

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: In the globalization era, transferable skills are highly demanded in human resource management. This study aimed to understand what kinds of transferable skills were acquired for employment in Indonesia and how Indonesian managers maintained transferable skills for their employee development. Thus, a qualitative method was applied to figure out the nature of this study with a setting in Surabaya East Java. Questionnaires were distributed to two hundred employees within three national companies, and interviews were conducted with five managers in the same companies. As a result, the participants identified transferable skills as communication skills, numeric skills, teamwork, negotiation, computer and digital skills, planning and problem-solving, time management, critical thinking, and influencing skills. While the managers confirmed the demand for transferable skills and technical skills for employment selection, office routines, and job rotation. The managers also emphasized the importance of communication that assisted to elevate other transferable skills for employment development.

Keywords: Transferable skills, employment development, communication skills

1. Introduction

Companies require employees with high qualified competencies to achieve their competitive advantage and organizational success. For this, Human Resource Management has responsibility for selecting employees who match the company's standard qualification by evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, identifying their barriers and managing their improvement, and providing drills to develop their employability performance (Boon, Hartog, & Lepak, 2019). On the other side, employees have various difficulties in mediating their competencies to meet the company's needs. Many employers complain about higher education which does not provide students with adequate employability skills (Mohammed & Lashine, 2003; Setyorinii, 2018). Others argue that the skill mismatch is due to an unclear overview of office tasks and responsibilities that should be given in the office (Mawarti, Firani, & Kurniawan, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to classify what particular skills should be acquired by Indonesian graduates and to be required by Indonesian job markets.

This study proposes an overview of transferable skills that are depicted as skills to meet the global job market. Globalization has altered the changes of economic, political, social, and cultural systems in educational institutions and workplaces (Worldbank, 2019). The demands for employment have also changed involving multidimensional skills, such as foundation skills, transferable skills, job-specific skills or technical skills, and digital skills (UNICEF, 2018). Lately, digital skills are also important in response to the pandemic Covid-19 around

the world. In brief, all skills are beneficial for future human capital development in Indonesia (Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019).

Therefore, this study aimed to observe the nature of transferrable skills in Indonesian employment development. The research questions of this study were formulated into two questions: (1) what kinds of transferable skills were captured by Indonesian employees for their employment? and (2) how transferable skills are acquired and maintained by Indonesian managers for their employment development? The results are perceived to bring insights into what relevant skills can be taught in Indonesian higher education and what demanded skills are needed in the workplace. Furthermore, this study contributes to bringing values of transferable skills for employment development in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

In the globalization era, people are acquired to have and experience some multidimensional skills to navigate their success from childhood into adulthood. Skills are defined as “specific abilities that are developed directly in real-life situations or through education and training and later on transferred to real-life situations” (Nagale & Stalder, 2017). Still, some argue that technical skills are easily developed at school, but transferable skills need to be improved at work (Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019). Therefore, many countries are determined to develop relevant human skills in both education and workplace contexts.

In Indonesia, for example, the government considers the 2013 Educational Curriculum for human capital. The students are expected to learn fundamental skills and to develop transferable skills (UNICEF, 2018; Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019). However, barriers to human skills have been found in Indonesia due to the gaps of understanding among stakeholders (Setyorini, 2014). Similar realities also occur in many countries that require further actions to solve the employability difficulties for human resource development (Mohammed & Lashine, 2003; Suparna, 2017; Worldbank, 2019; Sparrow, Brester, & Harris, 2016). In brief, the government, educational policymakers, and employers need to find ways in constructing transferable concepts from education to the workplace (Setyorini, 2018).

Moreover, the UNICEF Strategic Plan (2018) develop a Global Framework on Skills in the process of developing human resources in school and out of school The framework includes four multidimensional skills, such as foundation skills, job-specific skills or technical skills, digital skills, and transferable skills. Foundation skills are concerning literacy and numeracy as the basis of people’s acquired skills that are commonly taught at primary school, informal education, and home (UNICEF, 2018). Job-specific skills are technical competencies to accomplish and perform specific tasks in the workplace. Digital skills are capacities to use digital technologies to face the increasing globalization needs (Frey & Osborne, 2017). These skills should be understood by students, parents, educators, employers, employees, and governmental officers in developing stronger human resources (Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019). Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the realities of transferable skills in the Indonesian workplace.

