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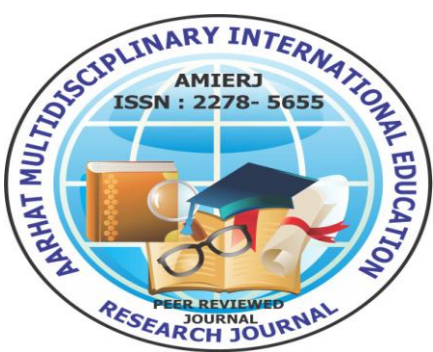## (Bi-Monthly)
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DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

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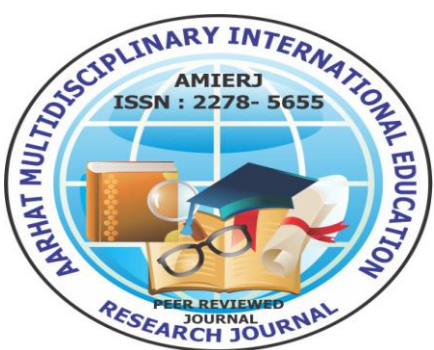
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Abstract

Professionalism refers to those qualities and skills that must be possessed by a practicing professional. It develops overtime and takes the shape in the context of professional practice. The term professional skills may be defined as those skills which are essential for graduates for becoming successful in their professional life. These consists of generic or transferable skills like facing the workplace challenges, working in team broader expertise, communication skills, personal attributes etc. These also include the attributes of self motivation, self management, self promotion, punctuality, getting on well with others and organization and clients and show initiatives. Professional skills can be developed by work experience, work placement and other forms of work-integrated learning at college or university level in the professional context. Professional skill can be developed to a maximum level when students reflect on what they have learnt and how they have learnt. Donald Schon suggested the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning was one of the defining characteristic of professional practice. If the students are required to reflect intentionally on their learning experiences, it become the starting point in the development of professional practice skills.

Key words: *Professionalism, Professional skills*

It is expected that higher education students should develop professional skills. They should be equipped with their skills when they enter their professions after completing their study. This is one of goals of tertiary educational program. However, our educational institutions are just satisfied with the development of technical skills. Thus, there is limited importance on the development of professional skills (spradling et.al., 2009). The relative reluctance to deal with professional skills at the individual course unit level is strongly related to
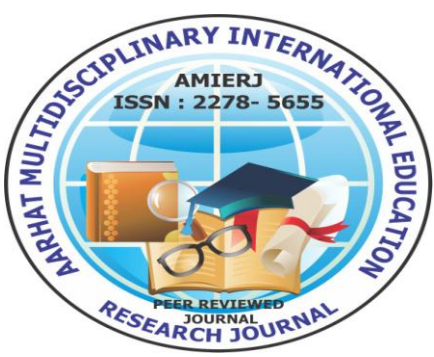
an uncertainty among teachers on how to integrate, teach and assess professional skills in the curriculum as expressed in eg. (Mckenzie et.al, 2004)

Professionalism means possessing those skills and qualities that characterize practising professional skills. These are those skills which are essential for graduates to get success in their professional practice. These skills consists of some generic skills and also includes some self - skills like self- motivation, self- promotion, self -confidence, self- management, practice of professional ethics, punctuality, meet deadlines, working well with others and taking initiatives. These skills give students an opportunity to:

- Know the relevance of knowledge, skills and methodologies learnt during their course of studies and thus motivates them to learn more.
- Translate theory into practice.
- Know that academic success is not enough for proceeding further in employment & career formation.
- To be awared about the work place culture and rapidly changing nature of the world of work.
- To inculcate personal characteristics like cooperation, diplomacy, leadership and work place etiquette.
- Inculcate specific communication skills.
- Prepare career plans and strategies.

The need for Professional Skills:-

"New graduates entering today's workplace face a number of challenges, especially how to learn and function in unfamiliar and unpredictable situations. Multi-skilled, multi-national project teams, requiring collaboration, cooperation, flexibility and intercultural awareness, demand high levels of professional and interpersonal skills. Graduates must be able to service their own administrative needs and are routinely required to work longer hours than their predecessors" Harvey (1999). Emphasis have been given by employers and graduates on the development of professional skills for advancement in their career. Lee Harvey (1999) has given
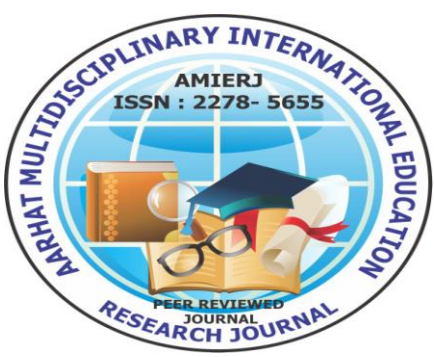
a summary of need of professional skills in today's place. The characteristics of today's workplace are mentioned below.

