

## EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS- GLIMPSES INTO GLOBAL VIEWS AND PRACTICES

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### ABSTRACT:

This paper attempts to introduce employability skills framework developed by countries such as the U.S., Australia and the U.K., in response to the challenges of the 21st century. These countries have been taking concerted efforts to equip their students with the necessary skills and attributes to prepare them to succeed in the competition ahead and in positioning themselves in the most appropriate jobs as per their employability capabilities. Presenting an overview of employability skills and employability interventions adopted globally, the strategic interventions developed and implemented by the global players and a few others are highlighted. The methodology used is of secondary data and in-depth study of the information. Employability frameworks developed earlier as well as recently by a few developed countries are presented. A brief account of practices adopted in other countries is also given. The objective of the paper is to facilitate the student community, the Universities and academic institutions and other committed and interested groups with a ready reference material to understand the expectations and trends in the employability field so that they can initiate efforts to meet global standards. The paper concludes that it is a collective responsibility- not only of policy makers, but equally or more so of – parents, students, educational institutions, employer organisations, non-governmental organisations, social and religious leaders alike. Key Words: Employability, Skills, Global, Employability Framework.

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## 1. Introduction

As the business environment undergoes unprecedented and rapid changes, the significance of employability skills, and ways of acquiring them, have become the key learning agenda in the higher education realm. The role of academic institutions in the process of developing these skills is evident from research studies. There seems to be an urgent need for a closer tie-up, joint planning, implementation and monitoring of employability skills, among different key stakeholders- the policy makers, universities, employer groups and the like. The rapid global changes and the knowledge economy call for acquisition of new skills, sharper thinking and lifelong learning. Those who fail to recognise these changes will have to pay heavy price for their complacency.

### 1.1. Defining Employability:

The Confederation of British Industry defines employability as “the possession by an individual of the qualities and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and thereby help to realise his or her aspirations and potential in work” (CBI, 1999). According to Canadian Labour Force Development Board (1994), employability is the realistic capacity of an individual to achieve meaningful employment, given the interaction of personal circumstances and the labour market.

Hillage and Pollard (1998) have defined employability as the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. Being a broad term, there is no uniformly accepted definition for employability. As the context change, the meaning, dimensions and parameters of employability also change. In the present context, employability is discussed mainly from the skill identification and skill improvement perspective, globally.

## 2. Objectives

The primary objective of this paper is to briefly document the global views and practices in employability so that anybody interested in enhancing one’s own employability skills could make use of it. The document is also aimed to facilitate policy makers, researchers, academicians, employer associations, employee associations and other stakeholders, who have

decisional roles related to employability skill development of their nations/provinces. It is further targeted to sensitise parents and significant others with concern over their wards' development, so as to get updated with the global trends in employability.

### 3. Research Methodology

The paper has been prepared with the use of secondary data. Websites and research publications are the key sources.

### 4. The Global Perspective

The developed countries, have been taking deep interest in employability skill development of their workforce. Task forces, research groups, academic institutions, employer associations, not - for - profit institutions, parent and community groups- all have been , and still are, contributing extensively in enriching their children and the youth, at various levels, by imparting appropriate knowledge and practical employability skills. They envision the future needs and sow the seeds from the very early stage, mainly to meet the global challenges of the years ahead. Let us have a quick overview of these efforts.

#### 4.1. Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom

##### Australia

The employability skills are termed as non-technical skills in Australia. They are generic in nature. Documented in the 'Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework' (CSfW, 2013), are ten skill-areas arranged under three major skill clusters. They further specify how contextual factors influence the demonstrable performance of these skills. Through a development approach, the framework encompasses five stages of performance- Novice, Advanced Beginner, Capable, Proficient and Expert. Along with Employability Skills Framework (2002), the CSfW 2013 is designed as a developmental tool for educators and job seekers. Table 1 presents these skills.

