

12

DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR WORK AND LIFE

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CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES



By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand the skills and competencies that contribute to your employability.
- Analyse which of those skills you have developed and which you could work on.
- Develop a plan for building and developing your skills.
- Action the plan and review what your next steps should be.

GLOSSARY



- **Employability:** 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations' (Yorke, 2006: 8).
- **Human capital:** the experience and skills an individual or population has and their value or cost to an organisation or country.
- **Psychological capital:** personal attributes that define a person's attitude to risk, resilience, confidence and goal-setting.
- **Social capital:** the networks and social ties between people, which 'create a bridge between graduates' educational, social and labour market experience' (Tomlinson and Holmes, 2017: 18) and helps broker access to job opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

This section outlines some of the skills that you will need to acquire in order to prepare for the world of work. The skills described in this chapter and those that follow will help you to develop skills that employers might find attractive in their staff and to research, seek out and define the kind of jobs that you would like to work in. The phrase ‘**employability** skills’ has become a shorthand for a collection of personal skills, competencies, knowledge and connections that employers and researchers have worked together to define over the last 40 years or so (Whistance and Campbell, 2019). For a long time, employers have asked universities to produce graduates who are knowledgeable in the subject that they are studying, capable of the technical skills that are required by the industry (for example, event management knowledge and experience) and who have less ‘concrete’ attributes such as self-confidence and resilience. This chapter will give you an overview of those that are the most sought after by employers and students.

Employability skills are not something that you will learn overnight, and indeed some are innate for some and difficult to acquire for others. These are skills that you will develop and hone over the whole of your lifetime. This section includes several chapters that highlight the most important key skills and attributes for your industry.

WHAT ARE THE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS YOU NEED?

Employability skills fall into three inter-related groups: human, psychological and social capital, all of which are underpinned by the experience of work.

Human capital includes the personal skills and knowledge that you might consider to be the core of the university degree that you are studying:

- Personal skills and capabilities (including the development of digital capabilities)
- Interpersonal and communications skills
- Work-related skills (including workplace etiquette, essential processes and procedures, and health and safety knowledge where applicable)
- Industry-specific knowledge
- Career skills (including job opportunity identification, skills for applications, and interviews and job readiness).

Psychological capital includes key personality traits that employers ask for:

- Self-efficacy (‘I can’/‘I believe I will be able to’)
- Resilience (‘I am able to recover quickly from a difficult situation’)
- Goal-setting (‘I may not be able to do that now, but I can see a way to learn how to/plan to do it and I will put that in place’)
- Confidence (‘I trust that my skills and capabilities are good enough’).

Social capital refers to the connections, networks and people that you have relationships with, and who would be able to support your search for work through introductions, potential offers of placements or internships, or supporting the development of your industry knowledge and skills. In the literature, social capital is divided into two areas:

- Forming connections (the 'bridge' into a community or knowledge group, often called 'bridging capital')
- Embedding (the 'bond' with a community, such as becoming part of a team or taking part in the organisation of a wider group, often called 'bonding capital').

Key to all these skills and attributes is work experience itself (see Chapter 21). Experience of work will help you to develop each of these; and if you find yourself in a place where you would like to further your career, then the social capital you will develop as part of work experience will be invaluable. We can formulate these skills into a handy diagram, shown in Figure 12.1.

