

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Academic and Employability Skills

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1. Introduction

The following report has been presented with a detail discussion on different academic and employability skills, as well as an introduction to different relevant terms. The study also cites from real life work experiences and own practices as appropriate. This purpose of this report is to deliver a clear understanding on the skills and knowledge that students develop from their learning experience. Reflective discussions have been made in this report in reference to relevant theories.

2. Skills

Skills can be defined as “the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance” (Cantwell and Scevak, 2010). There are different types of skills one can develop. Skills are usually related to one's expertise, education and profession. One develops skills that s/he can utilize in his/her profession, and the skills that relates to one's fields of education (Carnegie et al., 2018). Some skills are innate to individuals (for example, one may have the innate skills to speak clearly, or solve difficult math easily), whereas, some skills they need to develop by participating in workshops, training and development programs, schools and academies etc.

3. Academic skills

Academic skills are approaches or strategies applied to learning. According to Chin, Reid, Wray and Yamazaki (2018), academic skills are “an array of skills which tackle the process of organizing and taking in new information, retaining information, or dealing with assessments.” Academic skills help learners to make the best out of their learning experience. Key academic skills include academic writing, presentation skills and referencing (Dowson, 2018). Some of the complex skills are also underpinned as academic skills, which include critical thinking and reflective practice.

4. Employability skills

According to Cottrell (2010), “employability skills are the transferable skills needed by an individual to make them 'employable'.”

Employability skills include communication and interpersonal skills, team working skills, time management skills, IT skills, writing and reading skills, decision making skills etc. These are divided as hard skills and soft skills (Elling, 2009).

Employers look for certain set of skills at the least before they hire someone in their organisations. Employability skills increase the chances of an individual to get hired (Grit, Guit and Sijde, 2016). These are advanced versions of academic skills because students with continuous efforts to improve their academic performance often do better in terms of their employability.

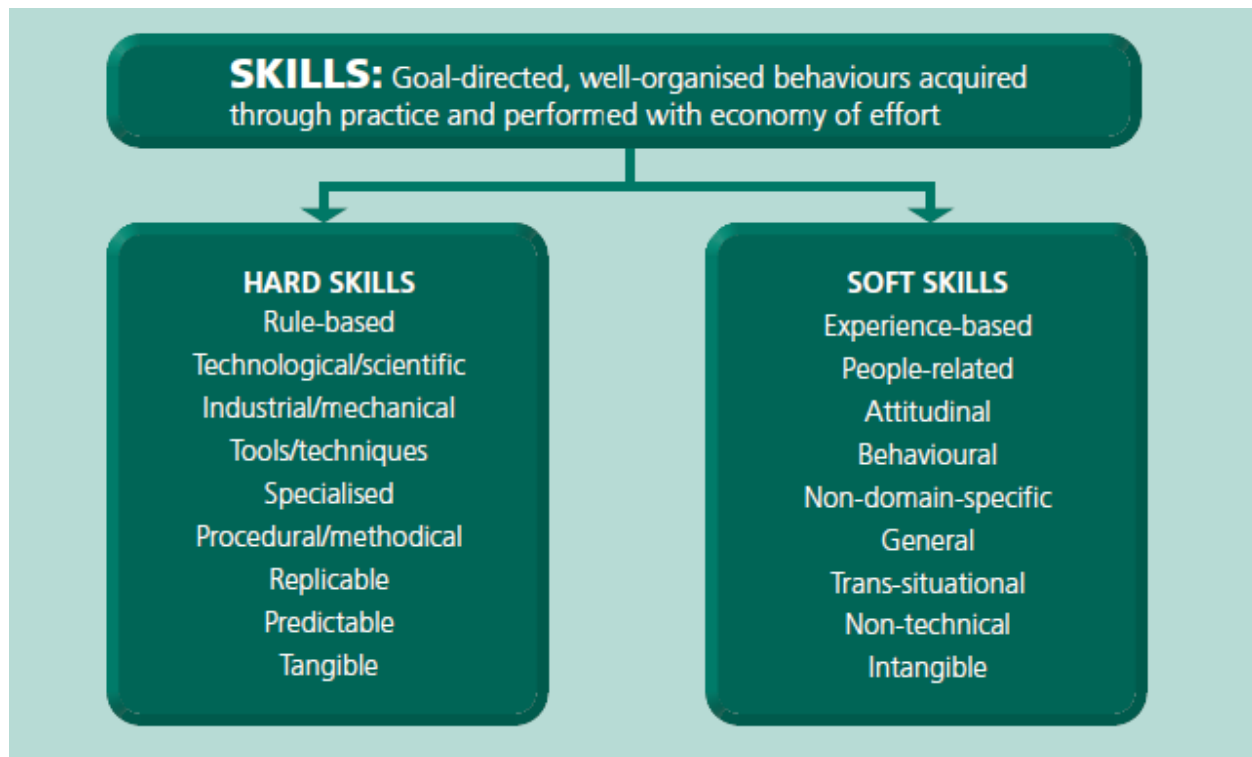


Figure: Employability skills (Grit, Guit and Sijde, 2016)

