

An Experiment in Employability Enhancement



A Pioneering Industry-Academia Initiative



India's Largest Skills Assessment Company

Abstract

“To be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure”

Peter Hawkins 1999

Employability is defined as the acquisition of those skills, which not only help in landing a job but also allow a person to remain employable. Placing the above statement in context, this white paper attempts to analyze the reasons for the dearth of employable talent in India and presents the perfect remedy to mitigate this problem. While a lot is being spoken about the industry- academia collaboration and bridging the gap between the industry expectations and the output of talent from academia, this initiative is a definite step in the right direction to empower the talent pool with employability.

Currently while there is no dearth of opportunities in the employment scenario, there is a serious lack of employable talent. A recent research by MeritTrac indicates that only 10% of all talent being churned out by the academia today is employable. It is vital here to differentiate between mere talent and employable talent. While there is abundant talent in India, the proportion of industry-ready candidates is alarmingly low, posing a huge challenge for the industry in meeting its requirement.

The need of the hour is a program that understands the expectations of industry, identifies the employable talent pool and provides a platform to this pool to showcase its skill sets to the industry and more importantly gives the unemployable talent pool detailed feedback on skills gap to facilitate training and orientation.

The Employability Enhancement program conceived by MeritTrac jointly with a leading Technological University is one such effort to bridge the industry-academia gap and enhance the employability of students. The program was highly successful in bringing all the stakeholders viz., students, academia and industry into a single platform and addressed all their concerns. This document captures the highlights of the program and chronicles the tangible results achieved.

The Concern

A few statistics that highlight the issue of Employability:

- India produces over 400,000 engineering graduates and 2.3 million other graduates
- Studies reveal that only slightly below 15% of the engineering talent pool is industry-ready and around 10% of non-engineering graduate talent pool is suitable for the BPO industry
- IT & BPO industries alone forecast a shortfall of half a million people by 2009

If one were to investigate the genesis of the problem, it would be apparent that students while equipped with graduate certificates lack in employable skills sets. This has, in turn opened up a yawning skills gap between academic output and industry expectations.

This yawning gap is evident in the low conversion ratios that every company faces while recruiting from campuses. While the number of students considered for employment is very high, the conversion rates in terms of employable talent are below expectations. This places a huge constraint on the resources of a company to find suitable talent from this large and geographically diverse talent pool.

With such issues in the recruitment scenario, the challenge now lies in answering the following questions and bridging the skills gap that exists today

- What are those critical skill sets that are rendering large chunks of the talent pool unemployable?
- How do we identify those skill gaps across our colleges/universities?
- What are the training initiatives we need to roll out to make the remaining 80% of the talent pool employable?
- What is the role of the various stakeholders in achieving this?
- How do we continuously measure and track progress?

The need to find answers to these questions is as important for the industry as it is for the academia and the talent pool.

The Solution: EMPLOYABILITY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS

Employability enhancement programs focus on increasing the industry readiness of the students. This would include creating awareness on industry expectations assessing the candidates on their skills and knowledge leading to structured training/orientation.

MeritTrac - The pioneer and leader in skills assessments in India has always endeavored to redefine the talent acquisition scenario in India. MeritTrac partnered with one of the most progressive universities that contribute significantly to the Engineering workforce in the country to conceive this program to address the issue of employability in its entirety.

About MeritTrac

MeritTrac™ is India's Largest Skills Assessment Company.

MeritTrac designs and delivers assessments to evaluate abilities, skills and knowledge for both corporate & individual customers. Since its inception in 2000, MeritTrac has assessed over 2 Million candidates for over 150 clients across industry verticals like IT, BPO, BFSI, Engineering, FMCG, Healthcare, Retail, Manufacturing, Public Sector Units and Education among others.

MeritTrac is neither a Placement/Recruitment firm nor a Training organization. We are uniquely positioned to be an “Independent” assessment company that provides quantitative inputs on the talent pool and helps in measuring competencies for specific roles.