Transferable skills are applicable abilities across domains that are essential for human resource development. The skills include skills for learning, skills for employment and entrepreneurship, skills for personal development, and skills for active citizenship (Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019). Otherwise, transferable skills are conceptualized into other terms: key competencies, soft skills, non-technical skills, generic skills, or basic skills (Nagale & Stalder, 2017; UNICEF, 2018; Rychen & Salganik, 2003). While, this study comprises some concepts of transferable skills (Mawarti, Firani, & Kurniawan, 2020; Nagale & Stalder, 2017; Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019; UNICEF, 2018). According to Naimbar, et al. (2019),

transferable skills are interrelated skills that can develop learning outcomes, motivate students to learn at a school, build responsibilities, and access better employment in the future. In this study, 23 varieties of transferable skills are depicted below:

Table 1: Varieties of Transferable Skills

Transferable Skills	Examples
Fundamental skills	literacy, using numbers
People-related skills or Social skills	interpersonal skill, oral communication skill, written communication skill, negotiation skill, team working skill, customer service skill, influencing skill, leadership skill,
Thinking skills	Planning skills, managing information, problem-solving skill, critical thinking skill,
Digital skills	Technological competence, coding, software programming
Business skills	Entrepreneurial skills, cultural business awareness
Active citizenship	Participation, empathy, respect for diversity

Moreover, an important example of transferable skills is communication skills. Both verbal and written communication skills are useful for life and work development. People must communicate in any ways in almost every situation, share information and ideas clearly and concisely, and perceive misunderstanding. The abilities to communicate in written and oral forms effectively are developed through formal education and informal experience (Suparna, 2017). Theoretically, communication is divided into formal, informal, interpersonal, and non-verbal communications (Molen & Hoogland, 2019). Formal communication is regulated by company management, such as official letters, reports, staff meetings, policies, notices, and newsletters. Informal communication occurs outside the office which employees use for social interaction or friendship. Interpersonal communication is two-way interaction (oral and written communication) among employees, employers, and other official parties for business purposes. Non-verbal communication refers to body languages, such as eye contact, gestures, and proximity. Nowadays, communication is an essential instrument in managing human resources in a company where particular organizational culture occurs (Sparrow, Brester, & Harris, 2016; Chukwuka, 2015).

3. Method

This study tended to evolve perceptions of Indonesian managers in viewing transferable skills for their employment skills. Therefore, qualitative research was suitable to demonstrate naturalistic inquiry and to gain realistic information about relevant participants within a particular context (Merriam, 2014). This study was located in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The company's location is near the observers' office. According to Gray (2017), a research setting may be chosen from the communities that the researchers are familiar with to gain a specific and clear understanding of the participants.

This study firstly delivered questionnaires to obtain insights before constructing interviews for detailed arguments (Bryman, Clark, Foster, & Sloan, 2021). Due to the pandemic situation, the questionnaires were delivered online to two hundred employees within three national companies. Snowball sampling was taken in this phase to nominate subsequent employees to observe (Gray, 2017).

Furthermore, this study conducted interviews with comprehensive sampling to five managers in the same companies. The interviews capture the research participants' feelings, experiences, activities, and opinions about what is questioned in a study (Gray, 2017). Two interviews were offline in the managers' office, while others were interviewed by phone due to a pandemic

situation. Each interview took between thirty minutes to one hour based on the managers' time convenience. Overall, sixteen meeting schedules allow the researcher to understand what particular skills are used by the managers in the office. Then, both questionnaire and interview results were analyzed using content analysis.

4. Result and Discussion

This study explored an understanding of transferable skills of Indonesian employees and managers and how they develop the skills for employment purposes. In this section, the results of questionnaires and interviews are presented in two parts to answer the research questions. This section includes the varieties of transferable skills that are understood and possessed by participants for their employment, the ways of managers in managing their transferable skills for employment development, and the demanded skills for Indonesian employment in the future.

