

## 3.0 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

### 3.1 Definition

Most young people leave school without the knowledge or foundation required to find and retain a good job. Employers are not merely looking for graduates with technical knowledge but also with non-technical abilities, i.e., their employability skills. Employability skills are those attributes of employees other than technical competence that make them an asset to the employer.

According to Sherer and Eadie (1987), “*Employability Skills are not job specific, but are skills which cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs from entry level to chief executive officer.*”

These skills are also meant to describe the preparation or foundation skills upon which a person must build job-specific skills (i.e. those being unique to specific jobs) like communication, personal and interpersonal relationships, problem solving and management of organisational processes.

The 88<sup>th</sup> session of the International Labour Conference held in 2000 adopted a Resolution concerning Human Resources, Training and Development. This Resolution defines employability skills as follows:

*“It encompasses the skills, knowledge and competencies that enhance a worker’s ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he/she so wishes or has been laid off and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of the life cycle. Individuals are most employable when they have broad-based education and training, basic and portable high-level skills, including teamwork, problem solving, information and communications technology (ICT) and communication and language skills. This combination of skills enables them to adapt to changes in the world of work.”*

The three features of employability are:

- **Broad-Based Education.** Education should provide a solid foundation on which further acquisition of knowledge, training and competencies can be developed. In fact, the system of education at all levels, pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary will play a key role in inculcating the right attitude to an individual.

- **Acquisition of basic and portable high level skills.** The skills should not only be basic and limited to an enterprise but should be portable so that the employee is mobile and can get a job elsewhere. The skills should also be of a high standard that encourage upward mobility. This high mobility can be attained through regular training.
- **Acquisition of knowledge.** This can be achieved mainly through education, training and Information Technology. There is a need for constant recycling of knowledge in this information age so that employees can be promoted, can adapt to change and can, in case of redundancy, find another job.
- **Development of competencies.** Employers do not rely solely on qualifications acquired at educational institutions. They would like employees to have other qualities like teamwork, problem solving, communication, interpersonal relationship and other skills.

### 3.2 *Employability Skills and Competence*

Employability attributes can be classified into three broad categories – basic skills, high-order thinking skills and affective skills and traits.

BASIC SKILLS	HIGH-ORDER THINKING SKILLS	AFFECTIVE SKILLS AND TRAITS
Oral Communication (speaking and listening)	Problem Solving	Dependability/Responsibility
Reading, especially understanding and following instructions	Learning skills, strategies	Positive attitude towards work
Basic Arithmetic	Creative, innovative thinking	Conscientiousness, punctuality, efficiency
Writing	Decision making	Interpersonal skills, cooperation, working as a team member
		Self-confidence, positive self-image
		Adaptability, flexibility
		Enthusiasm, motivation
		Self-discipline, self-management
		Appropriate dress, grooming
		Honesty, integrity
		Ability to work without supervision

### 3.3 What employers are looking for?

The following attitudes embody the qualities that employers normally look for in the people who wish to join their organisations.

<b>The right attitudes to succeed in your career</b>	
➤ <i>Be accountable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take on and accept responsibility</li> <li>• Deliver the goods</li> <li>• Admit your errors and mistakes</li> <li>• Never place the blame on somebody else</li> </ul>
➤ <i>Strive for quality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be reliable and consistent – someone to be counted on</li> <li>• Promise only what you can deliver and deliver what you've promised</li> <li>• Work with accuracy, precision, thoroughness and an eye for detail</li> <li>• Be on time</li> <li>• Minimise and strive to eliminate waste and rework</li> <li>• Learn from mistakes</li> <li>• Improve continuously</li> </ul>
➤ <i>Work hard – put in the effort</i>	There are no easy successes; there is no quick money; success comes from daily persistence and resilience
➤ <i>Be productive</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work smart</li> <li>• Find better ways</li> </ul>
➤ <i>Serve and care for others</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers</li> <li>• Colleagues</li> <li>• People at large</li> </ul>
➤ <i>Learn and develop all the time – lifelong learning</i>	
➤ <i>Think and act like a businessperson</i>	Wherever you are in business, whatever your job, understand and activate your positive impact on creating value and wealth. Understand the basic dynamics of business financials; profitability, sound cash flow management, asset productivity
➤ <i>Develop and maintain an open mind</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be curious, eager to learn</li> </ul>
➤ <i>Know other</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals</li> <li>• Teams</li> <li>• Cultures</li> </ul>
➤ <i>Accept people as they are, appreciate diversity – cultivate tolerance</i>	
➤ <i>Know the world</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business</li> <li>• Economics</li> <li>• Social issues and trends</li> <li>• Politics</li> <li>• World affairs</li> <li>• Environmental affairs</li> </ul>
➤ <i>Know yourself, your strong and weak points</i>	
➤ <i>Be modest and humble</i>	
➤ <i>Act with honesty and integrity</i>	
➤ <i>Lead by your own example</i>	
➤ <i>Teach yourself to make contact easily and cultivate relationships</i>	
➤ <i>Set yourself life and career goals and go for them!</i>	

Hence, the primary concern of employers lies in finding employees with a good work ethic and appropriate social behaviour, i.e., reliable, good attitude, pleasant appearance and good personality. It is clear that all the above reasons are not related only to academic qualifications. Employers look often for other characteristics – employability skills.

The employer makes a systematic analysis of the academic qualifications and skills required for the job as well as employability skills. For example, it is not sufficient to observe that “reading” is required for the job, one must know which tasks require reading and the type of reading skills needed. He also lists the traits he is looking for in a new recruit.

The pattern of development of Mauritius has led to a dramatic transformation of the economy as mentioned earlier. In the years ahead, this transformation will be further reinforced with the development of the financial and business services and ICT. Even traditional manufacturing industries have to introduce latest technology to be competitive and able to produce quality products. There has been a shift in demand for different occupations.

Employers are increasingly looking for professionals and semi-professionals. While a first degree may be the standard requirements, there is definitely a preference for people with postgraduate qualifications especially in the light of the large number of Mauritians pursuing postgraduate studies and in line with the economic development of the country. In sectors like IT or Finance, a second degree may even be an essential requirement. Employers are also looking for specialised qualifications. Students therefore must move towards a specialised Master degree.

The Master degree does not only denote a higher degree of maturity but it also shows exposure to practical work, project or research and development of analytical skills. Although the student might not have worked, the research work or thesis provides concrete evidence of the level attained by the student and his ability to apply knowledge in practice. In a sense, research becomes a substitute for work experience.

Although many employers require experience from new recruits, this is not necessarily a general rule. Many employers will prefer fresh graduates who can be trained provided they have the basic qualifications and the right attitudes to work. It is worth stating that employers are not blindly looking for qualifications but for competence as well. It is idealistic to have all the employability traits in an individual but the latter should be prepared to learn.

The new recruit should also have a positive attitude to continuous learning and in this respect, many employers will provide the necessary training. The new recruit should show a keen interest in his personal development and training.

In this information age, employers are also looking for employees who are computer literate. IT is expected to pervade all fields of studies, occupations and the world of work. A fair knowledge of IT or a relevant qualification in this field is essential.

***“Psychologists agree that IQ (Intelligent Quotient) contributes only about 20% of the factors that determine success. A full 80% comes from other factors, including what I call Emotional Intelligence”***

**DR DANIEL COLEMAN, author of the Book “Emotional Intelligence”**