



Business Council *of*
British Columbia

**2008 BIENNIAL SKILLS
AND ATTRIBUTES
SURVEY REPORT**

**What Are BC Employers
Looking For?**

**September 2008
Vancouver, BC**

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1. Introduction

The labour demands of the marketplace are continually changing with the general economic environment and the introduction of new technologies. Reflecting these pressures, British Columbia employers are seeking different combinations of skills and attributes in new hires in order to maintain their competitive edge. Job seekers in turn must keep pace with the necessary skill sets sought by employers in today's dynamic work environment. The Business Council of BC's 2008 Biennial Survey has been designed to help entrants to the workforce do just that: identify the most important skills and attributes BC employers are seeking in new job applicants. Identifying these skills and attributes in turn helps job seekers better prepare for careers in a range of sectors and occupations.

Every two years, the Business Council of BC surveys its members (senior human resources representatives) and asks a range of questions concerning their organisation's anticipated employment needs by occupational grouping, their labour market outlook, and the key Attributes and Skills they are looking for from new hires. They are also asked for their opinions on their overall impression of recent applicants, the characteristics they commonly find lacking, and what advice they would give to job seekers.

Members of the Business Council of BC are active in all major sectors of the provincial economy, including forest products, mining, manufacturing, transportation, agri-food, telecommunications, information technology, financial services, energy, tourism, retail, construction, healthcare, education and the professions. Taken together, the corporate members and the associations affiliated with the Business Council account for approximately one quarter of all jobs in British Columbia.

2. Background

Against the backdrop of a strong British Columbia economy and forecast labour shortages, understanding employers' hiring priorities can place job market entrants in a competitive position. Some recent labour market statistics for British Columbia help paint the picture. In July 2008, BC's unemployment rate was 4.4 percent (seasonally adjusted), compared to 6.1 percent nationally, both approaching 30 year lows. The unemployment rate is lowest among those aged 25 to 44, at 3.8 percent (seasonally adjusted).

The BC economy is projected to continue to grow. Between 2005 and 2015, BC is projected to generate roughly 1,113,700 jobs, approximately 60 percent of these to replace retiring workers, and 40 per cent due to job creation. The provincial average employment growth rate is expected to be 2.0 percent per year. The sectors anticipating the most significant increases include Health Care and Social Assistance (3.4%), Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (2.8%), Management, Administrative and other support (2.7%); and, Accommodation and food services (2.4%)¹ (COPS BC Unique Scenario, 2007).

3. Method and Respondent Characteristics

The 2008 Survey was administered via the Internet over a two month period between March and April 2008. The questionnaire follows the same format and identifies the same range of Attributes and Skills as our 2004 and 2006 Surveys, allowing for comparison of data between the survey periods.

The 2008 Survey was divided into five sections covering the following areas:

- Respondent Characteristics
- Labour Demand Outlook
- Attributes

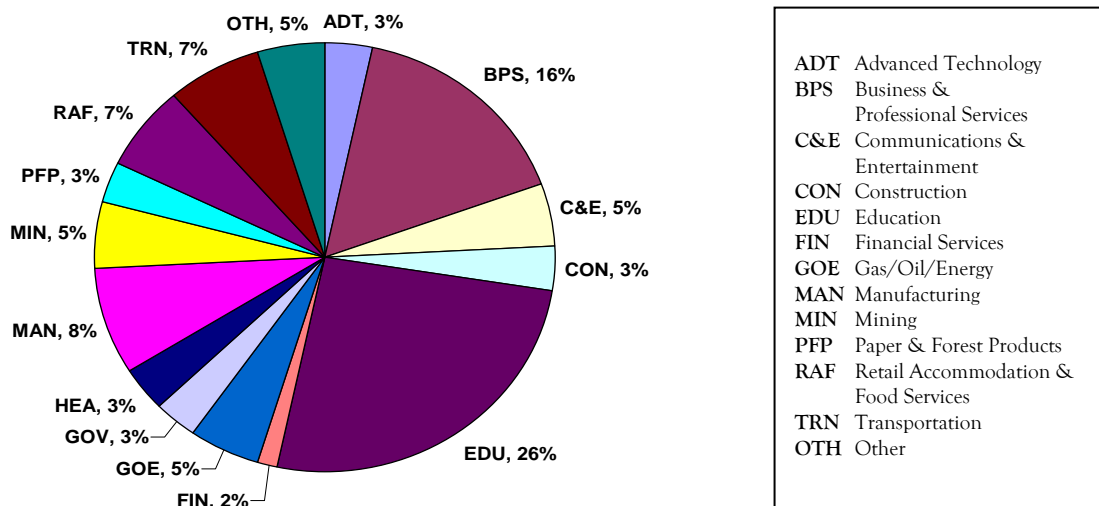
¹ It should be noted that employment growth rates represent one indicator of employment trends; another important factor is the overall size of an industry. Growth rates might be high in a sector which does not expect to produce a large number of new jobs.