**Table 1.** Core Employability Skills, Australia, (2002 & 2013.)

Skills as per Employability Skills Framework 2002, Australia	Core Skills for Work, 2013, Australia
Communication Teamwork Problem Solving Initiative and Enterprise Planning and Organising Self-Management Cluster Learning Technology	Cluster 1. NAVIGATE THE WORLD OF WORK a. Manage career and work life b. Work with roles, rights and protocols  Cluster 2. INTERACT WITH OTHERS a. Communicate for work b. Connect and work with others c. Recognise and utilise diverse perspectives  Cluster 3. GET THE WORK DONE a. Plan and organise b. Make decisions c. Identify and solve problems d. Create and innovate e. Work in a digital world

Source: Australian Government, Bridging Document, Core Skills for Work, March, 2013. [www.innovation.gov.au](http://www.innovation.gov.au)

In 2008, the University of Melbourne had undertaken a novel strategy and institution-wide change to bring about employability into the curriculum. Research projects, internships, work experience and volunteering, and studying overseas-these are provided at the Bachelor degree level. This innovative strategy from the University is in response to the rapid change and needs of the world of work. The outcome of the whole process is the enrichment of students, well-equipped for employment (BIS, 2011)

**Canada**

The employability strategy of Canada (2008) is aimed at meeting the challenges of slower labour force growth and the gap filling of growing skill shortages in the future. Identifying skills that are in great demand, ways of meeting these demands, providing for greater recognition of Canadian and foreign-born workers’ formal education, skills, occupation related credentials and prior learning-all these find prominent place in the strategy. Issues related to workplace training, post-secondary education, life-long learning and federally supported skill acquisition initiatives directed primarily at unemployed individuals, are key areas in the strategy. Intensifying the use of existing skills among under-represented segments of the labour force and supplying of skills

by attracting individuals from other countries, in areas of skill shortage are also part of the strategic approach. One of the key policy objectives of Canadian immigration program is stated to be the skill-based selection. The selection process is focusing on the capacity to work in a dynamic labour market. The policy intention is to select immigrants with flexible and transferable skills ([www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)).

Many organisations across Canada enrich the career services offered by service organisations by giving them the needed support. Organisations such as, Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employees and the Canadian Career Development Foundation are prominent among them. Centre for Workplace Skills, is an independent national organisation, led by Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME) and Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). It coordinates and networks with business, labour and other key stakeholders, to optimise participation and investment in skills development in Canada ([www.workplaceskills.ca](http://www.workplaceskills.ca)). Focusing on the significance of early preparation for employability, Canada has initiated work experience opportunities for secondary school students ([www.cafce.ca](http://www.cafce.ca)). The Conference Board of Canada has published the Employability Skills 2000+ ([www.conferenceboard.ca](http://www.conferenceboard.ca)), key among those are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Employability Skills, Canada, 2000+ \*

Fundamental Skills	Personal Management Skills	Teamwork Skills
Communicate	Demonstrate Positive Attitudes and Behaviour	Work With Others
Manage Information	Be Responsible, Be Adaptable	Participate in Projects and Tasks
Use Numbers	Learn Continuously	
Think and Solve Problems	Work Safely	

\*Source: [www.conferenceboard.ca/libraries/educ\\_public/esp2000.sflb](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/libraries/educ_public/esp2000.sflb)

The Canadian Government has published the literacy and essential employability skills (2013), as: Reading, Writing, Document Use, Numeracy, Computer Use, Thinking, Oral Communication, Working with others and Continuous learning at different levels of complexity ([www.edsc.gc.ca](http://www.edsc.gc.ca)).

**The United States**

Efforts taken by the U.S. in this field are worth emulating. ‘The Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills’ (SCANS, 1993), had identified ‘Work Place Know-how’. The five competencies listed in this document are, productive use of a) resources such as time, money, material, space and staff, b) interpersonal skills, c) information, d) systems and e) technology. The foundation competences are: **Basic Skills:** reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking and listening. **Thinking Skills:** thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind’s eye, knowing how to learn and reasoning. **Personal qualities:** Individual responsibility, self esteem sociability, self management and integrity. Table 3 and Box1 present the key components of the U.S. Employability Skills Framework and the over-arching statements of career –ready practices, respectively.

**Table 3.** The Employability Skills Framework

1. Applied Knowledge	2. Effective Relationships	3. Workplace Skills
1.1. Applied Academic skills	2.1 Interpersonal Skills	3.1 Resource Management
Uses reading skills Uses writing skills Uses mathematical strategies and procedures Uses scientific principles and procedures	Understanding teamwork and works with others Responds to customer needs Exercises leadership Negotiates to resolve conflicts Respects individual differences	Manages Time Manages money Manages materials Manages personnel
		3.2 Information Use
		Locates information Organises Information Uses information Analyses information Communicates information
1.2 Critical Thinking Skills	2.2 Skills Related to Personal Qualities	3.3 Communication Skills
Thinks critically Thinks creatively Makes sound decisions Solves problems Reasons Plans and organises	Demonstrates responsibility and self – discipline Adapts and shows flexibility Works independently Takes initiative Displays positive attitude and sense of	Communicates verbally, Listens actively, Comprehends written material Conveys information in writing Observes carefully
		3.4 Systems thinking



	self worth	Understands and uses systems, monitors systems, Improves systems
	Takes responsibility for personal growth	3.5 Technology use
		Understands and uses technology