Acquired Transferable Skills

Questionnaires were distributed to 200 employees within three companies in Surabaya. In a week, the questionnaires were responded to by 162 employees whose ages are between 24 to 46 years old, with various educational backgrounds from undergraduate to master degrees. The respondents were also various in positions, such as managers, supervisors, administration staff, accountants, receptionists, customer services, technicians, and marketing representatives. As a result, 162 respondents agreed that transferable skills as employability abilities that can support their career. They considered 12 out of 23 varieties of transferable skills that they perceive for work. The skills were depicted as follow:

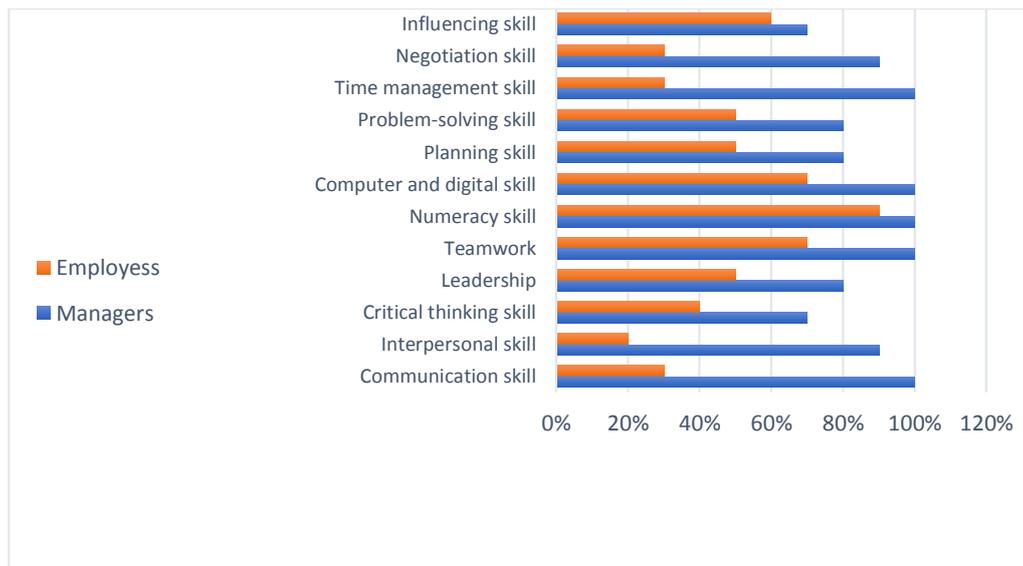


Figure 1: Employees' Perceived Transferable Skills
Sources: Data Processed

The finding supported previous studies about transferable skills that generally include communication skills, interpersonal skills, numeracy skills, leadership, teamwork, negotiation, computer and digital skills, planning and problem-solving, time management, and critical thinking (Nagale & Stalder, 2017). Other studies identify transferable skills, such as: writing, listening, social relations, problem-solving, analytical reasoning, critical thinking, leadership, adaptability, teamwork, creativity, attention to detail, project management, computer and

digital citizenship, organizational management, collaboration, initiative, strong work ethic, business culture, and entrepreneurial skill (Mawarti, Firani, & Kurniawan, 2020; Yunos, Saleh, Sern, & Lisa, 2017; Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019; Frey & Osborne, 2017). However, this study did not find creativity, attention to detail, project management, negotiation, collaboration, business and work ethic, and analytical reasoning. Therefore, the researchers argue the differences may depend on the characteristics of companies, types of works that the respondents occur, the employees' working length, and other variables that need to be investigated in the future.

Transferable Skills for Employment Development

This section draws a variety of transferable skills for employment development. The skills were identified and discussed from the questionnaire and interview results. To understand the questionnaire results, it is necessary to know the participants' arguments. Then, this study conducted interviews with five managers under the name of Maya, Andi, Tri, Riana, and David in the observed companies. The interviews were aimed to understand the research participants' feelings, experiences, activities, and opinions (Gray, 2017; Bryman, Clark, Foster, & Sloan, 2021).

