



Employability Skills – an Employers' Perspective

*A thorough and comprehensive project
with clear objectives and specific outcomes*

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) completed a major exercise to discover what employers really look for in workers to meet their current and future skills needs.

What types of skills and abilities are needed in the workplace?

What personal characteristics will ensure success as an employee or self-employed worker?

The outcomes of this project tell us that employers today want more than technical skills. They select staff that can demonstrate a variety of social and personal attributes as well as the ability to learn technical skills.

This project has identified these characteristics, which has powerful implications for educators preparing students for the workplace of today and tomorrow. It can be applied to entry level or existing workers in all industries.

An *Employability Skills Framework* has been developed for use at all education levels – school, vocational education and training (VET) and tertiary. The framework can also be used by teachers and training providers as a guide, by job seekers as a self- assessment tool, by employees to improve their career potential, and by recruiters and HR professionals.

Download the full report, *Employability Skills for the Future*
http://www.acci.asn.au/text_files/reports/Employability_Skills.pdf (2.5 MB)

WHY?

We all know that the nature of work is changing. The profile of a “typical” employee or self-employed worker is different for this generation. Suitable staff are crucial to business success. Educators must know how to prepare students for the realities of the workplace.

Employability skills for the purposes of the project were defined as “skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one’s potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions”.

The project involved employers identifying the employability skills that would be relevant to the future success of their business.

HOW?

The first step in the project was the commissioning of a comprehensive literature review.

Next, small group discussions and individual interviews were conducted with a range of small and medium-sized enterprises to identify their views on employability skills.

Over 40 businesses were identified through ACCI and other members of the project Reference Group. The businesses covered a wide range of industry sectors and were located in metropolitan, regional and rural environments nationally.

13 detailed case studies were also undertaken across the nation. Interviews were held with senior managers to determine their views and the way that employability skills are developed, monitored and assessed.

A validation process was used following the completion of focus group, interview and case study activity. The *Employability Skills Framework* that resulted from the initial research was released through ACCI to another 150 businesses and employer groups to test their response.

WHAT?

Businesses, irrespective of size, emphasised that the future would require a focus on:

- the bottom line, with an increasing expectation that all employees understand aspects of the business’ financial situation
- customer relationships and customer service with the expectation that employees would understand the nature and importance of long-term customer relationships and greater emphasis on solutions for customers

- community requirements and expectations with regard to business performance – for example, shareholder value, equal employment opportunity, occupational health and safety, environmental requirements
- globalisation – that is factors such as increased international competition or a move into, or expansion of, global market activity
- increasingly complex operating environments as a result of regulatory, legislative and financial changes
- innovation and process improvement either to drive cost effectiveness or create new products and services
- flexible business structures – for example, flatter, more autonomous structures with a workforce able to regroup as required
- time constraints – customer demands and market competition will require product and service provision in shorter timeframes.

Several large businesses indicated three other factors were also important. These were:

- delegation of decision making – flatter structures and closer relationships with customers will require more delegation of decision making and localised accountability;
- growing development of a learning culture with the expectation that staff will take responsibility for their learning and development; and
- assessment of the quality, relevance and use of data.

Within this context, all businesses identified the importance of communication, teamwork, problem solving, planning and organising, technology, learning, self-management, initiative and enterprise skills.

However, most importantly, businesses participating in the research placed a strong emphasis on the need for both entry-level and ongoing employees to exhibit a broad range of **personal attributes**.

These attributes (listed over) were identified as central to the concept of an *Employability Skills Framework*. Many of the businesses also suggested that educators review and redevelop their curriculum and change delivery methodology to support the development of these skills and attributes. Greater focus should also be given to looking at ways of measuring and recording the attainment of these attributes.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FRAMEWORK

Personal Attributes that contribute to overall employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty • Commitment • Honesty and integrity • Enthusiasm • Reliability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Presentation • Common sense • Positive self esteem • A sense of humour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A balanced attitude to work and home life • An ability to deal with pressure • Motivation • Adaptability
Skill Communication ..that contributes to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers	Element – (facets of the skill that employers identified as important noting that the mix and priority of these facets would vary from job to job) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening and understanding • Speaking clearly and directly • Writing to the needs of the audience • Negotiating responsibly • Reading independently • Empathising • Speaking and writing in languages other than English • Using numeracy • Understanding the needs of internal and external customers • Persuading effectively • Establishing and using networks • Being assertive • Sharing information 	Skill Planning and organising ..that contributes to long and short term strategic planning	Element – (facets of the skill that employers identified as important noting that the mix and priority of these facets would vary from job to job) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing time and priorities– setting time lines, co-ordinating tasks for self and with others • Being resourceful • Taking initiative and making decisions • Adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies • Establishing clear project goals and deliverables • Allocating people and other resources to tasks • Planning the use of resources including time management • Participates in continuous improvement and planning processes • Developing a vision and a proactive plan to accompany it • Predicting - weighing up risk, evaluate alternatives and apply evaluation criteria • Collecting, analysing and organising information • Understanding basic business systems and their relationships
Team work ..that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working across different ages and irrespective of gender, race, religion or political persuasion • Working as an individual and as a member of a team • Knowing how to define a role as part of the team • Applying team work to a range of situations e.g. futures planning, crisis problem solving • Identifying the strengths of the team members • Coaching and mentoring skills including giving feedback 	Technology ..that contributes to effective execution of tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a range of basic IT skills • Applying IT as a management tool • Using IT to organise data • Being willing to learn new IT skills • Having the OHS knowledge to apply technology • Having the physical capacity to apply technology e.g. manual dexterity
Problem Solving ..that contributes to productive outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing creative, innovative solutions • Developing practical solutions • Showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them • Solving problems in teams • Applying a range of strategies to problem solving • Using mathematics including budgeting and financial management to solve problems • Applying problem solving strategies across a range of areas • Testing assumptions taking the context of data and circumstances into account. • Resolving customer concerns in relation to complex projects issues 	Learning ..that contributes to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing own learning • Contributing to the learning community at the workplace • Using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support and networking, IT, courses • Applying learning to 'technical' issues (e.g. learning about products) and 'people' issues (e.g. interpersonal 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 • Acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change
Self Management ..that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a personal vision and goals • Evaluating and monitoring own performance • Having knowledge and confidence in own ideas and visions • Articulating own ideas and visions • Taking responsibility 	Initiative and enterprise ..that contribute to innovative outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting to new situations • Developing a strategic, creative, long term vision • Being creative • Identifying opportunities not obvious to others • Translating ideas into action • Generating a range of options • Initiating innovative solutions