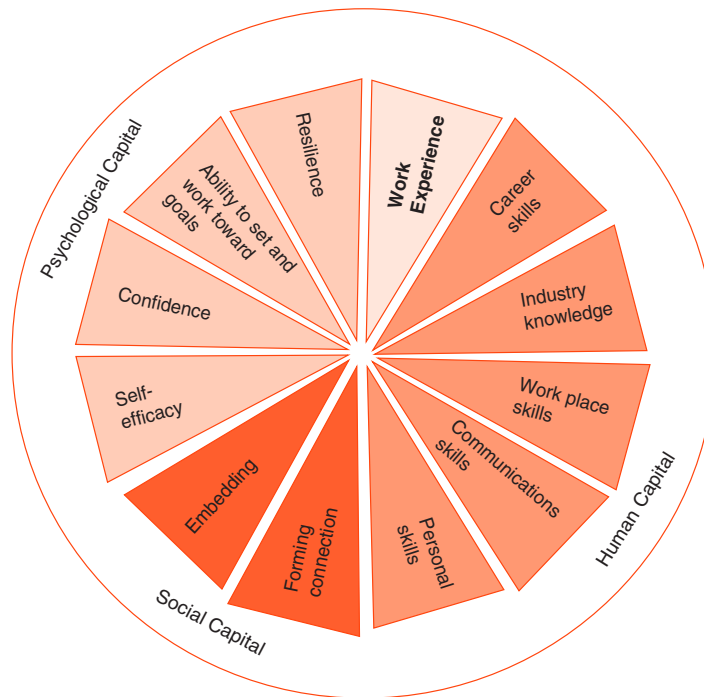


Figure 12.1 The employability capital compass

Source: developed from Jones and Sant (2013) and updated for this chapter, March 2020. Permissions given.

ACTIVITY



Using the employability capital compass

Using the employability capital compass above, do the following:

- Analyse which skills you have developed and which you could work on.
- Develop a plan for building and developing your skills.
- Action the plan and review what your next steps should be.



REFLECTION EXERCISE

Analysing your skills

Reflect on your own personal skills. Which of these do you feel you already have, or are currently developing as part of your course, work or leisure activities? Which do you think that you are unlikely to build at the moment?

1. Write a list of the skills that you have.
2. Grade them: which are well-developed? Which are not?
3. Identifying the skills that you are *most* confident with, consider how you can use these to best develop your employability and job skills. What plan could you put in place to make the best of these skills?
4. Thinking about the skills that you are least confident about, which is the highest priority?
5. Map all the skills that you want to work on, taking note of both their importance and your current level of skill.

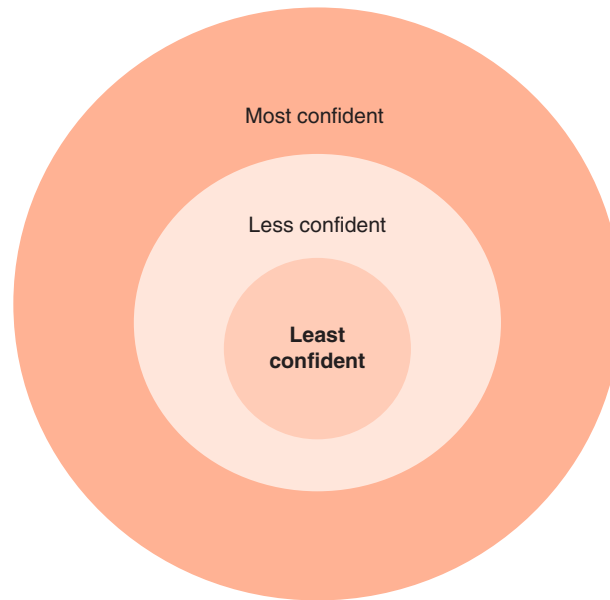


Figure 12.2 Skills target

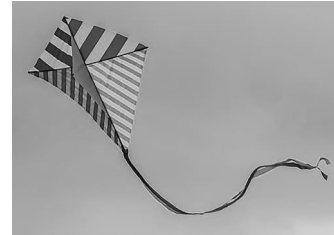
DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS: TAKING STEPS

For each of the skills that you want to develop, you should practise the skill of goal-setting. Depending on your outlook and the method you are most comfortable with, you can start either with the kite (if you like thinking about the landscape and context first and actions later) or the string (if you tend to develop ideas from a small start and grow them).

Flying high exercise

From the perspective of the kite, how would you describe being fully competent in the skill that you have identified? Can you say what it would feel like, or look like to someone else? What would you be able to do? Now think of what would make you *almost* that confident or capable. What would be the one task or exercise that you could undertake to master the skill? What would the last polish entail? Now work down the string of the kite, thinking of each of those levels being just a little less skilful than the one before. For each of those levels of competence, what would you do to work up to the next step?