- **Workplace challenges** – Making aware that world of work is unpredictable which requires a set of skills for effective functioning.

- **Teamwork** – Interactive and communicative skills are essential while working in collaboration with culturally diverse persons and multi-skilled situation.

- **Changing nature of work** – Employees are required to be multi-skilled. They need to perform their own administrative tasks effectively and adapt to the modern technological advancement related to their profession.

- **Broader expertise** – The workforce is required to demonstrate those professional skills which go above the requirements of written and practical examination in their professional context.

- **Transferability of skills** – Transfer of learning from one learning context to another is proportional to the environments in which the students practice their professional skills.

- **Interactive Attributes** – Communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills.

- **Personal attributes** – Intellectually sound, disciplinary knowledge, willingness and ability to continue learning, ability to find things out, willingness to take risks and show initiative, flexibility and adaptability, ability to pre-empt and lead change.

- **Self Skills** – Self-motivation, self-confidence, self-management, self-promotion.

Importance of development of professional skills

Importance for employers:

"The new graduate would generally work with somebody else, so they get to learn from that other person how to do things. They are also introduced to our organization, how we work, why we do things in a certain way, and I think that is really valuable for students to get that of experience. The other thing we stress is that it is always going to be different from workplace to workplace and you need to understand that. You have to interact with other people and are person might not always have something ready for you on time, when you wanted it, and you
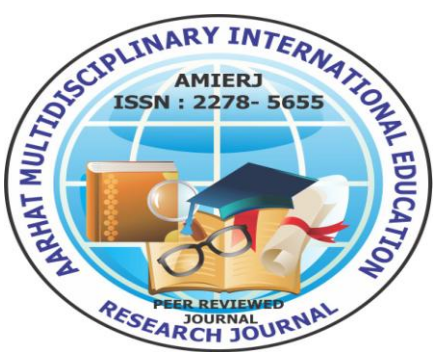
might need to negotiate with different people and reassess your deadlines in order to get completed on time (employer of Griffith Graduates, 2002).

'Employers' do not ask new graduates to mortgage their souls and operate on the principle of blind obedience but they do ask new recruits to adopt fundamental beliefs and values perceived to be necessary for success. The culture in an organization is vastly different from that on campus and must be thoroughly understood by new graduates or they will be doomed to fail. "Phillips, J. 91987).

Research show "……….. While the social and economic world has been transformed in recent years, the demands made of graduates by employers still largely revolve around age-old concerns of the ability to learn new material and to apply it to workplace scenarios." Hosketh, (2000). "In essence, employers expect a degree to provide a profound, broad education rather than attempt to train someone for a specific job. In some cases, particular knowledge and understanding of a subject area is a bonus, as are specific technical skills. An understanding of the world of work, some commercial awareness, some appreciation of work culture and the ability to work in teams, communicate well and exhibit confidence (but not arrogance) in inter-personal relations is a considerable enhancement"(Harvey et.al, 1997).

The Business Council of Australia and Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry identified a number of elements of learning skills that are valued by employers, namely:

- Managing own learning;
- Contributing to the learning community at the workplace;
- Using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support, networking, IT courses; Applying learning courses to technical issues (e.g. learning about products) and people issues (e.g. inter-personal and cultural aspects of work);having enthusiasm for ongoing learning;
- being willing to learn in any setting – on and off the job;being open to new ideas and techniques;
- being prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills; and
- acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change.

Business Council of Australia and Australian chamber of commerce and industry. (2002). "The extent to which the (higher education) context and the first or subsequent job contexts are similar is also likely to have a profound effect on whether transfer occurs. The greater the difference in terms of task ,people and expectations, the lower the likelihood of transfer". Atkins (1999).

"In contrast to the more academic areas of the educational program, goals for the practicum are more likely to emphasize attitudinal changes than acquisition of knowledge or technical skills. "(Toohey et.al., 1996)
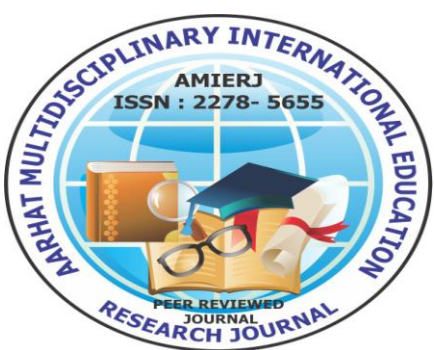
Development of Student's professional skills through work-integrated learning (WIL).