Our suite of scientifically designed assessments is used by corporate customers for pre-recruitment and employee assessments, and by individuals for measuring their skills for employability. MeritTrac's strong Test Development team has created a validated suite of tests in over 300 areas spanning Communication Skills (English and other Indian Languages), General Abilities, Domains Skills (Technologies, Engineering, Accounting, etc.) and psychometrics. The team has been instrumental in generating over 75,000 questions across all these test areas.

All the tests are delivered in both Online and Offline (paper pencil) modes, under supervision. All online tests are delivered using OnTrac a proprietary web-based testing engine. Our Test Delivery team has administered tests in over 75 cities in India.

We currently test over 80,000 candidates every month across industry verticals and count among our clients some of the world's most admired & respected companies like ABB, Accenture, Aricent, Cholamandalam DBS, Cognizant, Google, HAL, Honeywell, HP, HSBC GLT, IBM, ICICI Bank, ICICI Prudential, ITC, Microsoft, MindTree, NSE, SAP Labs, Satyam, TESCO, Wipro and Wockhardt.

TracSkills our Individual Certification program for IT, BPO, Services and the MBA Talent Pools has assessed and provided structured feedback on industry-readiness to thousands of candidates across the Country. TracSkills is endorsed by several companies across sectors and partners with academic institutions like Bharathiar University, Visvesvaraya Technological University, among others on employability enhancement initiatives.

Pariksha - our program for Education Assessments, has successfully supported educational institutions like Manipal University in conducting large scale national level entrance examinations online, in a highly secure mode.

Headquartered in Bangalore, MeritTrac has 450+ fulltime employees and over 1000 certified test administrators operating out of offices in all the metros of India. MeritTrac also operates 21 state-of-the-art online testing centers - “MeritTrac Assessment Zones” across 16 cities, having 1300+ online terminals.

MeritTrac assessments have also been delivered in countries like Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Mauritius & Philippines. MeritTrac is represented by business partners in the USA & the Philippines.

The Process

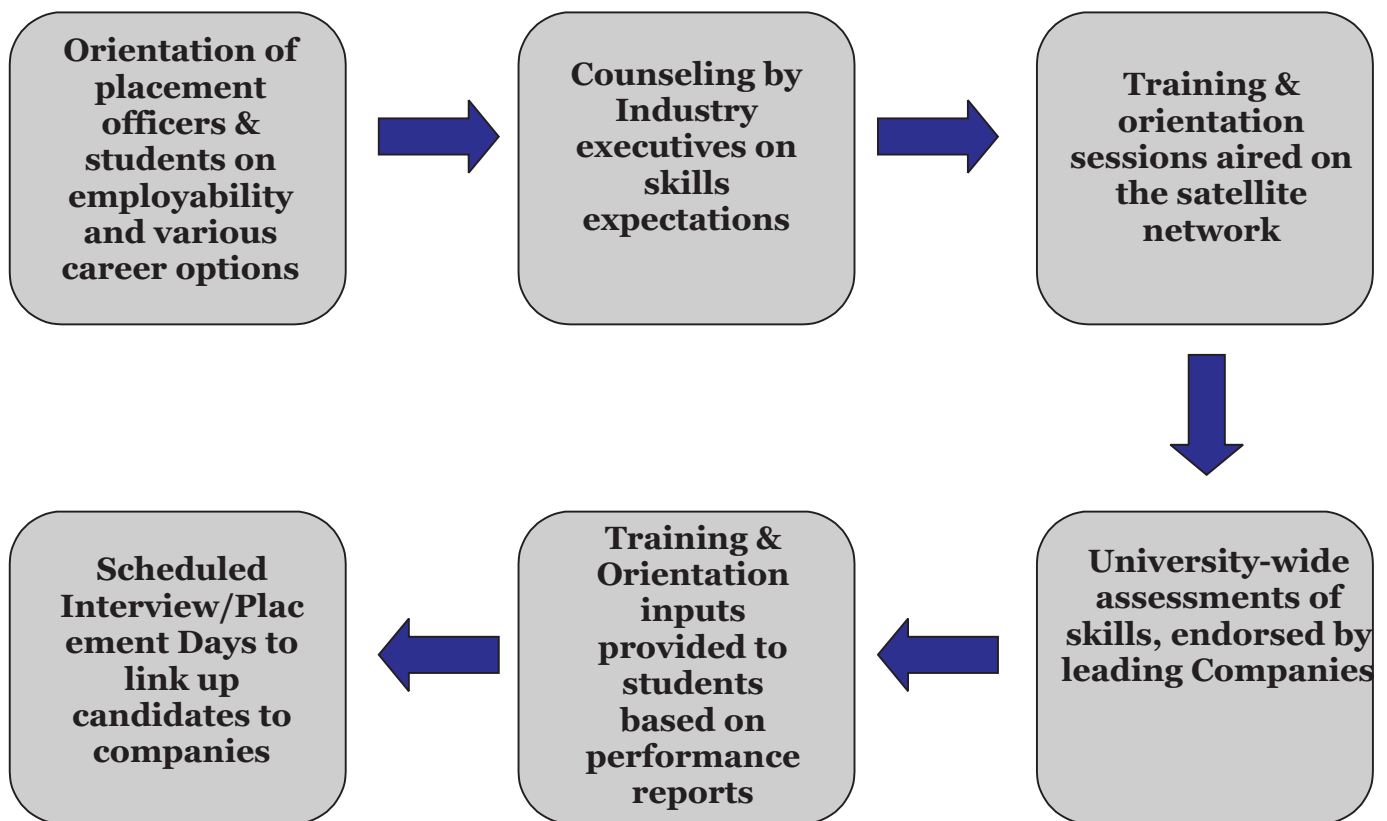
The program has been painstakingly modeled to address the issue of employability in its entirety. Starting with sensitizing the placement fraternity and students on the importance of employability, the program also provides an excellent platform for the industry to actively participate by defining its expectations and providing invaluable counsel.