- Skills
- Job Applicant Perceptions and Advice

Quantitative and qualitative data were obtained, and where applicable, representative open-ended comments are included in the report.

Senior human resources personnel from 44 core member organizations of the Business Council participated in our 2008 Biennial Survey. They represent the views of both large and medium sized companies across the province. The breakdown by industry is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Respondent Profile



In terms of respondent organization size, about one third of respondents (34%) represent organizations of between 100 and 500 full time equivalent employees (FTEs). 18 percent represent organizations of smaller than 100 FTEs, and approximately 30 percent represent organizations of 1,000 to 5,000 FTEs. These results demonstrate a broad range of perspectives from medium to large size companies and organizations.

4. Labour Demand Outlook

The Survey asked employers to identify their requirements for hiring new personnel over the next 12 months and the key Skills and Attributes they are seeking in these new applicants, classified by five broad occupational categories. The categories are:

1. Management
2. Professional
3. Technical, Paraprofessional & Skilled
4. Intermediate
5. Elemental

With the exception of Management, these categories are based on the National Occupational Classification (NOC) skills levels, which roughly divide all occupations on the basis of commonality of education and training requirements. The Management category, defined by skill type, was added as it seemed most logical for the purposes of the Survey. Definitions and sample occupations for each category are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Occupational Categories

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	DEFINITION	SAMPLE OCCUPATIONS
Management	Occupations that may require anywhere from some high school courses to a university degree. Those who plan; organize; direct; and control, the activities of a branch or department.	Office executive, plant manager, administrative manager
Professional	Occupations that typically require a university degree, or in some instances a college diploma.	Accountant, engineer, lawyer, researcher, systems analyst, computer programmer
Technical, Paraprofessional & Skilled	Occupations that typically require two or more years of community college, post-secondary, or on-the job training; occupations that require apprenticeship completion or involve supervisory responsibilities.	Chef/cook, medical technologist/technician, clerical supervisor, secretary, paralegal, graphic artist, qualified tradesperson, supervisor
Intermediate	Occupations that typically require high-school completion or some secondary schooling and <u>up to</u> two years of on-the-job training	Office clerk, receptionist, transit driver, letter carrier, longshore worker
Elemental	Those occupations that typically require less than two years of post-secondary schooling and on-the-job training.	Cashier, trades helper, primary production labourer

In terms of overall hiring expectations, 30 percent of respondents expect to hire between 1 and 25 people in the next year. Approximately 7 percent plan to hire between 26 and 50 employees, while 32 percent plan to hire more than 50 people. Significantly, 75 percent of respondents anticipate a skills shortage in the foreseeable future, 15 percent more than the response in the previous Survey. Those who feel there will be a shortage were asked to comment more specifically. Occupations that were identified are listed below:

Accounting	Marketing
Clerical	Project Management
Engineering	Supervisory
Faculty/Instructor	Technologist/Technician
Information Technology Management	Trades

In terms of occupational categories of hiring, respondents were asked to indicate what percentage of new hires will be in each of the five occupational categories identified above. Findings are reproduced in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Hiring Intentions by Occupational Group

Occupational Group	2004	2006	2008
Management	4%	10%	9%
Professional	13%	28%	21%
Technical/Para-professional/Skilled	12%	21%	18%
Intermediate	6%	17%	25%
Elemental	65%	24%	21%

Clearly, the composition of employment needs has changed over the past four years. As a proportion of total hiring, the Elemental occupational group has declined significantly, while Intermediate occupations in particular have grown in demand. The 2008 results are likely a reflection of the upswing in the British Columbia economy, combined with the pressures from retirement-driven skills shortages.

