



**Certificate in Higher Education in Skills for the
Work place**

MODIWL: BMSW4001

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Academic and Employability Skills

A review of the concept in the modern era

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Date: 22/08/2020

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Introduction

What does employability mean? A generic term often used but not well explained. This report analyses what the experts in the field of education and employment mean by employability.

“A set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes, that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”. York, (2004)

It is essential for graduates, professionals and job seekers to understand what employability is and what it is not according to different organisations. *“The **Career EDGE** model provides a useful summary of five essential elements that aid students and professionals employability”*: U. Edinburgh (2020).

It encapsulates how to **develop your career**, incorporates **experience** acquired throughout life and jobs for professionals and students, take into account **specific degrees** relevant to the position, **core skills** and also **personal intellect and emotions**.

Now let's dive into more detail about this concept of employability skills.

1. Employability From the Academics Perspective.

To understand what the different organisations classify as employability, we should have a clear picture of what it is and what it is not according to the various organisations.

From an University perspective employability is:

- Continuous current and future success on any career (s) a student or professional chooses.
- Acquiring and using a variety of skills, capabilities and personal features that are used in different areas and that are unique from person to person.
- Beyond a University degree.

- Continuous improvement process that is beneficial from continuous self analysis.
- Stay up to date since the job market and graduates are extremely competitive.

And what it is not:

- More than just being on a job.
- Memorising data and doing a task in a robotic way without a purpose.
- Ones personal development for only his/hers own benefit.
- A new trend that is popular now.

The research from the University of Edinburgh brings on some light on why employability is important to students and to the Academic Staff.

To students:

- **A degree is no longer enough:** The job market has dramatically changed. A degree is no longer enough for a successful and long lasting career. Recruiters are now looking for graduates with work specific skills. So for students is imperative to develop their employability during the time at University.

- **Return on investment:** The cost of studying a University degree for students and families has exponentially increased, therefore students expect this to have a good return on investment, specially for international students.

- **Participate and being involved in the process:** Getting the students involved in the process so that they can see their progress and the relevance it will have to their future career.

- **Engaging in the whole student experience:** Those students that are fully involved with the University experience, contribute and benefit from a balanced education and bring life to the University and community.

To Academic Staff:

“ The things employers generally value in new graduates are things that most teachers in higher education generally value”

Harvey & Knight, (2003)

Employability is also important to Schools and Universities since these organisations are responsible for producing the future work force that will drive prosper economies to the Nations.

To the Schools:

“ Although a student’s experience of higher education cannot guarantee a graduate level job, the nature of that experience influences the chances of success”. Yorke (2003),

To the University:

“ We aim to produce graduates fully equipped to achieve the highest personal and professional standards”.

University of Edinburgh (2012/2016).

As we have seen in this part of our research, life is a continuous process of education, experiences and self improvement. Academic employability skills are the foundation to create a prosper long lasting career in the job market. On the next section of this report we will look into how those skills are transferable to a practical point of view and more importantly, what companies and other organisations consider to be the more essential skills for them.

2. Employability Skills. The Skills you need to get a job.

We live in a very dynamic and changing economy. Most people will not hold a life time career in the same organisation. Flexibility is key nowadays.

Employers and other organisations are aware of this, but it is important to understand that basic skills called ‘Soft Skills or Employability Skills’, that are useful in any area are essential for the job seeker. Companies do not have the time and financial resources to teach basic skills to every person within the organisation, they will invest only in specific skills for the relevant position.

These skills are encapsulated in three main categories;

1. Working well with other people. Interpersonal skills.

These group of skills are focus on communication. The ability to deal with customers, being a member of a team, negotiate and solve problems.

There are several areas covered by interpersonal skills, including:

- Communication skills. Both, speaking and writing.
- Verbal communication. Face to face or in writing.

- Non verbal communication. Body language.
- Listening. Interpretation of messages verbal and non verbal.
- Emotional intelligence.
- Team work.
- Negotiating, persuasion and interpersonal skills.
- Conflict resolution and mediation. Resolve disagreements.
- Problem solving and decision making.

2. Being reliable and dependable.

This means that you will be able to deliver, to do a good job, to solve problems, to be efficient. Being organised and managing time effectively are skills that will be key in accomplishing these tasks.

Being reliable also means being trustworthy and conscientious. In his book *'The Speed of Trust'*, author *Stephen Covey* says "*Trust is the very basis of the new global economy*", (Covey, 2008, p28), and he describes how trust and the speed at which it is established with clients, employees and constituents is the essential ingredient for any high performance, successful organisation.

