealt with demographic variables. Sections two and three focused on CCFOs and GAs respectively. The CCFOs appraised, for example problem-solving skills, teamwork, self-responsibility, research skills, communication, technological and environmental literacy, as well as the development of macro-vision skills. GAs that were evaluated included job-seeking skills, academic skills, personal and career management, interpersonal skills, work ethic, and computer literacy. A 4-point Likert scale was used, where a score of 1 represented 'complete disagreement' and 5 'complete agreement'. A sample item from Section B is:

Are you satisfied with graduates' teamwork skills which can be defined as the capability to work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation and community?

A sample item from Section C is:

Do graduates possess the competency and or ability to apply theoretical knowledge in work-related situations?

The measuring instrument was validated by means of factor analysis which can be seen as an efficient tool to ascertain the underlying construct of a measurement and consisted both exploratory and confirmatory analysis (Lu, 2014). Results were indicative of four factors responsible for the majority of the variance. The four underlying factors subsumed interpersonal skills, CCFOs, job-related activities and academic skills which accounted for 42.297% of the variance in graduates' employability skills. The total questionnaire accounted for 61.745% of the variance. The four underlying factors could be clustered into CCFOs and GAs (of which interpersonal skills, academic acumen and job-related activities are foremost elements).



Cronbach alpha estimates for the subscales ranged from 0.863 to 0.922 (Jonck & Minnaar, 2015).

4.4. Data analysis

Descriptively, measures of central tendency were utilised to calculate the norm score to describe the evaluation of employability skills (Abas, 2016). Inferentially, coefficient of correlation and regression analysis were performed in accordance with a study conducted by Jain and Jain (2013) on graduate employability. Specifically, Pearson's product moment correlation was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between constructs (Holton, Bates, Bookter & Yamkovenko, 2007). While, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the variance in employability skills as a result of the CCFOs and the GAs. Pursuant, hierarchical regression analysis was performed to determine the individual contribution of each GA.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The evaluation of public service employers in terms of the CCFOs and GAs measured are tabulated in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Measures of central tendency for employability skills

Variable	Level of the variable	Standard				STD*
		Mean	Median	Lower quartile	Upper quartile	
Critical cross field outcomes	Problem solving	3.01	3.00	1	4	0.770
	Teamwork	3.22	3.00	1	4	0.758
	Self-responsibility	3.10	3.00	1	4	0.770
	Research skills	2.98	3.00	1	4	0.850
	Communication	3.17	3.00	1	4	0.754
	Technological and environmental literacy	2.98	3.00	1	4	0.801
	Macro-vision skills	2.750	3.00	1	4	0.847
Graduate attributes	Job-seeking skills	18.57	18.50	8	24	3.476
	Academic skills	23.76	24	12	32	4.387
	Personal/career management	32.40	31	13	44	5.865
	Interpersonal skills	30.80	30	12	40	5.596
	Work ethics	15.11	15	6	20	3.311

* Note: STD = Standard deviation; Range of means: 1.00 – 1.99 (not satisfied); 2.00 – 2.99 (somewhat satisfied); 3.00 – 3.99 (reasonable satisfied); 4.00 – 4.99 (satisfied)

As can be seen from the table above, respondents were satisfied with most of the CCFOs. Respondents were least satisfied with macro-vision skills followed by research skills as well as technological and environmental literacy. Macro-vision skills can be defined as the demonstration and understanding of the world as a set of related systems cognizant of the fact that problem-solving does not take place in a silo. Similarly, research skills can be seen as the ability to gather, analyse, organise and critically evaluate data. While, technological and environmental literacy underscore the ability to utilise science and technology effectively, with an underlying element of social responsibility (De Jager, 2004). Only the academic skills of graduates were evaluated as dissatisfactory.

To determine the correlation between the seven CCFOs and six GAs a Pearson product moment correlation was performed with results depicted in Table 2 overleaf. As can be seen from Table 2 all the facets measured correlated with each other on the 99th percentile. The strength of the correlations ranges from 0.237 to 0.787. The strength of the majority of the correlations were medium to large as can be deduced from an R-value ranging between 0.3 and 1.

To determine the influence of the CCFOs and GAs on graduate employability skills a standard multiple regression analysis was performed. The analysis was prompted to test the primary research hypothesis which stated: 'Employability skills including GAs and CCFOs statistically significantly predict the employability of graduates as determined by public service employers in the Mangaung area'. Results are illustrated in Table 3 overleaf.

