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# **Academic and Employability Skills**

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## **1 Introduction**

In this assignment I will define and explain different types of academic and employability skills and their importance. I will also analyze my strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in terms of employability and outline my personal development plan based on my analysis.

## **2 Employability skills**

Employability skills can be defined as a group of characteristics that include the advancement of knowledge about a subject area, aptitude level and attitude that is necessary for success within the professional working environment. (Pool & Sewell, 2007) Employability is also defined as the ability to comfortably and efficiently move within the labor market to gain sustainable employment. (Hillage & Pollard, 1998)

Individuals that apply for jobs are assessed on their employability skills once identified for a job, through their CV, face to face interviews and numerical tests for example. Hillage and Pollard discusses this topic as “presentation” under the four components of employability and explains “presentation” as the capability of an individual to demonstrate his or her soft and hard skills through CV’s, references, previous work experience and strong interview technique. (Hillage & Pollard, 1998)

Hiring managers and human resources teams in companies look for various soft and hard skills in a candidate when choosing successful candidates. Candidates who have the most relevant skills are usually those with the highest success rate of getting a position within a company. Employers can provide a description of the required skills in job advertisements when they are hiring. These employability skills can be differentiated into hard skills, soft skills and transferable skills.

## **3 Soft skills**

When we talk about soft skills, we refer to the personal characteristics and abilities required to succeed in a professional environment and to work harmoniously with colleagues. Soft skills are usually not specific to a job or industry. (Doyle, 2020)

Many people associate soft skills with emotional intelligence, the ability to recognize and manage our attitude and emotions when communicating with customers or colleagues and the ability to communicate with people professionally. (Goleman, 1998)

Soft skills can be developed over time but they cannot be easily evaluated with a test unlike knowledge about I.T systems for example. Soft skills however can be tested and observed in real life work environments and how we relate to people. (Glassdoor, n.d.)

By experiencing different work environments and working with different types of people, we can develop our soft skills. (Work Experience Group, 2002)

We also can develop soft skills in university or school when we present to a class about a subject area, lead a group assignment or work in a team to finish a coursework task.

Interviewers test for soft skills by asking questions about previous work experience to see if we can work in a team, lead a team or can work under pressure to meet deadlines.

Employers may also test how we speak during an interview, observe our facial expression and body language to understand if they will enjoy working with us and if we can work in a team.

### **3.1 Why are soft skills important?**

Soft skills are necessary in all professional work environments and are important because these skills can influence how we communicate with others and our relationship with colleagues and customers. (Pappas, 2019)

They are not only essential to develop in work life but these capabilities are also useful in university and personal life as well.

Been able to communicate clearly and having a hard-working attitude with a strong work ethic are some of the soft skills that can be tested during interviews. Employers give a lot of importance to soft skills as it will show whether you are able to fit into the team and if you are able to communicate professionally with customers.

Some key soft skills are listed below:

**Communication:** Ability to communicate clearly and to change the style and content of the message depending on the audience. It is also important to communicate professionally and have the right use of body language. Strong communication skills can be developed by presenting on topics at university.

**Teamwork:** Ability to work with colleagues on work place projects efficiently or the ability to work with group members during a group project at university.

### **3.2 Benefits of soft skills to employees and employers**

There are many benefits of developing soft skills for employees and employers:

**Improved collaboration:** For a company to operate successfully individuals must work well together in a team to realize a common objective. The quality of work is better when individuals utilize their personal abilities and aptitudes together in collaboration. Every employee has different types of tasks that they

can be good at. Employees could also have different types of skill sets. Employees can share the benefits of all these skills when working on a project in a team. For example, when creating a phone application there could be a design team and a coding team working together and using different skills to improve a product.

**Attracts new customers and improves customer service:** Employees with strong soft skills of communication, are better able to listen carefully to what customers have to say, solve problems for customers and provide the customer with the right product. Employees with a positive and professional attitude will also be able to improve customer experience.

For example, employees with strong soft skills working in a coffee shop can attract and retain customers through their positive attitude and ability to clearly understand the orders of customers without making mistakes. This can also lead to higher sales for the employer.

#### **4 Hard skills**

Hard skills are another type of employability skills that are important to succeed in a work environment. Hard skills are more specific to a job role compared to soft skills. (Doyle, 2020)

For example, a software engineer will need to know how to code, which is a hard skill. However, coding skills are not required for a barista. Teamwork skills which is a soft skill is important for a barista and software engineer.

