

Relevance of soft skills in the workplace

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Academic and Employability skills

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Assignment 1

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Introduction

Essentially in life, people want to be successful in thing they do and choices they make. Individuals need to be aware of their own personal attributes and the skills they have acquired, in order to truly understand personal development and future aspirations. For each individual, employability frequently comes down to the way in which people present themselves to employers, and the personal assets they portray in terms of knowledge and skills. It is the capability to gain initial employment and to then maintain this employment. The focus of this analysis is to reflect and discuss relevant employability skills that are needed in current working organisations.

Background

Recruiting and hiring has changed significantly over the years as technology has evolved, however, in all working industries employers still expect their new recruits to have a certain level of skills. There are two types of skills that employers look for in applicants, they are Soft and Hard skills. Soft skills are highly valued in the modern workplace, they adapt through our personality traits and enable people to work with others and function within organisations. Hard skills however, require the person to learn specific knowledge and to have the abilities to succeed further, while certain hard skills are necessary for any role given, employers have been increasingly looking for candidates with certain soft skills. This analysis will investigate five soft skills that are that are essential to gaining employability, Communication, Adaptability, Team-work, Problem-solving and Time-management.

Communication

Communication is needed to succeed in any form of employment; it is having the ability to communicate with your colleagues verbally, written or electronically allowing you to build relationships within the workplace. Having the ability to speak clearly and listen carefully is essential in any organisation, and it requires more than words, this involves your body posture, eye contact and hand gestures which all express meaning. According to Dekay, S.H. "Recent research has identified interpersonal communication skills as critical attributes for new employees and more experienced workers seeking promotion. However, despite the significance of interpersonal communication in the workplace, our knowledge of these skills and how they might be taught is limited." (Dekay, S.H). This shows there is an increased attention towards whether candidates have good communication skills, even though this can also be much harder for the employer to define and evaluate from the first meeting.

Adaptability

Adaptability is another preferred skill employers look for when recruiting. People that have the ability to adapt to changing situations and expectations makes them much more valuable. This skill is particularly important when working in a fast-pace environment, such as retail, schools, nursing and advertising. The ways in which you can demonstrate adaptability in any organisation is by keeping calm and confident, by preparing alternative solutions to problems and by making easy transitions. Being adaptable also involves willingness to engage with a variety of people with diverse skills to complete the task given. All-important leadership qualities have adaptability at their core.

Kevin E Plamondon says, "Although adaptability is not a new concept, the pace and types of change we are experiencing only continue to grow, which has caused research sponsors, academic researchers, and practitioners in organizations to become increasingly interested in understanding and enhancing adaptability in the workplace." This demonstrates that Managers also need to be trained to allow their employees the freedom to experiment with approaches and take on jobs that they may not feel entirely ready for, says Shaun Thomson, CEO at Sandler Training. "Ultimately adaptability boils down to employees that have been empowered to make their own decisions and be held accountable for them."

Teamwork

Teamwork skills allow people to operate well in a group setting in the workplace to quickly and effectively accomplish tasks given. Open and respectful communication is a key element of great teamwork. In positive team environments, people express problems, ideas and opinions to other co-workers without criticism. An element of effective teamwork is having clearly defined roles on the team where all people involved know what they are supposed to be doing. Establishing great teamwork means that managers have taken the time to define each employee's role and to further explain how the team functions together. When working in a team environment, it allows employees to draw on the strengths of one another, to work collaboratively and be productive, this can have a significant impact on the success of the organisation, whereas poor quality collaborative work projects waste time money and human resources.

An article by Crowley, M., Payne, J.C. and Kennedy, E explores different approaches to teamwork. It has emerged as increasingly important in some organisations, "Most commonly associated with the human relations approach to management, the empowerment perspective regards teamwork as a managerial strategy aimed at solving problems of inflexibility and resistance associated with reliance on more coercive control (Pruijt, 2003; Womack et al., 1990). The panopticon approach to teamwork is somewhat different as a notion of discipline. "Rooted in postmodern Foucauldian (1977) notions of discipline, the panopticon approach regards teamwork as a managerial strategy intended to increase effort and deter sabotage through heightened visibility and normative control". This approach induces a sense of permanent visibility that ensures the functioning of power. "The panopticon perspective applies Foucault's metaphor to workplaces arguing that firms install teams in a way that promote peer surveillance- thus heightening visibility, peer discipline, and internalization of work rules while eroding solidarity necessary for collective action (Sewell, 1998)". "In contrast to the empowerment and panopticon perspectives, which emphasizes managerial perspectives and strategy, respectively, the conflict approach calls attention to how worker agency shapes teamwork. Rather than assuming workers will uniformly respond to teamwork as management intends, conflict scholars contend that worker sentiments and behaviours depend on team implementation and social context". This article used content coded data on 204 work groups to investigate hypotheses derived from empowerment, panopticon and conflict perspectives on teamwork, they confirmed that the empowerment perspective regarding potential for autonomy in teams to increase satisfaction and in turn citizenship and support the conflict approach in that teamwork has no straightforward connection to co-worker estrangement, conflict with management or collaborative action. The panopticon approach on teamwork they concluded needed