(Source: Adapted from the 'Employability Skills Framework' [www.cte.ed.gov](http://www.cte.ed.gov))

Box.1. Career Ready Practices-Overarching Statements

**Career Ready Practices-Overarching Statements\***

- Act as a contributing citizen and employee
- Apply appropriate academic and technical skills
- Attend to personal health and financial well –being
- Communicate clearly and effectively and with reason
- Consider the environmental, social and economic impacts of decisions
- Demonstrate creativity and innovation
- Employ valid and reliable research strategies
- Utilise critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them
- Model integrity, ethical leadership and effective management
- Plan education and career paths aligned to personal goals
- Use technology to enhance productivity
- Work productively in teams while using cultural global competence

\*Source: [www.careertech.org](http://www.careertech.org). Common Career Technical Core, Career Practices (2014)

The collaborative efforts including that of parents and community leaders in developing Common Core Standards (2012) from Kindergarten to High School, the Standards clearly communicating what is expected of students at each level, the responsibility of students in acquiring employability skills through integrated learning, the Common Career Technical Core

(CCTC, 2014), all these are well planned and framed with a committed mission and strong will to equip their students ready for employment and life. ([www.cte.ed.gov](http://www.cte.ed.gov)).

Support to student employability in the U.S. is received from all the key stakeholders. One of the key organisations, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), is focusing on the employment of those with the University education. ([www.naceweb.org](http://www.naceweb.org))

### **The United Kingdom**

The UK stands prominent in providing employability skills to its students. The Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) focused on communication, numeracy, the use of information technology and learning to learn. Bennet et al. (2000) gave emphasis to disciplinary content, disciplinary skills, workplace experiences, workplace awareness and generic skills. Knight and Yorke's (2002, 2004) USEM model –Understanding, Skills, Efficacy beliefs, personal qualities and skills and Metacognition –encompassing self awareness regarding the student's learning and the capacity to reflect on, in and for action, served as a very good base for the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to take the lead in this area. The HEA promotes good practices through research, action projects and programmes in collaboration with Universities, business, other employers and non-government organisations and document them for the use of all interested stakeholders. Their latest document on employability framework (Cole and Tibby, 2013), provides a very useful guideline for all those interested in developing and sustaining employability. Another HEA publication, *The Pedagogy for Employability* (2012), narrates good practices through case studies and a wealth of quality literature on the topic. The highlights of the framework and the pedagogy are given below:

- Personal Development Planning (PDP) –a mix of skill auditing, action planning, personal profiling and action planning- to be built into the curriculum
- Action-learning approaches
- Experiential Learning or 'Constructivist' approaches
- Work Based and Work-Related Learning approaches
- Teaching and Assessing employability



- Career Management Skills-the ability to search, interpret, analyse and find out job opportunities, develop appropriate job application and present oneself well at the interview and succeed in getting the job.

### **The Visible Focus Shift in Employability Skills:**

These employability perspectives of Australia, Canada, the U.S and the U.K., show a visible policy shift in equipping its workforce with the employability skills attuned to meet the global needs. As computers take up most of the tasks involving routine skills and standardisation, the shift is more on application of digital knowledge, critical thinking and work related communication and interpersonal skills.

The Australian framework has strengthened itself with career management and work-life management, digital proficiency-all with heavy focus on work-related aspects. Apart from basic skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy, Canada has added continuous learning, thinking and working with others and computer use among its core skills. The U.S. Framework has thrust on application-based Knowledge and Skills, effective relationships, system and technology use. As per the U.K. strategy, employability is a life-long process. Personal Development Plans, Emotional Intelligence, Self Efficacy and work-related learning are value-additions in the strategy to compete in the knowledge economy.

#### **4.1.1. Other European Countries**

McQuaid and others (2007), and BIS (2011) give some interesting information on employability and practices in various countries. A brief account is given below.