Transferable skills are particular and applicable abilities across fields for human resource development. Each competency is various that can be different between one and another employee. In this study, most employees have not yet understood the meaning of transferable skills, but know its similar terms. Accordingly, two managers said below:

Honestly, I never heard the term 'transferable skills', sorry, so that's why I was confused firstly with the questionnaires. After I read all questions, I find social skills, negotiation skills, communication skills, etc... yes finally I know the meaning. Well, I just knew the skills as soft skills. From the questionnaires, I think yes transferable skills are very important to learn by employees because my office need staff with good soft skills, oh I mean, good transferable skills are important (Maya, Manager, Interview 1)

Finally, I understand transferable skills as the examples in the questionnaire. My lecturers used to say them as non-technical skills. Of course, both skills are necessary for all personnel in the university, in the workplace, in society, especially in this globalization era where international trades occur everywhere. I agree that transferable skills need to be taught more in all settings so (Andi, Manager, Interview 1)

However, the unfamiliarity did not influence the participants' interests in answering the questionnaires about varieties of transferable skills. In this study, the transferable skills of 162 participating employees were significantly gained from the workplace. According to the questionnaire, the employees argued that some skills can be acquired in one of the contexts or both contexts. About 60% to 80% of observed employees mentioned that communication skills, planning skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, negotiation skills, influencing skills, and leadership were learned and developed more in the workplace rather than from higher education. While numeric skills were highly developed from their higher education. The findings are similar to research that transferable skills are specific competencies acquired from both formal education and informal pieces of training (Nagale & Stalder, 2017; Mawarti, Firani, & Kurniawan, 2020; Setyorinii, 2018). They also remarked on particular variables and contexts that influence the employees' skills acquisition and improvement. The different perspectives of acquired transferable skills for employment were identified by the research participants of this study below:

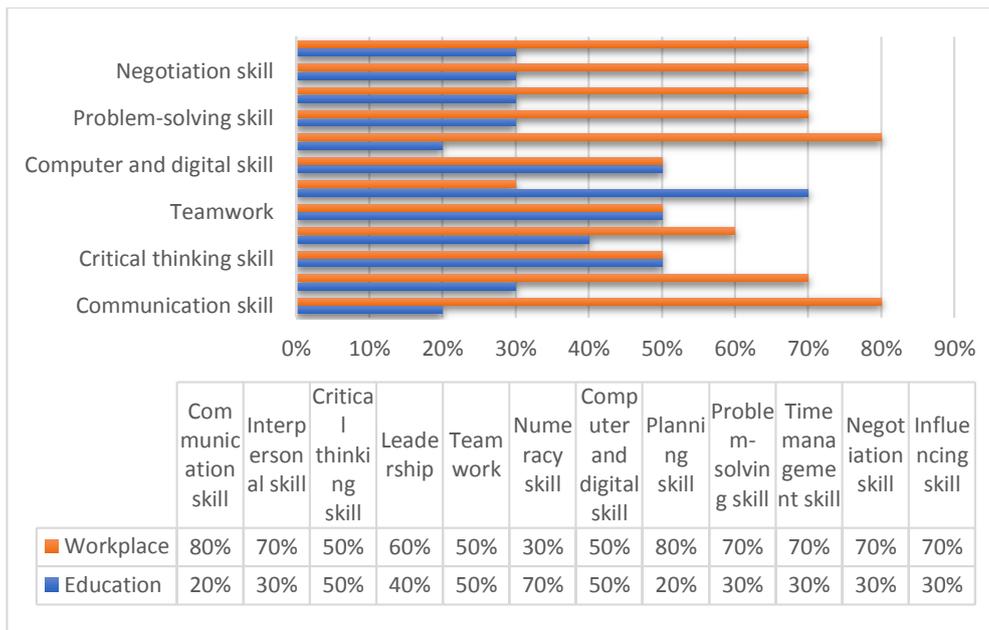


Figure 2: Employees' Transferable Skills for Employment Development
Sources: Data Processed

As the chart, this study found that numeric skills were mostly gained by Indonesian employees in school and university. It seemed that learning numbers are considered essential following the Indonesian schools' curriculum that can assist Indonesian graduates to work about numeric business data (Kotamena, Senjaya, Putri, & Andika, 2020; Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019). The overall results add information that the Indonesian community is generally unaware of what relevant kinds of transferable skills are in their life and work situations. Such an idea was also presented by Setyorini (2021) in a national newspaper about the imaginary or real function of soft skills in Indonesia. Another research also shows that an employee needs to articulate numerical financial reports based on accounting principles into verbal data with appropriate language (Mohammed & Lashine, 2003). Similarly, an observed manager said below:

My [new] staff commonly have less confidence in communicating, yes, they have lack soft skills that are important instead of technical skills. So they tend to be silent at work, never ask anyone if they don't know a job. Then, they cannot complete the job. I think it's not about character, but it is an awareness of an employee. So I always convince my staff to ask what they don't know to complete their jobs (Tri, Manager, Interview 2)

Other managers agreed to the importance of transferable skills for employment development, but they urged that most new employees have to lack transferable skills. The lack was also emerged in research indicating less soft skills given for students in many Indonesian universities (Setyorini, 2014). Other research also showed that the technical skills are easily taught to new employees because they have been acquired in previous higher education, but communication skills, leadership, and teamwork need further learning processes in the office (Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019).

This study also found the need for transferable skills due to globalization. Some employers are afraid that the current situation in welcoming free trades in Indonesia affects the availability of job markets in Indonesia. The manager identified that current Indonesian accounting students and graduates still have low soft skills, including communication skills. Most Indonesian employees have to lack English competence compared to foreign workers. Setyorini (2018) find that university graduates' inadequate knowledge and competence result from inappropriate

and insufficient materials and facilities provided by schools and universities. Similar to this research, a manager said:

I think education in this country [Indonesia] has not been developed to know students' potentiality. So they cannot maximize their abilities. I am worried, free trade will lead to more jobless because many Indonesia companies currently prefer recruiting foreign workers than Indonesians due to their better competence (Andi, Manager, Interview 1)

Moreover, three managers mentioned that their Human Resource Department tends to provide relevant training to decrease employees' barriers in public speaking to meet the demand of business negotiation and to develop relevant working skills. Other managers also added that transferable skills are needed for the recruitment process and positioning employees in the right place. A manager said:

As I know many companies provide training for new employment. Of course, we understand that what is taught in the university cannot comprise all company tasks, impossible for the students or graduates to master all knowledge from school and universities. That's why, training is needed for new employees to learn important duties for them in the office, for daily office activities, such as: reporting that can be different from one company to another company, stocking that may have different ways from one company to others... The point is that my company understand the skill gaps between education and the workplace (David, Manager, Interview 1)

Accordingly, this study agrees that transferable skills are addressed as important for recruitment. New employees with adequate transferable skills will be "quickly competent in new situations in the workplace (Nagale & Stalder, 2017). The observed managers evidenced that their companies provide particular training on transferable competencies and technical skills after the recruitment. While other studies have confirmed the importance of company training to support employees' qualifications as a part of the HRD duties (Boon, Hartog, & Lepak, 2019; Chukwuka, 2015; Kotamena, Senjaya, Putri, & Andika, 2020). For this issue, two managers in this study also expressed their opinion about transferable skills for recruitment:

I realize that many new employees have a lack of soft skills [transferable skills] in many cases, yes we understand that many tasks can not be explained through theoretical books as given in the university, so we provide them training. They are good in financial statement theory, for example, but cannot explain it clearly. Yes, I think now communication skill is important. The first impression can be gained through the job interview. If the applicant tries using English, for example, we will be impressed. We will remark the applicant as competent ones (Maya, Manager, Interview 1)

All workers must realize that all companies need ones who can communicate well, know computers well, know how to negotiate, and lead staff clearly, and easy to work with different people. All employees must be ready to be relocated to other departments or other branches. In this situation, both technical skills and non-technical skills [transferable skills] are needed to see by employers (Riana, interview 2)

The managers' argument above supports previous research about the benefit of transferable skills. As the transcripts, this study classifies some thoughts of transferable skills, such as negotiation skills, digital skills, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, and communication skills. Interpersonal skills are closed to communication skills in which people do two-way interaction, verbal and non-verbal among employees, supervisors, managers, and employers. Such facts have been discussed by other researchers (Molen & Hoogland, 2019; Kotamena, Senjaya, Putri, & Andika, 2020; Chukwuka, 2015). In brief, transferable skills are interrelated abilities that can support each of the transferable skills.