Another important component of being reliable, is using your own initiative to solve problems, to complete tasks efficiently and independently. Companies value professionals that think 'out of the box'. Having an open mind and using techniques to be more creative will be also helpful to expand your learning capabilities always with a willingness to learn more.

3. A willingness to learn.

Showing interest and commitment in your position within the organisation will put you a step forward in the career race. Companies take notice of employees that work on their personal development either formal or informal. Our society is continuously evolving, and as professionals in the job market we must keep our skills updated.

We have seen what transferable or 'soft skills' employers and the job market demand from job seekers to be considered as candidates to get a job in an organisation. But what mayor influential organisations data tells us about the problems that companies are facing in order to find competent professionals? Lets analyse this data and see what we can do about it.

3. Barclays mayor study data reveals that 60% of adults in UK do not have the necessary transferable skills to access the job market.

This study shows worrying data about the lack of Employability Skills within the adults in UK. The report surveyed more than ten thousand people, six hundred employers and five hundred educators in the UK. These are the three main points they drew from the study;

1- Almost six in ten adults were not able to show the more essential employability skills ‘soft skills’ to access a job.

2- As we saw before, most companies will not spend time and money to teach these skills. They claim that people have to take responsibility to acquire these basic skills by themselves.

3- Barclays has in place a LifeSkills program that will try to help ten million workers and job seekers by the end of 2022.

Another mayor important point to take into consideration is that educators, businesses and Government should agree and work together to tackle and solve this problem for the future well being of the UK’s economy.

Interesting data on age groups, gender and geographic location are the difference in performance among generations, cities, men and women. The ‘Baby Boomers’ are the ones with all the core skills but lacking in confidence. Women perform better than men except in confidence, which men scored higher.

Londoners scored higher in confidence when asked but when tested, reality was very different being the lowest score in the UK on all the core skills.

CEO of Barclays UK, Ashok Vaswani said:

“Today’s findings show the importance of lifelong learning, whatever your age or chosen career path. I firmly believe that education should not stop at the school gates – businesses, educators and the Government all have a role to play”, Vaswani (2018).

The Barclays' program LifeSkills is design to help millions of young people to acquire the necessary skills for the future work force. The program connects educators, businesses and parents.

Educators have more than sixty hours and dozens of interactive tools of employability resources at their disposal to help the young generation to achieve.

How will this short of skills affect the work force during and after the COVID 19 pandemic?

4. Five Million professionals will be left without the necessary skills during and after COVID 19.

How will the 'New normal' change the job market? With new measures in terms of social distancing, capacity and human interaction, companies and employees will have to adapt and make changes.

According to The Open University, this will open new opportunities for distance learning companies and job seekers. This will change the skills required to access the job market for at least five million job roles in the UK.

Younger generations are aware of this and are willing to take action and invest their own money in education if this means they would have access to new job opportunities. Companies need to be involved and give clearer guidance on which skills they require.

One of the biggest free learning sites in the UK, The Open University's Open Learn shows important data on this issue. The site has registered almost one million new enrolments for courses during the lockdown. More than 50% of those courses are orientated towards management skills and less than 25% on digital skills.

The Open University is collaborating with the UK Department for Education to extend the content in the government's Skills Toolkit to allow employees on furlough to better prepare and educate themselves to return to work.

According to Professor Tim Blackman, Vice Chancellor of The Open University, *“With the UK approaching a recession and the economic uncertainty that this will bring, the time to invest in skills is now. The world of work is changing and it’s clear that employees are recognising this and prioritising the development of their own skill sets to prepare for the ‘new normal’”. Blackman (2020).*

5. Analysis of my personal employability skills.

Looking back to my childhood, years in school and college, and my first years of employment I consider that my very basic core skills come from my parents, such as; hard work, punctuality, being reliable and dependable and a sense of care. And throughout the years of experience I developed better communication, willingness to learn and emotional intelligence. Also acquired technical skills such as mechanical and electrical engineering concepts and trading skills applicable to construction and maintenance.

Conclusion

As we have seen from all points of view; educators, governments, companies, service providers, students, professionals and job seekers, ‘Soft Skills or Core Skills’, are the foundation to all institutions. Without those Skills it would be almost mission impossible to access the job market. Lo and behold the importance of Employability Skills.

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