##### **Denmark**

Denmark employability services are shared among three service groups- the Public Employment Service (PES) agency, the contracted service providers and the local authorities. Besides providing basic assessment and job matching, the PES also imparts activation and training services to a limited level. The contract service providers are extending employability and training interventions. The local authorities are also responsible for the provision of job matching and training. The employer and trade unions have advisory roles.

## Finland

The planning of employability strategies are led by the Labour Ministry. In cooperation with other Ministries, it has developed a five-year National Employment Programme. The employability services are delivered through the PES. The employability programmes encourage an expanded role for local authorities, the voluntary sector and social partners.

## France

Services related to C.V writing skills, and interview techniques are provided by some universities. These University websites provide information on internship/employment. Learning of at least one foreign language is mandatory for Masters Students. Outside the mainstream of the public universities system, career support and employability skills development programmes are effectively undertaken.

## Germany

Formal employability provision is mainly through the Public Employment Service. Local authorities and community-led partnerships such as the Church, cultural, youth and not for profit organisations also are involved in the employability services. Labour market-specific trainings, very often, are planned by the regional governments as per the requirements. Public-Private partnerships also exist. They facilitate job search and supported job opportunities. These are delivered through inter-agency structures, comprised of employers, trade unions, and vocational training institutions.

## Italy

The job search and job matching services are provided by the local public employment service organisations. Specialist placements are very often outsourced to private service providers. Counselling and client assessment functions are also outsourced. Vocational trainings are through regional authorities. A unique employability service provider, the AlmaLaurea, Italy, is operated by a consortium of Italian universities. Its main role is to link students, universities and the business world and involves 64 Italian Universities with 1,820,000 curricula in its databank, as on 26 June 2013. AlmaLaurea has given 3.5 million curricula to Italian and International companies in the last ten years ([www.almalaurea.it](http://www.almalaurea.it)).

### The Netherlands

Almost all universities and higher education institutions give considerable thrust to the employability factor. Programmes on professional skills development are offered for students aspiring for very competitive careers. Career services of the institutions help students with expert advice. Deep rooted and extensive collaboration between universities and employing organisations add to their employability efforts. The University of Amsterdam’s Student Career Centre runs a Career Week for International Masters Students seeking employment in the Netherlands.

### Sweden

Sweden imparts its employability services through Universities. All have a career centre offering these services. Career Counselling, advice on C.V preparation and covering letter preparation, workshops, imparting interview skills, company presentations, job fairs and job and internship listing are the type of services generally offered by these centres.

## 4.2. Asian Countries

### China

Employability studies are relatively few in China. One of the earlier studies by Li et al (2005), has classified 20 personal traits as given in table 4.

**Table 4.** Classification of Employability for Graduates (Li, et al, 2005)\*

Inner Quality	Deal with work	Social Skills
Honesty and Integrity	Analysing and Judging	Expression
Hardworking	Logic Thinking	Leadership
Devoted to work	Problem Solving	Social activity
Responsibility	Independency	Organising and
Initiative	Adaptability	Coordinating
Ambition	Handle Change	Interpersonal Skills
	Learning	Entrepreneurship
	Team-working	

\*Source: Li et al (2005) , in Hefferman et al (2009).

Hefferman, et al (2009) studied the skills expected by marketing employers in China. They are: Executive Ability, Communication, Desirable Persona (Reliable, Trustworthy), Working Enterprise (Achievement oriented, Diligence) Professional Knowledge and Adaptive Skills. We can identify a clear shift of traits/skills compared to the earlier study of Li et al, (2005). The Hefferman study portrays the global employability needs in line with other developed/developing countries.

The employability skills preferred by Chinese employers, studied by Zhang and Zou (2013) are given in table 5.

**Table 5.** Skills and Personal Characteristics Preferred by Chinese Employers\*

Personal Characteristics	Skills
Honesty, Independence, Self Esteem, Ethical Behaviour, Adaptability, Self confidence, Enterprising Spirit, Endure Pressure, Passion, Trustworthiness, Strong Sense of Responsibility, Enthusiasm	Interpersonal Relationship, Teamwork, Professional Morality, Strain Capacity, Innovation ability, Problem Handling Capacity, Life Long Learning, Leadership, Information Technology Software Applications, Presentation Skills

Source: Zhang and Zou (2013)

The add-on skills from 2005 to 2013 are quite evident. While the newly added skills such as ‘Strain capacity’, ‘Professional Morality’, ‘Life-long Learning and ‘Information Technology Software Applications’, are necessary skills to meet global challenges, ‘Interpersonal Relationship Skills’ continue as one of the key skills in managing the diverse workforce.

