

## UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF FUNDAMENTAL VALUES IN SERVING A LARGER PURPOSE

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Dear participants of the Eurasian Forum, dear keynote speaker and panelists,

At the end of the first day of the Forum, I hope we may come to an agreement that employability is an increasingly relevant performance indicator for universities. Traditionally the expectation has been that universities will develop the skills of students - particularly technical skills and 'soft skills'. Supporting Jamil's statement, I want to suggest that skills are no longer enough.

As technology changes ever more rapidly, as more graduates are being produced and there is more competition for jobs, universities that want to enable their students to be most employable in a sustainable way should pay more attention to the fundamental values which they are enabling their students to inculcate.

Apart from acquiring technical knowledge, fundamental values such as integrity, dedication and trust (between the employer and employee) are also important. Employers would usually seek those graduates who are professionally committed to what they do. Indeed, you may strive to become a very ambitious engineer but the lack of professional and personal values could cause an employer to doubt if you were really fit for their company.

The role of personal values and soft skills is also becoming increasingly important in the context of internationalization and academic mobility. As graduates, today's students will shape the world of the future as economic beings (professionals) and as social and human beings. Their actions and decisions in the workplace, in their local community, in their lives will have an impact on others and be influenced by the breadth and depth of their knowledge about the world, their skills in relating to others and their values (Leask, 2015). Values such as integrity, teamwork and responsibility are most likely to be appreciated in different social contexts. Graduates should be ready for professional and social mobility. Globalization penetrated every aspect of our lives, which erased borders allowing resources as well as human resources travel all over the world, and employers to hire globally. In such international workplaces graduates should have global competencies and fundamental values that enable them to work in synergy. Thus, development of fundamental values should be given more attention across both secondary and higher education.

Evidence from employers says that we can train people to cover skills gaps and help people gain experience, but it is essential that employees arrive with well-developed and appropriate values. Different authors define different sets of values that employers usually seek in graduates. These are usefully summed up in a set of five main fundamental values: dedication, integrity, accountability, collaboration and conduct.

Speaking from my professional experience, I have seen graduates that were not sure if their major choice was based on their personal aspirations rather than salary prospects. One may argue with me here that salary is an essential element of human life but my case is that to serve a larger purpose is as important as private good. Motivation theorists suggest that intrinsically motivated individuals, those who are driven by an interest or enjoyment of the task itself have long lasting and self-sustaining motivation rather than external motivation that relies on external pressures or rewards, such as salary. (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Intrinsically motivated employees are more likely to engage in the task willingly as well as work to improve their skills, which will increase their capabilities.

I have also seen graduates that could not focus on the development of their professional skills as they have not found their inner voice of professionalism. I think universities should look out for such students and help them to develop their professional identity and awareness of what they want to become in the rapidly changing world.

Unfortunately, the reality is quite different. It is quite a challenge for educators to design academic programmes and provide learning experiences that inculcate values that help students to become well-rounded and confident students. Interestingly, according to the Gallup survey held in the US, 64% of respondents strongly agree that goal setting should be taught at schools, while 61% strongly agree schools should know how to motivate students. A majority also strongly agree that things like creativity and collaboration are also meaningful teacher targets (Lopez and Calderon, 2013).

It is also worth noting that according to one of the local Kazakhstan-based recruitment companies that made a content analysis of 16 000 vacancy announcements, employers would appreciate workers that demonstrate the following values and qualities: a good sense of responsibility; creativity and seeing one's work as a 'meaningful' job; communication skills and punctuality (HeadHunter, 2015).

To sum up, it is important for higher education leaders to make sure that students live with values which are fit for the future and help them become well-rounded personalities as well as serve a larger purpose.

### References

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