Moreover, the communication skills are fragmented as what people label as transferable skills, non-technical skills, soft skills, generic skills, or basic skills (Nagale & Stalder, 2017; Sparrow, Brester, & Harris, 2016; Rychen & Salganik, 2003) that perform employees' daily activities in the workplace. As the results of questionnaires, this study found the different usages on communication skills between Indonesian managers and their employees at work as follow:

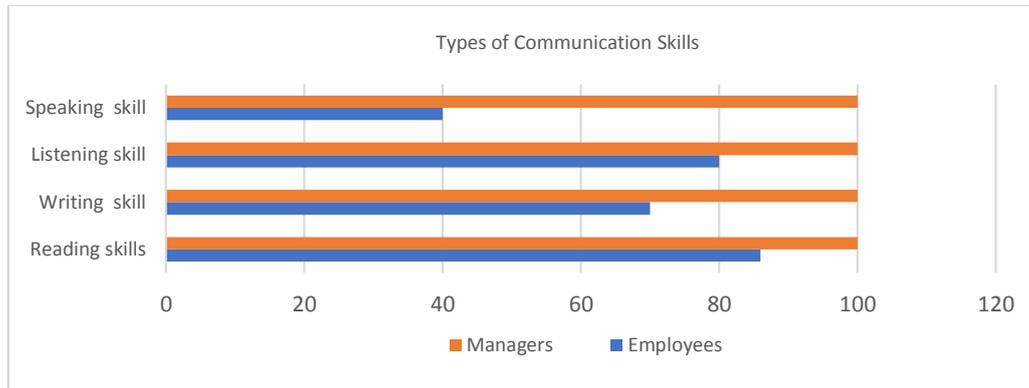


Figure 3: Demanded Communication Skills

Sources: Data Processed

The value communication skills at work are previously demonstrated by Mohammed & Lashine (2003) following other transferable skills. For example, an employee is maintaining financial reports based on accounting principles (technical skills), by using computerized spreadsheets (computer skill), to draft and develop auditing reports (analytical skill and critical skill), to present and discuss financial matters (problem-solving and interpersonal skill) with appropriate language. Communication abilities as non-technical skills can also support other technical skills in a real workplace. While the finding of interpersonal skills and social skills supported another research result (Naimbar, Karki, Rahardiani, Putri, & Singh, 2019).

This study concluded that communication skill is one of the demanded transferrable skills in the workplace. According to the interview results, the communication skills include abilities on telephoning, emailing, writing letters or documents, presenting finance reports, and negotiating in Indonesian or English appropriately. The managers also stated that communication skill refers to speaking and writing skills. They often had online meetings via Zoom Meeting, Demio, and Google Meet during the pandemic era. Referring to previous research, communication skills currently support other transferable skills, such as digital and computer skills in using online video platforms for office meetings (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Yunos, Saleh, Sern, & Lisa, 2017; Mawarti, Firani, & Kurniawan, 2020). In short, communication skill is considered fundamental to support human resource management within an organization and a company (Suparna, 2017). The research participants stated that communication skills can support other transferable skills for job recruitment, daily job tasks, and job changes. In conclusion, the Indonesian employees' transferable skills can develop their employment progresses.

5. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate Indonesian employees' transferable skills and to understand Indonesian managers' perspectives in developing transferable skills and in maintaining communication skills for their employment success. In this study, data were firstly collected through questionnaires before conducting interviews. First, the questionnaire result comprised various types of transferable skills captured by Indonesian employees. They mentioned communication skills, interpersonal skills, numeracy skills, leadership, teamwork, negotiation,

computer and digital skills, planning and problem-solving, time management, critical thinking, and influencing skills. Secondly, the interviews were conducted to gain more information with the questionnaire results as well as to understand the managers' perceptions deeply about transferable skills and employment development.

This study concluded that transferable skills are essential for employment selection (application, interview, and evaluation processes), office routines, employment transfer, and further career development. Instead of relevant technical skills, the managers identified some demanded transferable skills, such as written and spoken communication skills, numeric and digital skills, leadership, negotiation, and problem-solving skill. They also emphasized that communication skills for emailing, writing documents, and presenting reports in Indonesian and English would assist employees to improve other transferable skills.

In brief, transferable skills are essential to support human resource management. For further study, this recommended investigating participants in various departments so the results will be more objectives and will find more findings.

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