This is followed up with an objective measurement of the skills of the candidates through scientifically designed assessments that benchmark the skill levels of the candidates with the industry expectations. The candidates are provided with feedback about their performance so that they can recognize the skill gaps and work at honing their skills through training and orientation.

The skills and interest of the candidates are mapped to various industry verticals and the candidates are counseled about diverse career opportunities. The colleges are provided assistance in formulating various training programmes that would ensure that the students could increase the levels of their competency in various skills.

Finally, for the moment of truth, the initiative is showcased to various endorsing companies and assistance is provided to the placement officers in reaching out to the companies and showcasing the talent available in their colleges.

The Model



Highlights of the programme

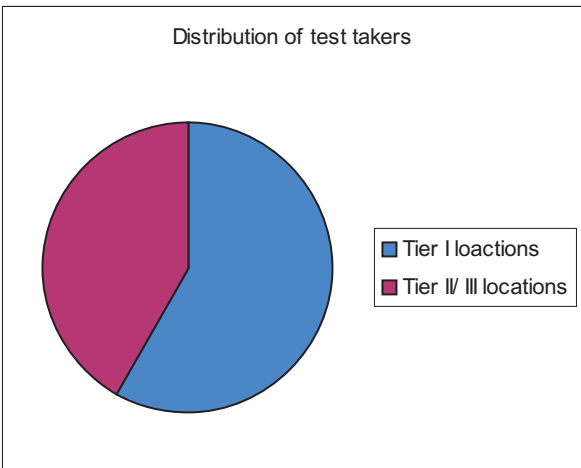
Nothing really is more convincing than the “Proof of Concept”, so we believe. A quick snapshot of the program achievements and we rest the case.

