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)

ACCI acknowledges support from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to undertake this project.
**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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Personal Attributes that contribute to overall employability</th>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>Initiative and enterprise</th>
<th>Self Management</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Personal Attributes that contribute to overall employability</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>• Identifying and understanding customer needs</td>
<td>• Managing resources effectively</td>
<td>• Respecting diversity</td>
<td>• Developing ideas into practical solutions</td>
<td>• Adapting quickly to change</td>
<td>• Taking on new challenges</td>
<td>• Planning and executing projects</td>
<td>• Written and verbal communication</td>
<td>• Knowledge of IT systems and applications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>• Managing time and priorities</td>
<td>• Taking initiative and making decisions</td>
<td>• Communicating effectively</td>
<td>• Identifying problems in a range of situations</td>
<td>• Building and maintaining relationships</td>
<td>• Identifying learning opportunities</td>
<td>• Organising and sequencing work</td>
<td>• Listening and understanding</td>
<td>• Understanding the needs of internal and external customers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honesty and integrity</td>
<td>• Being resourceful</td>
<td>• Managing stresses</td>
<td>• Establishing and maintaining networks</td>
<td>• Identifying projects that contribute to the achievement of goals</td>
<td>• Contributing to the development of others</td>
<td>• Being open to new ideas</td>
<td>• Using IT to support decision making</td>
<td>• Speaking and writing effectively</td>
<td>• Working across different ages and irrespective of gender, race, religion or political persuasion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive self esteem</td>
<td>• Taking responsibility</td>
<td>• Managing change</td>
<td>• Developing effective communication</td>
<td>• Identifying opportunities that contribute to innovation and growth</td>
<td>• Contributing to the learning community</td>
<td>• Being creative</td>
<td>• Applying IT as a management tool</td>
<td>• Using IT to organise data</td>
<td>• Showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them</td>
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<td>Motivation</td>
<td>• Taking initiative</td>
<td>• Managing complexity</td>
<td>• Establishing and maintaining relationships</td>
<td>• Generating a range of options</td>
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<td>• Managing complexity</td>
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<td>A sense of humour</td>
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Extract from Employability Skills for the Future, 2002

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