4.1 Hard skills

Hard skills are defined as “the teachable and measurable abilities, such as writing, reading, math or ability to use computer programs.” (Philpot, Curnick, Soars and Soars, 2013)



Figure: Hard skills (Philpot, Curnick, Soars and Soars, 2013)

There is no conclusive list of hard skills. As the workplaces become more competitive, the employers expect more from the candidates, and therefore, the candidates need to develop the skills that will make them more “employable” in the current context (Ruetten and Pavlik, 2012).

4.2 Soft skills

Soft skills are defined as “the traits that make one a good employee, such as etiquette, communication and listening, getting along with other people.” (Sultmann and Burton, 2003)



Figure: Soft skills (Sultmann and Burton, 2003)

Soft skills can be developed through practice, self-managed learning, or in some extents, they can be developed by participating in workshops or development programs.

4.2.1 Communication

Communication is the process of verbal, non-verbal or written interaction. Communication is done for sharing message. It can be formal or informal. Communication skills refer to skills that make the sharing of message more effective in terms of comprehension and outcomes (Throop and Castellucci, 2011).

Communication skills are basic academic and employability skills. Employers usually evaluate a candidate's communication skills at the very beginning (Trought, 2017). This involves evaluating all aspects of communication skills including verbal, non-verbal and written communications.

4.2.2 Working with a team

Team working skills refer to one's ability to work as a team, cooperate with team members, collaborate and coordinate with team members and understand own roles and responsibilities in

the team (Turner, Krenus, Ireland and Pointon, 2012). This also involves acknowledging leadership and making use of own expertise to contribute to the team performance.

In the academy, we are required to work as team on different projects assigned by the tutors (Elling, 2009). This give us the opportunity to share information and knowledge, and brainstorm ideas. In the professional fields, team working is vital because employers realize that employees can contribute more to the organization by working as team rather than working as competitors. This is why, more organizations nowadays offer group-based rewards to their employees (Employability skills for the future, 2002). Therefore, it is important for the students to improve their team working skills.

4.2.3 Time management

Time management refers to one's ability to use one's time productively and effectively, at work or at the academy (Cottrell, 2015). Time management is also considered as a common and one of the basic academic and employability skills because both students and employees are expected to finish tasks within the assigned deadlines to keep up with the progress of operations/activities.

5. SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a strategic decision-making tool that is used for listing the strengths and weaknesses and identify the opportunities and threats that are associated to those. Although normally used for making business decisions, but it can also be used for evaluating personal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Dowson, 2018). Thus, it is used in the process of personal and professional development planning.

Personal SWOT analysis:

Strengths 1. Research and note taking skills 2. Academic writing and reading skills 3. Team working skills 4. Time management skills 5. IT skills	Weaknesses 1. Communication and interpersonal skills 2. Paraphrasing and summarizing skills 3, Leadership skills
Opportunities	Threats

1. Can invest on skill development activities by paying for training and development programs	1. Lack of communication skills can be a serious threat in the job seeking process.
2. Can improve own skills to be more employable.	2. Lack of leadership skills can affect my position in the selection process.

6. Academic skills

Academic skills are developed throughout the span of one's academic life. Starting from college to universities, students make use of their academic skills and improve own skills to make them suitable at professional levels (Cottrell, 2015). An important aspect of academic skills is that they are not only limited to one's academic activities, but academic skills act as the gateways to develop greater employability and professionalism (Elling, 2009). Therefore, improving academic skills involve improving one's professional or employability skills as well.

7. Research and note taking

Research and note taking are common academic skills. Throughout the academic years, students are required to do a lot of research on subject relevant topics and take notes from different sources of information (Carnegie et al., 2018). This is crucial to their subject based learning.

Students need to have the basic research and note taking skills and continue to improve them to be able to use them at professional levels (Cantwell and Scevak, 2010). For example, a student studying business administration is required to conduct primary and secondary research on business operations in different industries and take notes on the trends (Carnegie et al., 2018). A student doing a literature-based assignment is required to investigate different sources of theories and concepts, and take relevant notes to draw conclusion on the issue. Thus, research and note taking skills are vital for students at different levels of their education. These are also important at professional levels because the employers seek candidates who understand the nature of the business and can identify the relevant trends for making appropriate decisions at own positions (Chin, Reid, Wray and Yamazaki, 2018).

Researches can be primary or secondary. Students are assigned with tasks that might require primary investigation or secondary investigation or both at the same time (Dowson, 2018).

