

Chapter 12

Employability Skills

INTRODUCTION

Economic challenges and global competition require Australian businesses to implement a range of strategies to ensure ongoing growth and increasing international competitiveness.

Employee skills are fundamental to enabling business growth and competitiveness.

Businesses, whether they are small, medium, or large, require employees who possess skills relevant to their employment and the ability to develop new skills to increase their value to the business. Employability skills are additional to technical/academic skills and are required by all employers and across all industries.

BACKGROUND

During 2001, ACCI in conjunction with the Business Council of Australia undertook a research project, *Employability Skills for the Future*, to establish a set of employability skills required by Australian businesses.¹ The final report was published by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) in March 2002.

Employability skills under *Employability Skills for the Future* are defined as:

...the skills required to gain employment or establish an enterprise, but also to progress within an enterprise or expand employment capability, so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.²

Establishing a set of employability skills was deemed necessary in a climate of economic challenges and globalisation.

Strategies to address economic and global challenges have included multiskilling, greater automation, workforce restructuring, adaptation, cost reduction, increased productivity and new markets and/or new products and services.

As identified in *Employability Skills for the Future*:

Enterprise choices with regard to recruitment and training are largely being driven by these business strategy directions. In this environment, there is an increasing requirement for employees to be able to support increased competitiveness, innovation, flexibility and client focus.

Enterprises are increasingly seeking a more highly skilled workforce where the generic and transferable skills are broadly distributed across the organisation.³

To establish what these skills were, ACCI developed an *Employability Skills Framework* which provides a definitive, comprehensive framework of such skills.⁴ The Framework is relevant to small, medium and large enterprises and is able to support the future needs of Australian industry.

CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES

Objectives

The objectives of *Employability Skills Framework* were based on the need for:

- the provision of a two-tiered response to attributes and underpinning skills required for effective participation in the labour market;
- the need for any Framework to allow for the diversity of occupations, entry and ongoing development pathways and differences in types of engagement in the labour market;
- an understanding that general education from kindergarten to year 12 also has an important role which supplements any agreed Framework;
- the recognition that the Mayer Key Competencies were still sound but required some revision;
- the importance of a nationally consistent response against an agreed framework across the three education and training sectors; and
- the need to ensure clearly articulated outcomes against skill components.

In light of these objectives, a set of key personal attributes,

key skills and elements of key skills were developed as a guide for employers and policy makers.

Personal Attributes

Personal attributes, under the *Employability Skills Framework*, describes a set of non skill-based behaviours and attitudes that employers felt were as important as the employability skills and other technical or job specific skills.

The *Employability Skills Framework* incorporates the following personal attributes that contribute to overall employability:

- loyalty;
- commitment;
- honesty and integrity;
- enthusiasm;
- reliability;
- personal presentation;
- commonsense;
- positive self-esteem;
- sense of humour;
- balanced attitude to work and home life;
- ability to deal with pressure;
- motivation; and
- adaptability.

There is no doubt that enterprises see the inclusion of these attributes as a new and essential component of employability skills.⁵

ACCI does not advocate that the personal attributes should be taught, assessed or reported on. However, where it is possible to highlight to students that employers highly value personal attributes, this should be done as an awareness raising activity.

Key Skills

Key skills, which describe the learned capacity of an individual under the *Employability Skills Framework*, include:

- communication skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers;
- team work skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes;
- problem-solving skills that contribute to productive outcomes;
- initiative and enterprise skills that contribute to innovative outcomes;
- planning and organising skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning;
- self-management skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth;
- learning skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes; and
- technology skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks.

Elements of Key Skills

Elements of key skills are the facets of the skill that employers identify as important. They are not fixed and only provide examples.

The mix and priority of these elements varies from job to job. The list of elements is not exhaustive, however, it is indicative of the expectations of employers.

The level of sophistication in the application of the element is dependent upon the job level and requirements.

See Figure 12.1 for an example skill and element.⁶

Inclusion of Employability Skills in Training Packages

During 2006, Industry Skills Councils were provided funds to review all Training Packages and modify competency standards to accurately reflect industry requirements.

Figure 12.1
Example of Skill and Element

Skills	Element
Communication that contributes to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening and understanding. • Speaking clearly and directly. • Writing to the needs of the audience. • Negotiating responsively. • Reading independently. • Empathising. • Using numeracy effectively. • Understanding the needs of internal and external customers. • Persuading effectively. • Establishing and using networks. • Being assertive. • Sharing information. • Speaking and writing in languages other than English.

The modifications have been progressively endorsed and released in reviewed Training Packages replacing the Key Competency Framework.

In March 2006, a report by the Allen Consulting Group, *Assessment and Reporting of Employability Skills in Training Packages*,⁷ identified an integrated approach to assessing employability skills with technical skills within a qualification and the corresponding units of competency.

It also recommended a descriptive reporting approach using short text to describe the nature of the employability skills developed as part of a qualification (or unit of competency). The information reported relates to the qualification (or units), not to the individual.

The report also recommended that students voluntarily develop their own portfolios of employability skills to supplement the formal descriptive reports.

Education.au, a not for profit agency funded by all Australian governments, to develop and manage national online services of benefit to the education and training sector, was previously funded to develop and trial a website for e-portfolios to allow all people, including students, to easily record their academic, vocational and employability skills to support job applications, career planning, and entry into further education and training. However, no further work has been done since the initial trial to develop the e-portfolio concept.

Employability Skills Profiler

The Employability Skills Profiler was developed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations as

a user-friendly online decision support tool to help service providers gain a better understanding of a job seeker's employability.

Nationwide roll-out to Job Network members began in February 2006 and, by the end of June 2006, 70 Job Network members had it installed and were planning to use it across an estimated 391 sites.⁸

An employment service provider Profiler Best Practice Model was also developed to provide to Job Network management practical suggestions on how the profiler could be incorporated into existing service models.

CONCLUSION

There is a need for the *Employability Skills Framework* to apply across the education, training, higher education and employment sectors. Implementation in the training and employment sectors has progressed well, however, the education and higher education sectors are lagging behind.

Industry must continue to be involved in the further development and implementation of the *Framework* in each sector.

ACCI PROPOSALS

ACCI proposes that the Government should:

- develop a comprehensive national approach for government, industry, education providers and the community on the issue of acquiring and improving employability skills;

- fully report on the implementation of the *Employability Skills Framework* in the areas of: schools; VET; and Higher Education;
- outline how it will achieve greater industry involvement in the development and implementation of the *Framework* in each sector;
- further investigate e-portfolio approaches to supplement reporting procedures in the education and training sectors; and
- investigate the possibility of developing tools based on the employability skills profiler for use by employers to attract and recruit staff as part of a holistic workforce development approach.

¹ DEST (2002) *Employability Skills for the Future*, DEST, Canberra.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ DEST, *Assessment and Reporting of Employability Skills in Training Packages*, DEST, Canberra, 2004.

⁸ DEST, *Development of a Strategy to Support the Universal Recognition and Recording of Employability Skills*, DEST, Canberra, 2004.