In addition to the representation in Table 2 above, the data were analysed in quartiles between 1% and 100%. In the Professional occupational category, approximately four percent of respondents are planning to hire 75-100% of new employees from the Professional category, and 74 percent are planning to hire up to 25%.

Three percent of respondents plan to hire between 75% and 100% of their new workforce from the Technical, Paraprofessional & Skilled category; while 77 percent plan to hire up to 25% from this category.

In the Management category, 95 percent of respondents plan to make new managers one quarter or less of their overall hiring plans. Furthermore, no respondents intend to hire 50% or more of their workforce from this category.

70 percent of respondents plan to add 25% or fewer Intermediate hires, and only four per cent plan to do 75% or more of their hiring in the Intermediate category.

The Elemental category has the highest proportion of respondents who plan to do the most hiring: Almost seven percent of respondents plan to hire upwards of 75% of new employees in the Elemental category, compared to 17 per cent in 2006. 67 percent plan to hire up to 25% in this category.

5. Attributes

The Most Frequently Selected Attributes

From the list of Attributes, employers were first asked to choose ten key Attributes they sought in all new job hires. Based on the frequency of selection, the 10 most frequently sought Attributes in new job applicants are shown in Chart 1 below:

To understand the consistency or change of demands of the workplace, the ten most frequently sought Attributes reported in each of 2004 and 2006 are placed below the 2008 responses in Table 3 below.

Chart 1: Top Attributes BC Employers Are Looking For...

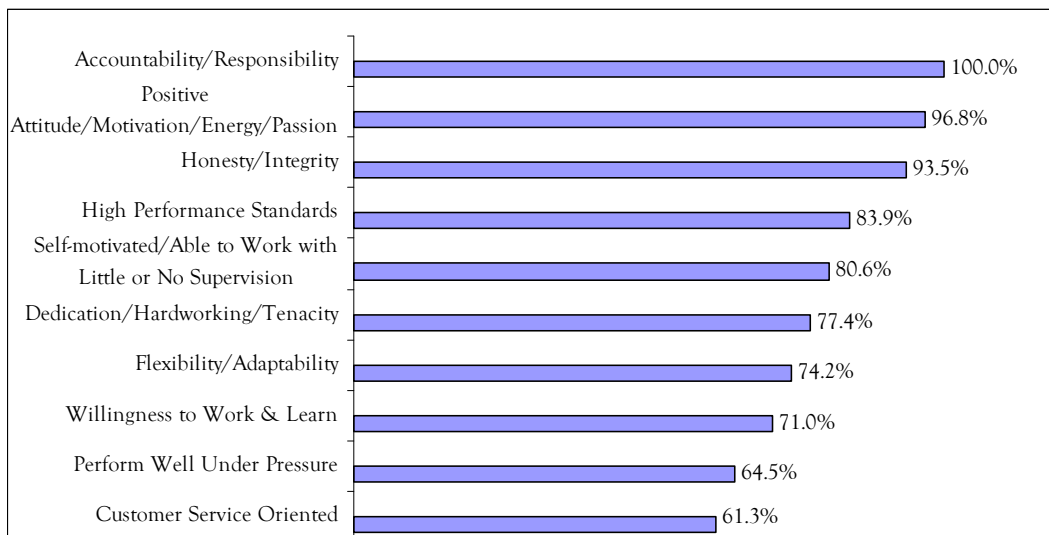


Table 3: Top 10 Attributes Over Time

Top 10 Ranking Comparison			
1	Accountability/Responsibility (100%) (Ranked 1, 2006; Ranked 2, 2004)	6	Dedication/Hardworking/Tenacity (77%) (Ranked 8, 2006; Ranked 9, 2004)
2	Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion (97%) (Ranked 2, 2006; Ranked 4, 2004)	7	Flexibility/Adaptability (74%) (Ranked 6, 2006; Ranked 3, 2004)
3	Honesty/Integrity (94%) (Ranked 3, 2006; Ranked 1, 2004)	8	Willingness to Work & Learn (71%) (N/A, 2006; N/A, 2004)
4	High Performance Standards (84%) (Ranked 4, 2006; Ranked 5, 2004)	9	Performs Well Under Pressure (65%) (N/A, 2006; N/A, 2004)
5	Self-motivated/Able to Work with Little or No Supervision (81%) (Ranked 5, 2006; Ranked 6, 2004)	10	Customer Service Oriented (61%) (Ranked 7, 2006; Ranked 7, 2004)