MeritTrac conducted tests in 34 locations

No. of Candidates assessed: ~ 10,000

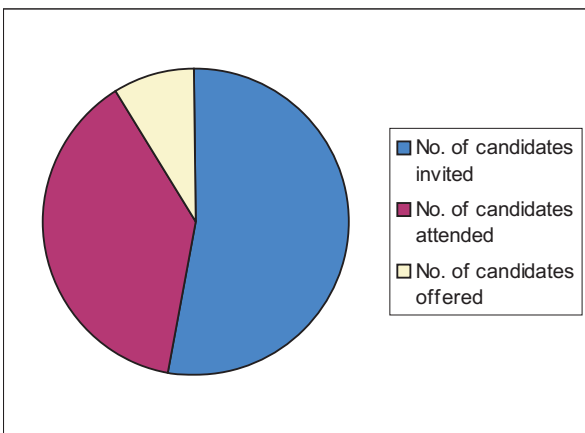
No. of locations covered: 35

No. of colleges covered: 95



It was ensured that the program reached out even to other locations beyond metros and cities providing a fair chance and a common platform for candidates from Tier II/III locations.

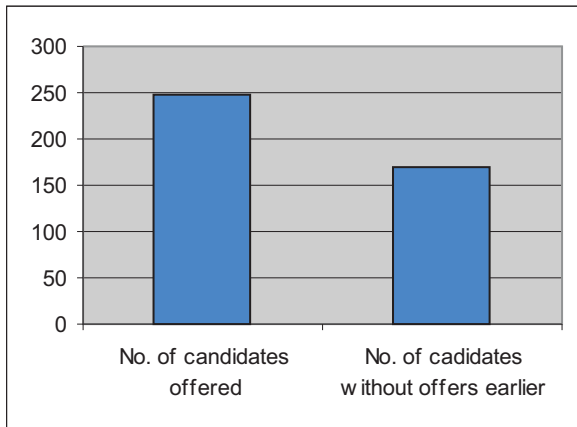
Though the conversions were low from Tier II/III locations, the opportunity to benchmark their skills and the feedback for training/orientation has immensely benefited them.



A total number of 1540 candidates were invited for the Scheduled interview event based on their test scores and according to the shortlist criteria of the participating companies.

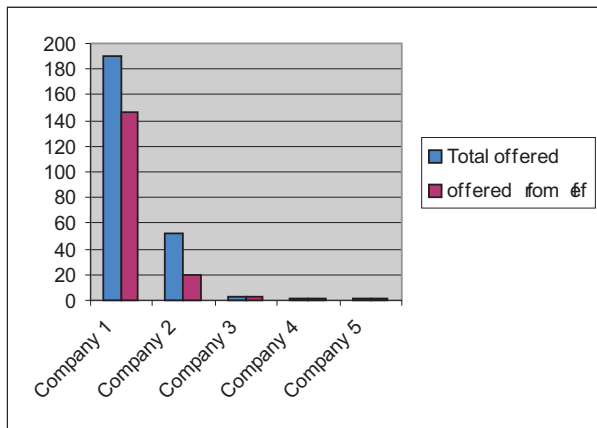
The number of candidates who attended the event was **1124** out of which already an impressive **247** offers were made to meritorious candidates till date

Five endorsing companies including some of the worlds most admired corporates selected candidates for final placement based on the test scores of candidates and their internal recruitment criteria.



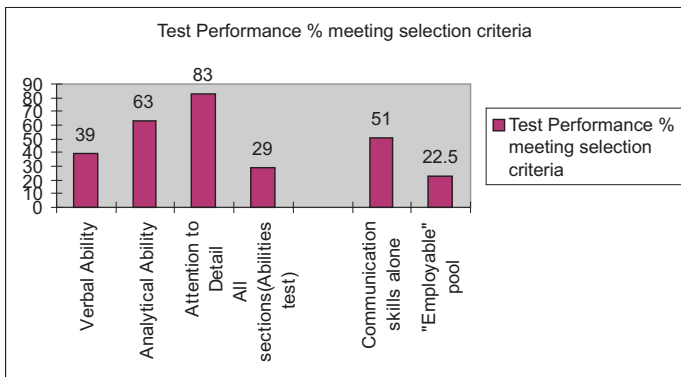
69% of candidates who received offers did not have jobs earlier.

This also indicates that a lot of talent has gone unnoticed in the past due the constraints on the companies who have not visited these campuses.



The program has been highly successful in placing **90%** the candidates in their dream companies with their dream profiles.