### Japan

The skills prioritised by Japanese enterprises (MHLW, 2004) are : Communication ability, Basic Scholastic ability, Sense of Responsibility, Positiveness/ Extroversion, Qualifications, Power of action/ability to act, Business manner, Ability of presentation, Aspiration/inquiring mind, Specialised subject knowledge, Flexibility and environmental adaptability, and Professional awareness and attitudes towards work.

According to Nguyen (2005), employable personal qualities required by Japanese employers are as given in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Employable Personal Qualities required by Japanese Employers\*

Personal Skills	Attitudes	Traits
Communication Skills	Responsibility	Initiative
Personal Presentation Skills	Optimism	Sensitivity
IT & Computer Skills	Curiosity	Flexibility
Problem-solving skills	Ambition	Individuality
Leadership Skills	Desire for Challenge	Sincerity
Visionary Skills	Cooperation	Creativity
Self-Assessment Skills	Vitality	An entrepreneurial mind
Goal-setting skills		A balanced personality

\*Source; Nguyen (2005), in Zaharim, A.et al, (2010)

Compared to the U.S., the U.K., and Australia, the Japanese Government had been slow in enhancing the employability of its graduates to compete in the global market. The Universities in Japan offer few internship, of short duration only. Students were also not much interested in internships. One study by Mie University, listed the top skills/attributes by the employers as, motivation, manner and attitudes, collaboration skills and pro-activeness. Logical thinking, presentation skills and foreign language skills were considered less important by these employers in Japan. (Ito, H. 2014). There is a change in perspective from 2004-2005 to 2014. All the top skills listed by the employers were new and had not found a place in the earlier studies.

### Singapore

The Singapore government does commendable efforts to enhance the employability of its workforce to global standards. In 2003, it established the Singapore Work Force Development Agency, with a specific mission “to lead, drive and champion work force development, enhancing the employability and competitiveness of Singapore’s Work Force” ([www.wda.gov.sg](http://www.wda.gov.sg)). Its Executive Development and Growth for Excellence Programme (EDGE, 2012), aims at Work Force Soft Skills. The areas covered are: Analytical, Conceptual and

Evaluative Skills, Information and Communication Technology Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Personal Management and Development Skills and Job Safety Skills

The Foundation Skills include, Communication, Personal Effectiveness and Self Awareness, Initiative, Problem-solving, Learning, Workplace English and Workplace Maths.

## India

In close consultation with industry, state governments and experts, the government has developed a new strategic framework for skill development. A three-tier institutional structure on Coordinated Action on Skill Development consists of: 1) The Prime Minister's National Council on Skill Development, 2) National Skill Development Coordination Board, and 3) National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). There are also Sector Skill Councils (Singh, R. 2012). The NSDC aims at up-skilling of 500 million people in India through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiative.

The skill development initiative to enhance employability of students in the Industrial Training Institutes commenced in the 2011-2012 year period. The syllabus broadly covers, English Language course- pronunciation, functional grammar, reading, writing, speaking, Communication Skills- listening skills, motivational training, facing interview, time management skill, Quality Tools, Occupational safety and health, and Entrepreneurship.

The employer expect Higher-order thinking skills, such as analysing, evaluating and creating – skills, English skills, integrity, reliability, teamwork and willingness to learn, from newly graduated engineers in India (Blom and Saeki, 2011).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The overviews of the employability skills desired and practiced by different countries reflect the rapid changes and the preparations needed/undertaken by these countries to meet global requirements. As has been pointed out by Levy & Murnane (2005), as decades pass by, jobs demanding expert thinking and complex communication, continue to increase and tasks requiring



non –routine manual skills tend to decrease. It is, therefore, vital for all those who are interested in the welfare and prosperity of a nation, to be sensitive to the job market needs and to undertake concerted and sustained interventions to identify develop and strengthen the employability skills of its workforce. It is a collective responsibility- not only of policy makers, but equally or more so of – parents, students, educational institutions, employer organisations, non-governmental organisations, social and religious leaders alike.

Learning by doing approach, action programmes, learner - centred curriculum, facilitating role for the teachers, quality support from the policy makers, coordination and team work, output and outcome based approaches, sharing of good practices, encouraging innovative techniques demonstrated by teachers, and above all a strong political will to raise the employability skills and standards from the early school years onwards are some of the urgent inputs required in this realm.

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