It is interesting to observe generally that employers tend to maintain similar priorities among groups of Attributes. *Accountability/Responsibility* has consistently been among the top Attributes looked for by employers, and remains in the top three for the 2008 Survey. This Attribute, together with *Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion* and *Honesty/Integrity* continue to be rated most frequently by employers, and together form the three most important attributes looked for in employees. The next most frequently mentioned Attribute in 2008 is *High Performance Standards*, maintaining the fourth place rating it held in the 2006 Survey.

Lower in frequency, but still consistently within the top ten are Attributes such as *Willingness to Work & Learn*, *Perform Well Under Pressure* and *Customer Service Oriented*. It is interesting to note those Attributes that did not make it into the top ten in 2006: *Self-esteem/Confidence*, *Creativity*, and *Presentable in Appearance*.

The Top 3 Most Important Attributes

Once respondents had selected their top ten Attributes, they were then asked to rank the top three in order of importance against each of the five occupational categories. From the key Attributes ranked in terms of importance by the respondents, a simple weighting procedure was used to determine their relative importance and arrive at the three most important Attributes that

employers are looking for. Each time an Attribute was ranked number 1, it was assigned a weight of 5 points, rank number 2 was assigned 4 points and rank number 3 was assigned 3 points.

The top three Attributes ranked in order of relative importance are listed below (all occupational categories):

1. Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion (#2 in 2006)
2. Accountable/Responsible (#1 in 2006)
3. Hardworking (*not in top 3 in 2006*)

Overall, *Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion* is ranked as the most important Attribute in the 2008 Survey. The least important Attribute is *Multicultural Sensitivity and Awareness*, suggesting that employers feel this attribute is a given for becoming employed in any occupational category.

The Top Five Attributes ranked by occupational category are listed in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Ranking of Attributes by Occupational Category

THREE MOST IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTES BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	
MANAGEMENT (e.g. CEOs, executive directors, store or plant managers)	1. Leadership/Management Skills 2. Accountable/Responsible 3. Honest/Ethical
PROFESSIONAL (e.g. Accountants, engineers, lawyers, researchers, computer programmers)	1. Accountable/Responsible 2. High Performance Standards 3. Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion
TECHNICAL, PARAPROFESSIONAL & SKILLED (e.g. Secretaries, paralegals, qualified trades people, medical technicians)	1. Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion 2. Customer Service Oriented 3. Accountable/Responsible
INTERMEDIATE (e.g. Office clerks, receptionists, transit drivers, letter carriers, longshore workers)	1. Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion 2. Customer Service Oriented 3. Dedication/Hardworking/Tenacity
ELEMENTAL (e.g. Cashiers, trades helpers, primary production labourers)	1. Dedication/Hardworking/Tenacity 2. Customer Service Oriented 3. Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion

As presented in the table, several Attributes repeatedly appear as priorities for respondents. For example, *Accountable/Responsible* and *Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion* is common priorities for employers, regardless of occupational category; however, depending on the occupational category, the levels of importance will vary.

Therefore we also present in Table 5 the results of the three top-ranked Attributes across occupational categories. The ranking number of a given Attribute is shown in its occupational category, illustrating commonalities and differences among priorities for employers.

Table 5: Top Ranked Attributes across Occupational Categories

Top Five Attributes	Management	Professional	Technical, Para-professional & Skilled	Intermediate	Elemental
Accountable/Responsible	2	1	3		
High Performance Standards		2			
Honest/Ethical	3				
Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion		3	1	1	3
Customer Service Oriented			2	2	2
Leadership/Management Skills	1				
Dedication/Hardworking/Tenacity				3	1

In all categories but Management, *Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion* was selected as one of the top three attributes for respondents (in varying order). These results suggest that, generally, employers are looking for employees with these characteristics regardless of the capacity in which they might be hired into an organization. Another important attribute for employers is *Accountable/Responsible*, which was selected in most of the occupational categories.