*Table 2:
Pearson product moment correlation results for the various dimensions of employability skills*

	CCFO 1	CCFO 2	CCFO 3	CCFO 4	CCFO 5	CCFO 6	CCFO 7	GA 1	GA 2	GA 3	GA 4	GA 5
CCFO 1	r 1											
	p											
CCFO 2	r .482**	1										
	p ,000											
CCFO 3	r .550**	.439**	1									
	p ,000	,000										
CCFO 4	r .579**	.507**	.415**	1								
	p ,000	,000	,000									
CCFO 5	r .547**	.545**	.421**	.577**	1							
	p ,000	,000	,000	,000								
CCFO 6	r .394**	.442**	.237**	.453**	.456**	1						
	p ,000	,000	,000	,000	,000							
CCFO 7	r .547**	.524**	.486**	.550**	.564**	.568**	1					
	p ,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000						
GA 1	r .457**	.390**	.434**	.472**	.474**	.416**	.523**	1				
	p ,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000					
GA 2	r .610**	.463**	.517**	.564**	.515**	.519**	.630**	.695**	1			
	p ,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000				
GA 3	r .491**	.412**	.452**	.442**	.460**	.425**	.548**	.736**	.787**	1		
	p ,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000			
GA 4	r .548**	.457**	.516**	.486**	.468**	.413**	.528**	.594**	.772**	.766**	1	
	p ,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000		
GA 5	r .393**	.388**	.465**	.365**	.343**	.285**	.423**	.619**	.677**	.715**	.763**	1
	p ,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	

Note: R = Pearson Correlation value; p = statistical significance; CCFO = Critical Cross Field Outcome; GA = Graduate Attribute; *p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01

Table 3
Standard multiple regression analysis for perceived employability

Variable	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised	T	P
	β	Standard error	β		
CCFO	1	0.000	0.177	77676260.248	0.00**
GA	1	0.000	0.866	379322311.997	0.00**
R ²			1.00		
R ² adjusted			1.00		
Sum of square			137816.900		
Mean square			68908.450		
DF			2		

Note: CCFO = Critical Cross Field Outcome; GA = Graduate attributes; DF = Degree of Freedom; *p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01

As can be seen from Table 3, the variance in perceived employability as evaluated by public service employers can be 100% explained by the CCFOs and GAs (R² = 1.00; R² adjusted = 1.00) included in the model. To determine the individual influence of the independent variables the partial correlation results indicated that GAs contributed to a greater extent to the aggregated model (β = 0.866; p ≤ 0.000**). Specifically, GAs contributed 75% to the model, followed by the CCFOs which contributed 3.13%.

To explore further the model presented above, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to determine the individual contribution of each GA with results displayed in Table 4.

Table 4:
Hierarchical Regression Analysis assessing Graduate Attributes as predictor of employability skills

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	β	p	β	P	β	p	β	p	β	p	β	p
GA 1 – Job seeking	0.808	0.000**	0.343	0.000**	0.191	0.000**	0.208	0.000**	0.189	0.000**	0.185	0.000**
GA 2 – Academic Skills			0.670	0.000**	0.449	0.000**	0.286	0.000**	0.283	0.000**	0.270	0.000**
GA 3 – Personal/ Career Management					0.415	0.000**	0.259	0.000**	0.237	0.000**	0.242	0.000**
GA 4 – Interpersonal skills							0.354	0.000**	0.297	0.000**	0.288	0.000**
GA 5 – Work ethics									0.115	0.000**	0.114	0.000**

Variable

Table 4

	β	p	β	P	β	p	β	p	β	p	β	p
R ²	0.653		0.885		0.939		0.981		0.986		0.987	
Adjusted R ²	0.652		0.884		0.938		0.981		0.985		0.986	
R ² change	0.653		0.232		0.054		0.042		0.005		0.001	
F for change in R ²	467.192		498.994		215.593		544.192		81.661		15.917	
P for F change	0.000**		0.000**		0.000**		0.000**		0.000**		0.001**	

*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01

As can be deduced from Table 4, job seeking was entered which explained 65.3% of the variance in perceived graduate employability. After entry of academic skills in the second step the model as a whole explained 88.5% (f = 498.994; p change = 0.000**). Academic skills individually explained 23.2% of the variance. In the third step personal and or career management was added which explained 93.9% of the variance in perceived employability (f = 215.593; p change = 0.000**). The additional change as a result of personal and or career management was 5.4%. In the fourth step, interpersonal skills were included after which the model explained 98.1% (f = 544.192; p change = 0.000**). The R-squared change as a result of personal or career management was 4.2%. In the fifth step work ethics was added to the model which explained 98.6% of perceived graduate employability with an individual influence of 0.5%. Lastly, in step 6 computer literacy was included which explained 98.7% (f = 15.917; p change = 0.001**) with a 0.1% change.