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is that learning which takes place when a component of industry/professional practical experience is integrated in the degree program. Though unpaid, but a credit is awarded for evaluation. It can include work experience, internships, guided industry projects individually or a combination of their work place activities. These can be in the form of "sandwich" courses also. Such activities take place under the guidance and supervision which can be either a part of course of study to be graded or it can be an ungraded activity of students' effort to have work place experience during the course of study.

During work placement or internship, students have to adapt to culture of that organization. Thus, they should follow the ethics such as punctuality, reliability, responsibility, well groomed & neatly dressed, ability to listen & follow instructions, meet deadlines, cumulating work and study, ability to communicate properly, work in collaboration with others, work independently, taking initiatives, ability to manage self, priority and time etc.
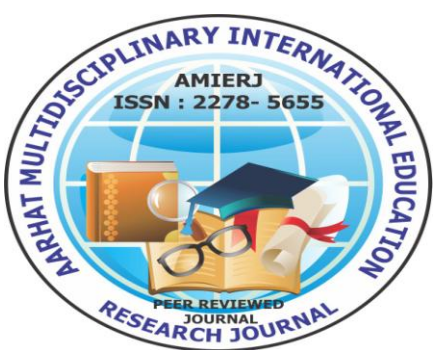
Some Models of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Some **Models of developing professional skills** among the students have been given by Griffith University as mentioned below:

(i) **Work Placement**: This model depicts the relationship between student, the higher education institution and an organization where the students are placed to gain work experience. It develops links between theory and practice. It gives an opportunity to gain experience within an organization outside the university. It helps in developing

professional competencies by undertaking a specific task or project. It inculcates some specific and some generalist skills necessary for day to day functioning in an organization. It provides an opportunity to gain knowledge of workplace practice by observing senior staff members in the organization. It have a place for a mentor supervisor for supervising the working of the students. Learning outcomes are usually negotiated by the student with the help of academic or industry supervisors. This model has a place for assessment of the students during the whole work placement.

(ii) **Work experience / vacation work**: It may be paid or unpaid extracurricular work. This work experience usually takes place in industry or organization that is connected with student's program but it may be related to student's program. It gives an opportunity to develop skills which will assist employability. In this model learning outcomes are generally defined and thus assessment is not formal.

(iii) **Practicum**: It may be paid or unpaid placement. Students are given an opportunity to learn professional skills and knowledge in specific time period. Learning outcomes are some general expectation of employer and assessment is done in a formal or informal manner.

(iv) **Internship**: It is a paid work placement usually of one year duration. Students are treated as a full employee of the organization. Learning outcomes are not well defined. There is no formal assessment but a report may contribute to credit points towards the degree program.

(v) **Sandwich Courses**: It is a paid work placement and adds to length of degree program by giving additional time to industry. It may be continuous block of work placement of 12 months. It may be a series of shorter duration i.e. 4 months per year for the entire degree program. Learning outcomes are not properly specified and may or may not be assessed.

(vi) **Industry Project**: It is usually unpaid and short term. It is based on achieving outcomes for a specific project. It may be for individual student or a team of students. This

project may be conducted at work place or in a university. Learning outcomes are well defined and are formally assessed.

Maximizing Learning Outcomes through reflection:-

Reflection helps in the development of professional skills of students. They learn a lot when they are required to reflect on what they have learned and how they have learned it. WIL coordinators agree that formal debriefing session, where students think deeply about their work-experience along with reflective documents. It increases students' awareness of several professional skills. It enhances the confidence in their those professional skills which help in employment after graduation. Donald Schon (1983) suggested that the capacity to reflect an action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning was one of the defining characteristics of professional practice. Requiring students to reflect intentionally on their learning experiences is an important starting point in the development of professional practice skills.

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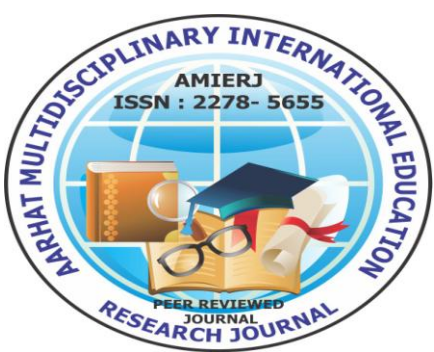Flinders University. (2010) *Work Integrated Learning*

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