In terms of the differences among the categories, it is interesting to note that in Management and Professional occupations, employers place considerable emphasis on demonstrating initiative and performing well under pressure. In occupations that fall in the Intermediate or Elemental categories, employers tend to emphasise the customer service and positive attitude Attributes when

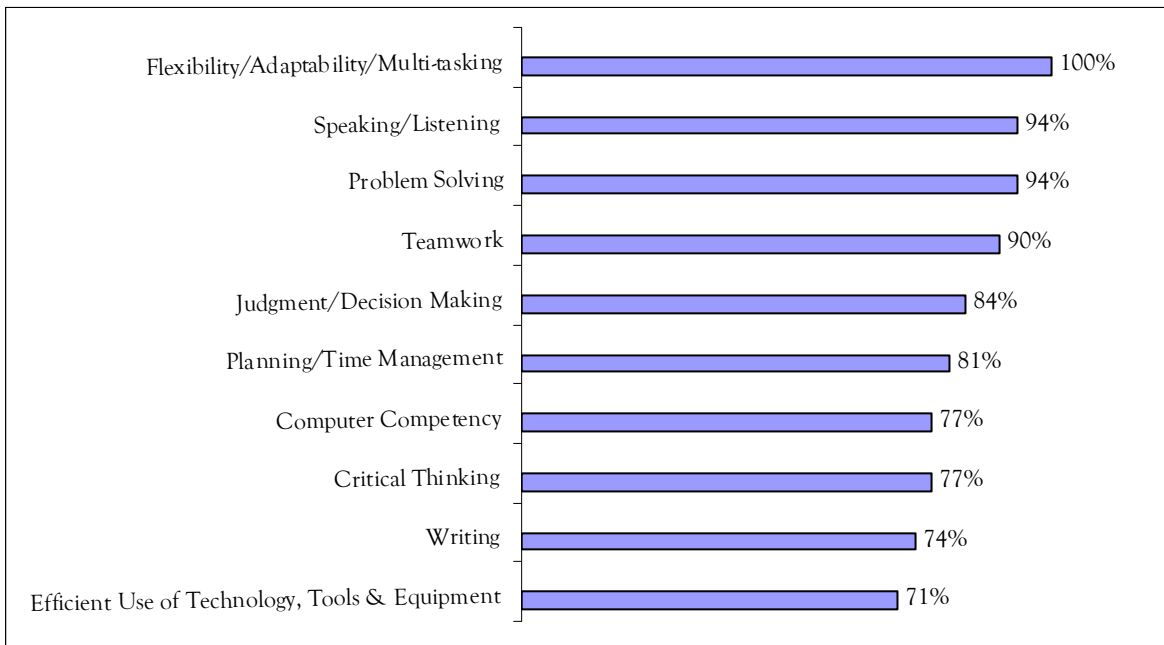
they are looking for employees. It is interesting to observe that the Attributes employers seek in the Technical, Paraprofessional & Skilled category are a blend of the other categories on the spectrum, and include *Accountable and Responsible* (common to Management and Professional) and *Customer Service Oriented* (common to Intermediate and Elemental).

6. Skills

The Ten Most Frequently Selected Skills

Similar to the Attributes section, employers were asked to choose ten key Skills they sought in all new job hires. Based on the frequency of selection, of the 14 listed Skills, the ten most frequently sought skills in new job applicants are as follows in Chart 2 below:

Chart 2: Top Skills BC Employers Are Looking For...



By way of comparison, the ten most frequently sought Skills reported in each of the 2004 and 2006 surveys are listed below the 2008 results below in Table 6.