The results were partially confirmed by Olivier, Freeman, Young, Yu and Verma (2014) who synthesised graduate employability skills into five categories subsuming foundational skills, IT skills, adaptive capacity, and technical/domain specific skills. Most of the aforementioned could be categorised as CCFOs which in the current study did statistically significantly contribute to graduate employability but to a lesser extent than the GAs. Suleman (2016) reported a general consensus in literature underscoring relational skills, namely communication (CCFO), interpersonal skills (GA), and teamwork skills (CCFO). Tymon (2013) as mentioned by Suleman (2016: 171) confirmed that these skills are cited in most articles and by internationally dispersed employers. Ravan (2016) who indicated that the critical skills required by employers subsume problem solving (CCFO), decision making skills (GA), communication (CCFO), domain specific knowledge (GA), and leadership (GA). Chiu and Chuang (2016) pointed out that employability skills comprised academic skills (GA), personal management (GA), and teamwork skills (CCFO). Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) added self-promotional skills and career management as important additional skills. There appears to be a general consensus as to the fact that a mixture of graduate attributes and critical cross field outcomes would hypothetically predict graduate employability skills. Based on the results obtained the null hypothesis was rejected.



However, employability skills are both occupational and contextual specific which is indicative of the fact that different occupations would intrinsically have a unique set of employability skills and would also vary according to country of origin (Chiu & Chuang, 2016). Employability skills (also referred to as competency or critical skills) within the context of the South African public service consist currently out of two streams, namely senior or middle management competencies (Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority, n.d.: 49). A summary of the link between the competency and the corresponding employability skill are tabulated in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Summary of the link between public service competency and employability skills
Table 6

S	Competency	Employability skill
Senior Management	Strategic competency and	Macro-vision skill (CCFO 7)
	Programme and project	Career management (GA 3)
	Financial management	Academic skills (GA 2)
	Change management	Environmental literacy (CCFO 6)
	Knowledge management	Research skills (CCFO 4)
	Service delivery	Problem Solving (CCFO 1)
	Problem solving and	Problem Solving (CCFO 1)
	People management	Interpersonal skills (GA 4)
	Client orientation and	Interpersonal skills (GA 4)
	Communication	Communication (CCFO 5)
Middle Management	Honesty and integrity	Work ethics (GA 5)
	Concern for others	Interpersonal skills (GA 4)
	Creative thinking	Problem Solving (CCFO 1)
	Customer service orientation	Problem Solving (CCFO 1)
	Decision making	Self-responsibility (CCFO 3)
	Diversity Citizenship	Interpersonal skills (GA 4)
	Communication	Communication (CCFO 5)
	Problem analysis	Problem solving (CCFO 1)
	Self-management	Personal management (GA 3)
	Team membership	Team work (CCFO 2)
	Technical proficiency	Technological literacy (CCFO 6)

Despite the aforementioned it should be noted that graduate employability skills would be applicable to levels 5 to 8 within the context of the public service (viz. new entrants) and presently a competency framework for levels 5 to 8 is absent.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The knowledge economy in conjunction with globalisation has resulted in an increasing emphasis on employability skills. Moreover, South Africa's vision of a democratic developmental state requires a highly educated and efficient bureaucracy highlighting human capabilities. Despite this, articulation of the employability skills of the ideal public service cadre to respond to the requirements of a developmental state has been lacking. The current research attempts to address the lacuna by testing an employability skills model that was originally developed at an institution of higher education. Results indicated that the model predicted 100% of graduate employability as determined by public service respondents. Furthermore, it was found that graduate attributes were responsible for the majority of the variance.

Knowledge of the skill requirements integral to the next generation of public servants is pivotal especially since

public service training institutions require appropriate evidence to inform course design. Likewise, the study responds to the call in the MTSF that the relationship between the supply and demand of knowledge and skills must be better aligned. Hence, if the public service scientifically identified skills required by public servants, higher education institutions would be better positioned to develop programmes (i.e. Bachelors in Public Administration) to meet governmental expectations. Furthermore, the MTSF pointed out that research should be expanded to articulate better the knowledge and skill requirements of the country. Additionally, the results of the study could be used to validate the senior and middle management competency frameworks currently utilised in the public service.

Future research could include a national study extending to the three spheres of government underscoring graduate employability. The findings from the proposed national study could be used in research endeavours to determine how to integrate employability skills into current higher education programmes effectively as well as the course material of public service training institutions. Furthermore, it is recommended that the employability skills model be bridged and validated for public service employees in general and not specifically graduates. Results of the present study could also be utilised to inform a competency framework for levels 5 to 8.

The following caveats are acknowledged. Firstly, since fieldworkers were utilised to gather the questionnaire data non-random sampling might have adversely influenced the external validity of the results. Secondly, the research was demarcated to a particular province in South Africa. Subsequently, results cannot be generalised to the larger population of public servants. Therefore, it is recommended that random sampling be used to generate a nationwide sample.

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