If you are someone who likes to develop your thoughts step by step, think about your current capability. Considering a small step towards full mastery of the skill, what would be the first thing you could do that would take you up the string of the kite? Don't try and rush all the way up to the kite itself – just feel your way along the string in stages. Plan to do that first task alone, and then review how confident you feel once you've done it. In this way, you can set goals to gradually improve your skills.



ACTIVITY



List the five key competencies that you want to develop this term

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

DEVELOPING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

While human capital traits are generally simple to develop alongside your course and other activities, developing social and psychological capital may be more daunting. Your approach to risk is a very personal one and impacts on your confidence and self-efficacy in different situations. Most of the human capital traits included here are covered in sections A and B of this book, and social capital (generally developed through the workplace, networking and work-based skills) is covered in sections C and D. Psychological capital is generally developed through practice and self-reflection. For example, if you consider the skill of resilience in the context of giving a presentation, it allows you to control your nerves when presenting to others and allows you to learn from a presentation that doesn't go well. Other techniques can be brought over from research in high-risk and extreme sports. For example, mental tasks that have been developed by gymnasts to challenge themselves to perform exercises they consider risky can be used to further your resilience and confidence (Chase et al., 2005). Their tips are as follows:

1. *'Just go for it'*. Once you've got to the point of no return (e.g. lingering by the entrance to a networking event), just do it. It may feel tough the first time, but the second time will be easier.

2. *Seek trust, advice and support from a mentor or friend.* Bounce your ideas (and fears) off a mentor or a friend, or take up some of the support that your college or university might have available. Speaking about your fears to someone who is less emotionally involved might help you to get perspective.
3. *Imagery.* Imagine yourself doing whatever it is that you need to do. This is a technique that top sportspeople use to help them to imagine success.
4. *Positive self-talk.* Counter any negativity or doubt with positive thoughts and self-talk. It takes practice, but it's effective.
5. *Selective focus and attention.* Otherwise known as 'fake it till you make it'! Imagine that you've done it three times and that therefore this time will be a success too.
6. *Relaxation.* Practise some self-relaxation techniques, such as breathing slowly, mindfulness exercises or concentrating on something complex and physical, such as juggling. This should reduce your anxiety level and clear your mind.

OTHER ACTIVITIES THAT DEVELOP EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- Join a team, group activity, club or performing group and take some responsibility for the organisation of the club or some of its activities.
- Take a holiday on your own or with a friend. Don't go for a package holiday; instead, book your accommodation yourself and organise your own transport.
- Find some work experience, or internship in a place that is out of your current experience. For example, you might contact your dream employer and ask for a couple of days shadowing a current or recent graduate trainee.
- Go to a networking event and come away with five business cards or contact details of people who could help you find work experience or a job.



EMPLOYER INSIGHT

Carnival UK

If you're looking to find out more about employability skills and which ones are considered important in the hospitality industry, then the best place to look is the employers themselves, starting with their recruitment websites. Carnival UK is one of the largest holiday companies in the UK, running both the Cunard Line of transatlantic liners and P&O Cruises. Its head office is based in Southampton, across the road from the dockside. Carnival employs more than 2500 people in roles from shipbuilding to children's entertainment.

A recent job advert (see below) outlines the skills and capabilities that Carnival UK is looking for in its graduate employees. Job adverts can tell you a lot about the culture of the organisation. In this case, the Health, Environment, Safety and Security section of the job description underlines Carnival UK's commitment to these areas throughout their company and businesses. Look at the language used by the recruiter. There are knowledge-based skills (human capital) that they expect their applicants to demonstrate, such as the ability to manage surveys or use internal systems, and there are terms that suggest a psychological approach (or capital), such as 'proactively champion' and 'drive guest satisfaction'.