Table 6: Top 10 Skills Over Time

Top 10 Ranking Comparison	
1. Flexibility/Adaptability/Multitasking (100%) (N/A, 2006; N/A, 2004)	6. Planning/Time Management (81%) (Ranked 7, 2006; Ranked 4, 2004)
2. Speaking/Listening (94%) (Ranked 4, 2006; Ranked 8, 2004)	7. Computer Competency (77%) (N/A, 2006; N/A, 2004)
3. Problem Solving (94%) (Ranked 3, 2004; Ranked 2, 2002)	8. Critical Thinking (77%) (Ranked 5, 2006; Ranked 6, 2004)
4. Teamwork (90%) (Ranked 2, 2006; Ranked 3, 2004)	9. Writing (74%) (Ranked 6, 2006; Ranked 5, 2004)
5. Judgement/Decision Making (84%) (N/A, 2006; N/A, 2004)	10. Efficient Use of Technology, Tools & Equipment (71%) (N/A, 2006; N/A, 2004)

Flexibility/Adaptability/Multitasking are the most frequently mentioned Skills that are important to employers in the 2008 survey, followed closely by *Speaking/Listening* and *Problem Solving*. *Flexibility/Adaptability/Multitasking* is consistently selected by the majority of respondents over the three survey periods.

Skills that were mentioned too infrequently to make the top ten were *Research Skills*, *Public Speaking/Presentation*, and *Numeracy*.

The Top Three Most Important Skills

As with the Attributes section, once respondents had selected their ten most important Skills, they were then asked to rank the top three in order of importance against each of the five occupational categories. From the key Skills ranked in terms of importance by the respondents, a simple weighting procedure was used to determine their relative importance and arrive at the five most important Skills that employers are looking for. Each time a Skill was ranked number 1, it was assigned a weight of 5 points, rank number 2 was assigned 4 points and rank number 3 was assigned 3 points.

The top three Skills ranked in order of relative importance are listed below (all occupational categories):

1. Teamwork (#2 in 2006)
2. Problem Solving (#3 in 2004)
3. Flexibility-Multitasking (not in top 3 in 2006)

The top three most important Skills by occupational category are shown in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Ranking of Skills by Occupational Category

FIVE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	
MANAGEMENT (e.g. CEOs, executive directors, store or plant managers)	1. Judgment/Decision Making 2. Critical Thinking 3. Problem Solving
PROFESSIONAL (e.g. Accountants, engineers, lawyers, researchers, computer programmers)	1. Problem Solving 2. Judgment/Decision Making 3. Critical Thinking
TECHNICAL, PARAPROFESSIONAL & SKILLED (e.g. Secretaries, paralegals, qualified trades people, medical technicians)	1. Teamwork 2. Flexibility-Multitasking 3. Problem Solving
INTERMEDIATE (e.g. Office clerks, receptionists, transit drivers, letter carriers, longshore workers)	1. Teamwork 2. Flexibility-Multitasking 3. Technology Competency
ELEMENTAL (e.g. Cashiers, trades helpers, primary production labourers)	1. Teamwork 2. Flexibility-Multitasking 3. Problem Solving

Flexibility-Multitasking, *Teamwork* and *Problem Solving* are Skills that employers consistently rank in the top three for all occupational groups, suggesting that these Skills are important to develop regardless of the type of employment sought. However, other Skills appear to be more important for some occupational groups than others.

Therefore, we also present in Table 8 below the results of the three top-ranked Skills across occupational categories. The ranking number of a given Skill is shown in its occupational category, illustrating commonalities and differences among priorities for employers.

Table 8: Top Ranked Skills across Occupational Categories

Top Five Skills	Management	Professional	Technical, Para-professional & Skilled	Intermediate	Elemental
Judgment/Decision Making	1	2			
Technology Competency				3	
Problem Solving	3	1	3		3
Teamwork			1	1	1
Critical Thinking	2	3			
Flexibility-Multitasking			2	2	2

Certain Skills appear to be relevant for certain occupational categories. Skills important primarily to Management and Professional occupations include *Judgment/Decision Making*, *Critical Thinking* and *Problem Solving*. At the other end of the spectrum, in Intermediate and Elemental occupations, respondents tend to emphasise *Teamwork*, and *Flexibility-Multitasking*, while *Judgment/Decision Making* appears not to be relevant to these occupational groups.