Candidates were asked to indicate their preference of companies before the commencement of the Scheduled Interview Event and a high number of them were placed in the company of their choice.



The main area of focus for the candidates should be Verbal Ability section as, the relative difference in the performance level of the candidates who were selected and the group that has yet to be interviewed is very high.

The candidates who did not get interviewed need improvement in all the sections of the test i.e. Verbal Ability, Analytical Ability and Attention to Details section.

The candidates should also focus on improving their over all score in the test as the companies use the overall score as the cutoff criteria for short listing the candidates.

Benefits of the programme

The students are provided with industry interface and assessments to analyze their competencies and strengths. The feedback mechanism helps in identification of the skills gap and also provides a guideline for the necessary training and orientation that is needed to become industry ready. The certification provided also helps the candidate in applying to companies that are not visiting the campus.

The colleges and universities are provided a detailed report card on the performance of the talent pool and this can be utilized to create training /orientation for students to hone their skills. The talent pool card can also be showcased to various companies to invite them for placements.

The industry can access a wider pool of pre-assessed candidates across geographies, resulting in significant savings in terms of cost, time and effort.

CONCLUSION

- Talent is wide-spread and not just restricted only to Tier I Colleges and to Metros
- Exposure to industry expectations is very important
- Feedback mechanism is critical to identify and focus on gaps in skillsets
- Create Success Stories in Tier II colleges and smaller towns. Talent pool there is very critical to meet the demands of the industry in terms of numbers.
- Colleges and Universities will need to allocate sufficient resources for post-assessment training to help students improve their employability
- Training on industry readiness needs to be customized at individual student/group level, rather than the current “one size fits all” approach

This program has amply established the fact that through concerted efforts by all the stakeholders, the issue of employability for the talent pool and the shortage of industry-ready workforce for the industry, can be addressed

Programmes like these ensure that the meritorious students can get a platform to showcase their skills and that colleges can appreciate the need to churn out competent and employable candidates. The companies are also given the advantage of accessing a talent pool of pre-tested candidates that result in better conversion rates and a competent workforce.

The Proof of Concept- Testimonials from a satisfied bunch of stakeholders

Candidates

I , Bharath Koushik.B.S., have been recruited into a top company during the scheduled interview event. In light of the above event, I want to thank the program team which is striving hard to get more and more students from all parts of Karnataka, placed in a company and help them build their career. The job fair was conducted in an extremely systematic , disciplined and healthy manner. Irrespective of getting recruited or not, I was really happy with the initiative and really enjoyed the programme.

Hope students take advantage of this programme and make best use of the opportunities they get through this program . Also, I hope the programme continues to achieve its goal.

Once again , GREAT JOB by the program-Highly Organised ! I AM VERY MUCH GRATEFUL TO THE TEAM AND ALL OF THEM WHO PLAYED ROLES IN MAKING THE JOB FAIR , A GRAND SUCCESS.

THANK U SO MUCH.

Bharath Koushik

I am writing this mail to compliment the MeritTrac team for their excellent organisation of the event at. I got placed in one of the endorsing companies and would like to express my gratitude to MeritTrac. The response from MeritTrac has been worth the effort put in and i never imagined that it would be so useful.

Thanking the entire team once again and looking forward for more companies.

Sumant Srikant

Placement Officers

Greetings from Acharya !!!! It was indeed a great effort and grand success. On behalf of the students who benefitted from this program and our college management, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all of u. Looking forward to more such endeavors where many of our students will be benefitted. Once again thanks a lot.

Geetha
Placement officer
Acharya Institute of Technology
Bangalore

Thank you very much for helping our students in your effort in collectively placing them with companies of repute.

All Good Wishes.

Shalini K. Sharma
Placement Officer
NMAMIT



India's Largest Skills Assessment Company

Corporate Office:

#125/1- 18, G K Arcade, 2nd Floor, T. Mariappa Road,
1st Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore- 560 011

www.merittrac.com

Branch Offices:

Hyderabad, New Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai,
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21 centers across India

For more information e-mail tracskills@merittrac.com