P&O Cruises Job Description – Assistant, Guest Insight & Research, Carnival UK

Role Description: To drive guest satisfaction by providing understanding of guest needs, motivations and experiences.

Accountabilities

- Manage surveys
- Support development of research
- Support internal teams
- Use internal systems

Scope

- Problem-solving: Apply a range of techniques, apply analytical expertise
- Impact: Seek and suggest ways of improving guest experience
- Leadership: Proactively champion our guests

Demonstrable behaviours

- Analytical
- Good at communication
- Conscientious
- Shows initiative

Knowledge, experience and qualifications

- Manage data
- Interpret and analyse data
- Understanding of market research

Health Environment Safety and Security (HESS) Responsibilities

- Promote safe working
- Lead by example
- Adhere to GDPR

General responsibilities

- Adhere to codes of conduct and Corporate Policies and Procedures

(Source: CarnivalUKcareers.co.uk, 2020)

WORK EXPERIENCE – THE ALL-ROUND SKILL DEVELOPER

Employability skills may not all be included in your coursework, but you will develop them in the workplace. There's nothing like a job that you *don't* want to do to help focus your mind and identify what you *do* want to do. Never pass up on the opportunity to spend some time in the industry, via a part-time job, work placement or internship.

Work experience will also help you to develop your confidence, resilience and psychological skills. Working with other people (perhaps in your field, or perhaps not) will help you to focus on what you might want to do and set goals. You can build resilience with tough customers or long shifts, learning about yourself as well as about the industry. Moreover, work placements will help you to develop your networks and connections. Many employers think of internships as an opportunity to ‘interview’ potential graduate trainees for a few weeks or months; research by the Institute for Student Employers showed that 34% of graduates recruited had previously interned for the same company (Cullinane and Montacute, 2018) and that those who had interned were generally paid higher on graduation than those who had not. Even if you choose not to work with the company that you have spent time with (or, as may be the case with smaller businesses, opportunities may not arise), you will have developed key contacts and an insider’s understanding of the industry. Work experience works.



THINK POINT

Think of employability skills as dynamic life skills that require on-going development to ensure that your career is future-proofed. Employability is linked to a graduate’s ability to demonstrate technical know-how, soft skills and behavioural attributes. These three facets form the basis of most careers in tourism, hospitality and events sector.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have covered:

- The wide range of skills and capabilities that contribute to employability.
- The different types of capabilities that make up a holistic, employable skill set, and considered the differences between human, social and psychological capital.
- Some of these skills and competencies will be learnt during your studies, but others will be the result of experience gained in the workplace.
- The importance of work experience whenever you can as this will develop your confidence, resilience, industry knowledge and your network and connections.

FURTHER READING

- Deegan, J. and Martin, N. (2018) *Merging Work and Learning to Develop the Human Skills that Matter* [online]. Available at: www.echs-nm.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/DDE_Pearson_Report_3.pdf (accessed 2 March 2020).
- Tomlinson, M. and Holmes, L. (eds) (2017) *Graduate Employability in Context. Theory, Research and Debate*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yorke, M. (2006) *Employability in Higher Education: What It Is — What It Is Not* [online]. Available at: www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/employability-higher-education-what-it-what-it-not (accessed 2 March 2020).

Useful web resources

Carnival UK is the largest cruise company operating out of the UK, with nine ships and another in development. They own the historic Cunard brand and P&O Cruises. They employ over 2500 staff across the globe and are based in Southampton, UK – www.carnivalukcareers.co.uk/

Creative Attributes Framework, University of the Arts, London (2016). A useful resource for developing employability skills, focused particularly on those in artistic career paths but useful for all – www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/teaching-and-learning-exchange/careers-and-employability/creative-attributes-framework#

LifeSkills from Barclays has been set up to help young people to access the jobs market. Although focused on those aged 16–19, there are some interesting skill development sections – <https://barclayslifeskills.com/educators/tags/age-groups/16-19>

Rome2Rio: discover how to get anywhere – www.rome2rio.com/