In the Technical, Paraprofessional and Skilled occupations, employers seem to be looking for some Skills that are common to Professional or Management, such as *Problem Solving*, but also value those Skills that are important in Intermediate and Elemental occupations such as *Flexibility-Multitasking*.

7. Employer Perceptions and Advice

When asked for their overall impression of current job applicants, employers reported that candidates are generally well-prepared, with some knowledge of the company, similar to observations in the 2006 Survey.

However, employers also made the following observations:

1. Employers are finding the level of expectation from workers has significantly increased over the past few years. Some employers feel that due to the current employment climate, employees are becoming insistent in their demands for increased compensation despite their lack of experience:
 - “They are "bolder" than they've been in the past in asking early on the "what's in it for me" questions (i.e. wage increases, benefits, time off...).”
 - “...their expectation is to be "sold" on the employment opportunity.”
 - “They interview us as they consider our opportunity.”
 - “Want a lot of \$\$ for little or no experience”
2. There is a lack of qualified applicants. Employers expressed some experiences with skills shortages and the impact on hiring and job applicant skills:
 - “A very limited pool to select from. Most have a very junior level of experience.”
 - “The quality of applicants has gone down over the past 2 years.”
3. Some employers noted a lack of professionalism and preparedness at interviews among candidates:
 - “A high percentage of applicants do not take the time to understand our business before applying.”
 - “Most are not presentable and project a lack of preparedness for their interview.”
 - “Less prepared than 5 years ago. More casual attitude.”

Employers were then asked to state the Attributes, Skills or Knowledge they commonly find lacking in job applicants. They made the following observations:

1. Lack of experience, both within the industry or occupation, and in terms of maturity:
 - “Experience in complex work environments. Most have generally far less experience in their fields vs. 5 years ago.”
 - Knowledge of the business they work for and an eagerness to succeed in that field.
 - A lack of institutional knowledge of an industry as opposed to educational experience

2. Lack of communication and writing skills, and other interpersonal skills:
 - “At the entry level positions, we often attract recent arrivals to Canada and as a result, English language skills (spoken and comprehension) are often weak. In addition, we assume that candidates who self-identify as computer literate are, when in reality many do not have the rudimentary skills to function in MS Outlook or Excel for example. I predict a need to re-implement computer skills testing in the future, or at least internal training programs to address this potential productivity issue.”
 - “People skills - broadly defined (teamwork, good listening skills, etc.).”
 - “Positive attitude towards working as a team and for the benefit of both individuals and the company.”

When asked what advice they might give to job applicants in order to develop the necessary Attributes, Skills and Knowledge, employers made the following comments:

1. Employers consistently recommended that students take advantage of co-op work experience, summer work, and volunteer positions in order to gain relevant work experience and to develop communication and teamwork skills:
 - “For university students, co-op experience is a must. For experienced workers, courses or memberships in organizations can be very valuable.”
 - “Co op work experience for post secondary graduates is very important, as well as volunteer work that helps to develop interpersonal and leadership skills. Job applicants should demonstrate strong communications skills (verbal and written). Courses to enhance written skills should be taken

and/or participation in toastmasters would be beneficial if the applicant's communication skills are not strong.”

- “Co-op work experience, volunteer experience, participating in extra-curricular activities to become a well-rounded individual.”
2. Employers advised having a good attitude about the job process (hiring, training, etc.) and developing good “first impression” skills:
 - “Be honest about the skills you currently possess, and the skills you would like to learn, and ask how an employer can assist you with those specific goals. Do your own research and make choices that allow you to achieve your goals.”
 3. Employers recommend being flexible and building a range of soft skills, since reorganization is common:
 - “Put themselves into situations where they can prove their skills or attributes (i.e. organizing an event, dealing with a problem situation, take on something that takes them outside their comfort zone.”
 - “Leadership, customer service and interpersonal skills are key.”
 4. Employers also look for applicants to demonstrate a commitment to ongoing learning:
 - “Try to get as much broad experience as possible, participate in related professional associations or extra curricular activities if possible.”
 - “Experience leading and participating in a team environment is important. Sports are a great way to develop and demonstrate this.”
 - “Continue learning - keeping skills updated”

* * *

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