revising, however, especially with respect to co-worker relationships and mechanisms underlying how peer monitoring reduces sabotage. Qualitative results further revealed that workers preferred peer surveillance to traditional hierarchical control and they enjoy the feeling of being part of, rather than simply subject to, the authority structure of an organisation. A close view of all cases using these approaches portraying not only the workers rejection of teamwork, but also positive reactions to team-based projects. Scholars have suggested that team-work arose in part to meet rising expectations and capacities of an increasingly educated workforce (Hodson, 2001).

Problem-solving

Problem Solving is another essential skill needed to gain credibility in search of employment opportunities, it is the process of identifying a problem, developing possible solutions and making the appropriate decisions in order to find the right course of action. In the current fast-changing global economy, employers often identify every day problem solving as crucial to the success of their organisations. For employees however, problem solving can be used to develop practical and creative solutions, and also to show independence and initiative to employers. The ability to solve problems is a basic life skill and is essential to our day-to-day lives. As problems arise every day, we find a way to solve them, without really thinking how we solve them. For example, if a person has overslept in the morning and are going to be late for work, that person might decide to call work and explain the situation while getting ready to leave. While there is no right way to solve this problem, people will do things differently in their own way.

The rational decision process was investigated by Williams, S. (2002). It identifies all the components of a decision by creating a decision-making model. He states that "Important decisions can shape our lives, and our decision quality is improved if we critically and creatively analyse the problems facing us by considering new and different options, weighing the evidence objectively, looking at a problem from a different angle that gives us different insights, developing novel solutions that effectively solve our dilemma, and accurately forecasting the probable impact of our decisions." In order to solve problems creatively and to think critically, a person must understand how decisions are made and the factors that influence the decision-making process. It is also said that if we as decision makers are aware of the factors influencing both our interpretation of the problems at hand and the methods, we choose to solve them, then we can easily see subjective patterns of behaviour in our own decision making and can possibly avoid the possible negative impact on what we decide. There are two strategies that enable decision-makers to analyse objectively and reason out the situation facing them, to come up with different and potentially unexpected ways of addressing and correcting problems, they are through creativity and critical thinking. Creative problem solving is the mental process of searching for an original solution to a problem and this must be reached independently. Critical thinking involves the thinker improving the quality of his or her thinking by analysing, assessing and re-constructing the thought process. When both of these strategies are applied together it enables the person to gather and assess all relevant information, to raise vital questions and problems, to think open-mindedly and come to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions. In this study, it is finalised that decision makers are constrained by bounded rationality through a host of human limitations that lead us to satisfice or

willingly settle on a solution that is good enough, rather than seeking the best outcome possible.

Time-management

Time-management is another key attribute to succeeding when seeking employment. It is the coordination of tasks and activities in which an individual can show their efforts effectively. The purpose of portraying good time management enables people to get more work done to a better standard in less time. Good time management allows people to accomplish more in a shorter time space, allowing more time for individuals to take advantage of other learning opportunities. It can also lower stress levels and helps to maintain focus which can improve other aspects in people's lives. Time plays a significant part in our lives; it helps us to make a good habit of organising and structuring our daily activities. A research article investigates the impact of effective time management in higher education and it was found that students perceived control of time was the factor that correlated significantly with cumulative grade point average. "Empirical evidence suggests that effective time management is associated with greater academic achievement (McKenzie & Gow, 2004; Trueman and Hartley, 1996) as students learn coping strategies, that allow them to negotiate competing demands." Overall, effective time management can have a positive impact on an individual work and life in general.

Conclusion

In conclusion, for the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitude they possess. It is about being capable of getting and keeping work and to move self-sufficiently to realise hidden talents through sustainable employment. Many individuals need various forms of support to overcome mental and physical barriers to learning and development.

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