Secondary research skills include the ability to note relevant information from the internet or from the sources available in the libraries (Chin, Reid, Wray and Yamazaki, 2018). Therefore, these are skills that the students should develop. My own research and note taking skills are strong, and I have been acclaimed for my research and note taking skills by my instructors and my peers.

8. Academic writing

Academic writing has been defined as “any writing done to fulfill a requirement of a college or university.” (Dowson, 2018)

Academic writing has some distinct criteria. This involves the use of formal language/words/phrases; a structured design or format; use of references and intext citation, avoiding the use of first person or second person pronouns etc. Academic writing standards are almost the same at different schools, colleges and universities. It is slightly different from business writing as well because in business writing, the author may use complex terminologies and include informal words or phrases if necessary (Chin, Reid, Wray and Yamazaki, 2018). But in academic writing, the writers need to follow the academic rules and regulations of writing. The use of grammar and the correct vocabularies are checked in academic writing.

My academic writing skills are satisfactory and I have been acclaimed for my academic writing skills by my instructors in different occasions

9. Referencing and avoiding plagiarism

Referencing is an important part of academic writing. The assignments, reports, essays or research papers that the students write need to include adequate data and information for being valid pieces of work (Cantwell and Scevak, 2010). These information and data included in the academic papers are collected from different secondary sources. It is a writer’s responsibility to mention the source that s/he collected the information/ data from. It is also considered as an academic regulation to cite the sources of information both after the end of the sentences and at the end of the report. For example, a piece of information that has been taken from an external source should have an intext citation at the end of the exact sentence (Dowson, 2018). In Harvard referencing system, the name of the author or the name of the source is mentioned within a bracket and the year of publication is also added in that bracket after the author’s name. And all the sources of information are listed together after the conclusion, under the “bibliography” heading.

It is important to reference the work because it helps avoid plagiarism. There are two types of plagiarism- direct plagiarism (exact copy pastes from another material) and indirect plagiarism (exact paraphrasing from a different source) (Grit, Guit and Sijde, 2016). Although paraphrasing is actually not considered as plagiarism but when a paper compiles information from several different sources, it is crucial to reference that information, otherwise, the work could be counted as plagiarized. Same applies to the case of quotations (Hind and Moss, 2011). It is crucial to put intext citation after the quotations or exact data, and keeping the sentence within “...” mark to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is considered as a serious violation of academic regulations, which is why, these issues need to be taken into consideration (Grit, Guit and Sijde, 2016).

10. Paraphrasing and summarizing

Students often paraphrase and summarize a detail work into key points or phrases. Employees working on different positions are also often required to summarize a report (Hind and Moss, 2011). Therefore, students need to have the proper understanding of paraphrasing and summarizing methods.

Paraphrasing means rewriting on a topic from a particular material in own words, without copying from the source material (Grit, Guit and Sijde, 2016). One needs to have adequate knowledge of vocabulary and the ability to write creatively or reflectively to be able to paraphrase properly.

Summarizing involves one’s ability to grab the key points from a detail piece of information. For example, a student needs to understand the key messages or findings of a research paper and write them in sequential and organized matter (Ruetten and Pavlik, 2012). This is called summarizing. Reflecting on my own skills, I have a significant lack of summarizing and paraphrasing skills. I need to improve these skills through practice.

11. Communication and presenting information

Students are required to communicate and present information properly. Same goes for employees. Communicating and presenting information are crucial for having good academic and professional performance (Ruetten and Pavlik, 2012). In many aspects, individuals fail to communicate and present information properly and thus, the information they provide remain incomplete. Therefore, students need to improve their information sharing and communication skills right from the basic levels. However, these are skills that need to be developed through practice and increased

interaction with others. There are no professional training centers that teach one to communicate and present information effectively (Philpot, Curnick, Soars and Soars, 2013). For example, at the beginning of my college life, I faced some problems communicating with the instructors, presenting information with others and making presentations in front of the class. But I was able to improve these skills through practice and self-development.

12. Personal development plan

Personal development planning is “the process of creating an action plan based on awareness, reflection, goal-setting and planning for personal development within the context of a career, or education.” (Ruetten and Pavlik, 2012)

Students are nowadays encouraged to organize and track their progress with personal development plans. Universities and colleges provide templates or structures for the students to follow in respect to their personal development plans. Usually, personal development plans involve identifying the skill development needs, determining the activities to improve skills, setting starting date and deadlines and keeping blank spaces for notes on achievement and instructors’ feedbacks (Philpot, Curnick, Soars and Soars, 2013).

We also maintain our own personal development plan to track the progress of our skill development. At this stage of learning, we, the students, are required to make the best use of our time by engaging in different activities that will improve us professionally and create more opportunities for us in terms of employments.

13. Conclusion

The report delivers a brief discussion on employability and academic skills. The report presented academic definitions of different terms and explained their significance for the learners. It is expected that the report has been able to deliver a comprehensive understanding on these topics.

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