EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS & MINDSETS

A review of the skills and mindsets that drive success in the modern workforce and resources to help develop them
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Employability skills and mindsets are personal attributes that indicate a high level of cognitive and personal development and are broadly applicable across job titles and industries.

Creating and maintaining an adaptable workforce, where employees are prepared for changing jobs and jobs we cannot predict yet, requires young people to learn skills and mindsets beyond the technical aspects of any particular job or industry.

Establishing a shared language and greater collaboration around developing these skills and mindsets is critical to reach the goals of the postsecondary sector (the institutions educating future hires) and employers (the organizations hiring those students).
WHY DO EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS & MINDSETS MATTER?

They matter to employers and educators

Employability skills and mindsets demonstrate that new hires can communicate, collaborate, learn from their mistakes, grow and adapt, and solve problems.

We consistently hear that employers value employability skills as much, or more, than the technical qualifications they seek in prospective employees.

A 2016 CBI/Pearson Education study found that 81% of survey respondents valued employability skills over technical qualifications when hiring.\(^1\)

A survey by the recruitment firm CareerBuilder similarly found that 77% of surveyed employers rate employability skills as being of equal importance to “cognitive” skills (e.g. reading, mathematics, science).\(^2\)
A full 96% of educators rank problem-solving as a “very important or important” skill for career success, according to a survey by Wainhouse, followed by collaboration (96%) and persistence (90%).

Yet these skills are difficult to find in prospective employees.

The Wall Street Journal found that 92% of nearly 900 surveyed executives said employability skills were equally important or more important than knowledge-specific skills.

Yet only 11% have an easy time finding employees with those skills.

PayScale and Future Workforce found that only half of managers surveyed believe that recent graduates are adequately prepared for the workforce.
WHAT ARE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS & MINDSETS?

Employability skills and mindsets are personal attributes that indicate a high level of cognitive and personal development and are broadly applicable across job titles and industries. Establishing consensus on the definitions of these skills between the institutions educating future hires and the organizations hiring those students is crucial to ensure people are prepared to enter and succeed in the workforce. These are often referred to as “soft skills,” “social-emotional skills,” “21st-century skills”, and “noncognitive skills.” We prefer the phrase employability skills and mindsets because it encapsulates a broader set of attributes.

Note: This brief focuses on skills and mindsets, not on specific knowledge. Knowledge is a set of facts, information, or understanding about one’s self, others, and the world. It is highly role-dependent, whereas employability skills and mindsets cross roles and disciplines. For example, Algebra II, Physics, Biology, Python, etc. Building academic knowledge is a key developmental task as people move through K-12 education, postsecondary education, and the workforce.
**Top 11 Employability Skills & Mindsets:** We conducted a frequency analysis on the skills noted in surveys and studies from field leaders, and interviewed STEMconnector members and experts to identify those that appear to be most critical to the modern STEM workforce.

*Employability Skills* are the learned abilities to carry out a task with intended results or goals and can be either general or domain-specific.

1. **Collaboration (Teamwork):** Being able to work with others and function well in the process
2. **Cognitive Flexibility:** Being able to switch between thinking about two different concepts, and to think about multiple concepts simultaneously
3. **Communication:** Being able to communicate what to say in an appropriate and effective way
4. **Critical Thinking:** Being able to perform objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment
5. **Cultural Competence:** Managing cultural differences; respecting others
6. **Decision Making & Judgment:** Being able to make informed decisions
7. **Leadership:** Being able to lead a group of people or organization
8. **Organization & Planning:** Being able to organize and plan life, projects, tasks, and schedules
9. **Problem Solving:** Being able to solve problems
10. **Relationship Management:** Being able to form, grow, manage, and keep relationships
11. **Responsibility:** Being able to hold yourself and others accountable
**Employability Mindsets** are beliefs and attitudes about oneself, the world, and the interaction between the two. They are the lenses we use to process everyday experiences.

1. **Adaptability**: Being flexible in your thinking and behavior, depending on what is needed

2. **Agility**: Being able to change your mood and actions depending on what is needed, where you are, and who you are with

3. **Confidence & Self-Efficacy**: Having an internal sense of overall positive self-worth

4. **Curiosity**: Being an eager learner with many questions

5. **Empathy**: Being understanding and connected to the feelings and experiences of others

6. **Fairness**: Being sensitive to the difference between right and wrong, and believing everyone deserves a fair chance

7. **Growth Orientation**: Being able to improve oneself through effort; the belief intelligence can be developed

8. **Humility**: Being thoughtful and honest about your talents and achievements, shortcomings, and mistakes. Having a healthy perspective and engaging with others even when the focus is not on you

9. **Integrity**: Being honest and having strong moral principles

10. **Open Mindedness (Openness)**: Being willing to try new things or to hear and consider new ideas

11. **Persistence (Grit)**: Perseverance and passion toward achieving a goal despite having obstacles to overcome along the way
What can Employers and Educators do to Develop These Skills & Mindsets?

Many sector-specific efforts exist to develop employability skills and mindsets. For example, educators can choose from over 80 different pedagogical frameworks associated with employability skills. This brief does not create an exhaustive list of such resources, but rather offers an initial set for those interested in exploring the topic more deeply.

The challenge in developing these skills and mindsets is not a lack of best practices, but rather a lack of communication and coordination across sectors. While choosing an approach to building skills and mindsets matters, it is equally as important to align efforts of educators and employers to maximize impact.
RESOURCES EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE SKILLS


https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/employability-skills-framework#

RESOURCES FOR BUSINESS LEADERS
HELPING EMPLOYEES
TO DEVELOP THESE SKILLS

*Work in Progress: How CEOs are helping close America’s skills gaps.* Business Roundtable.
http://businessroundtable.org/skills


*Three Ways to Improve Employability Skills during CTE Month.* Mary V.L. Wright. JFF.
RESOURCES FOR HELPING STUDENTS TO DEVELOP THESE SKILLS

*Ready By Design the Science (And Art) of Youth Readiness.* Stephanie Malia Krauss, Karen J. Pittman and Caitlin Johnson. The Readiness Project.
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