Hard skills are acquired, for example through learning about a subject area in school, university or online courses. Knowledge acquired through studying biology in university can be considered a hard skill which could be used to obtain employment as a doctor. Educational qualifications can greatly improve chances of gaining employment. (Johnes, 2006)

Employers generally value employees with a balance of soft skills and hard skills more than an employee with strong hard skills and weak soft skills.

For example, during an interview an employer can see from our CV that we meet all the criteria to become a software engineer through a degree in computing but that we are not confident in speaking or don't show any teamwork skills. An employer may prefer to hire a candidate who has strong teamwork skills and who is more confident.

Some key hard skills are listed below:

**Hard communication skills:** Good communication can be considered a soft skill but having the ability to speak multiple languages fluently in a professional environment can be considered a hard skill. A receptionist working at the Spanish cultural center in London could be a confident and effective communicator and also be able to speak Spanish fluently. Knowing Spanish in

this case can be considered a hard skill, as this may be required to speak to frequent Spanish speaking visitors.

**Certificates & Licenses:** These are physical confirmations of what we have learnt by participating in courses that examine understanding of theories. For example, university transcripts or certificates for professional qualifications. Hiring managers and human resources use these documents to confirm qualifications and the candidate's potential for a role. For example, it is a hard skill to have a bachelor's degree in a finance related subject to succeed in an accounting role.

#### 4.1 Why are hard skills important?

Learning a specific subject area well can help develop hard skills. This can be through a university degree or a course. It is an important employability skill as it distinguishes us from other candidates. Strong hard skills can make us more capable of acquiring a job and many jobs require us to have specific hard skills. These could be technical job roles such as a doctor, engineer or a pilot.

### 5 Transferable skills

Transferable skills can be soft skills, hard skills or academic skills. They are not specific to an industry or job type but are skills that we can use when moving from one job to another or when moving from university to the work place. (Murphy, 1997)

For example, teamwork skills that we improved through working in a coffee shop could also be used while working in a team in a clothing outlet. Some hard skills can also be transferable, for example, if we learnt how to use Microsoft office and excel during a receptionist job, this could also be used if we shift jobs to become an accountant.

Some key transferable skills are listed below:

**Adaptability:** Be capable of doing different types of tasks easily in a work environment. For example, in a coffee shop an employee can adapt to working in the cashier till or to be a barista.

**Critical thinking skills:** Critical thinking skills are developed at university by been able to independently think about different subject areas covered in university.

### 6 Academic skills

Academic skills help us study effectively and succeed at university. These skills can be developed at university and some examples include writing skills and time management skills.

**Writing skills:** Writing skills can be developed when writing for coursework assignments. Writing skills can also be developed through summarising and paraphrasing research articles on topics.

Summarising is explaining the key ideas of a text in a shorter form and in our own words. Paraphrasing is rewriting a text in our own words without altering the meaning of the text or shortening the text excessively. Some techniques for paraphrasing include altering the sentence structure of the text or changing some of the words in the text. In both cases the original idea of the text should be maintained.

Any extracts used from the original text must be in quotation marks and should be appropriately cited and referenced.

These techniques are used to avoid plagiarism in academic writing. Plagiarism is directly copying (partially or completely) another person's work without acknowledging the source of the work. This work could be text or images.

**Time management:** This is when you are capable of meeting tight deadlines and been able to adapt quickly to new problems when meeting deadlines. Time management skills can be improved by planning before commencing tasks and by prioritising tasks based on effort required and urgency. This is also important in academic life to meet course work deadlines. We can plan and prioritise our work and daily schedule based on each deadline so that these deadlines can be successfully met.

## **7 SWOT analysis and development plan**

Finally, I have performed a self-analysis on hard and soft skills using a SWOT format.

**Strengths:** I have improved my communication skills through working in different types of customer facing roles. These include working in the cashier till for a coffee chain and through working as a lifeguard.

**Weaknesses:** I am a perfectionist and sometimes find it difficult to give responsibility to others.

**Opportunities:** Using a strong university education to build my knowledge on employability, working within teams on course work projects and communicating confidently. Through my degree, I also have an opportunity to frequently use the internet to improve my research skills.

**Threats:** Highly competitive work environment in the city of London and external factors such as COVID-19 that may affect the job market negatively.

Using my degree that I am currently studying, I will attempt to improve my

teamwork and time management skills by working in group related tasks. Additionally, I will improve my research skills by analysing and critically thinking about several subject areas.

I will also develop on my weaknesses by planning as to how I will handle delegating responsibilities during teamwork tasks at university and during work.

## 8 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have explained the different types of hard skills and soft skills that can be developed and the importance of developing these skills for career success. By been more aware and recognising our strengths and weaknesses we can plan to develop these skills through our academic and professional life.

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