ResearchOnline@JCU

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

This is the author-created version of the following work:

Scarinci, Janice, Pryce, Josephine, and Thirumaran, K. (2022) ***A New World During COVID-19: employability skills in tourism, hospitality and events.*** **In: Batabyal, Debasish, and Das, Dillip Kumar, (eds.) Domestic Tourism and Hospitality Management: issues, scope, and challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Apple Academic Press, Palm Bay, FL, USA. pp. 111-133.**

Access to this file is available from:

https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/69814/

© 2023 by Apple Academic Press, Inc

Please refer to the original source for the final version of this work:

https://www.appleacademicpress.com/domestic%2Dtourism%2Dand%2Dhospitality%2Dmanagement%2Dissues%2Dscope%2Dand%2Dchallenges%2Damid%2Dthe%2Dcovid%2D19%2Dpandemic/9781774910566

A New World during COVID-19:

Employability Skills in Tourism, Hospitality and Events

Abstract

COVID-19 has changed the landscape of the Tourism, Hospitality and Events industry worldwide. This study seeks to determine if the employability skills needed in the Tourism, Hospitality and Events Industry in Australia and Singapore have changed since the pre-COVID era. The implications of this research can impact tertiary education institutions which need to address necessary changes to employability skills in the curriculum.

The Australian Higher Education Standards Framework created by TEQSA require employability skills as part of the learning outcomes for all degree courses. The Department of Education, Science and Training developed the *Employability Skills for the Future Report*. This report identified eight employability skills, and 13 personal attributes, which were deemed necessary by employers. Studies prior to the COVID-19 pandemic identified communication, leadership and teamwork as the top three skills areas for the Tourism, Hospitality and Events Industry. This study utilized the Employability Skills Framework to conduct a critical assessment of employability skills needed during COVID-19.

Job advertisments were searched to identify a range of positions for investigation – from frontline to back-of-house and from junior supervisory to executive levels. Fifteen positions were chosen and for each position 20 job descriptions as detailed in job advertisements were collected from Australia and 20 respective job descriptions from Singapore. This resulted in 40 job descriptions for each position for a total of 600 job description for analysis. The researchers used a qualitative approach and NVivo software to analyse the employability skills for each of the job titles in Australia and Singapore respectively, to determine similarities and differences of skills needed between each country. Overall, the results indicate that communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills were the most desired skills by the industry. These findings provide information for development of curriculum to meet the respective needs of each country as the industry moves through this pandemic era.

Keywords:

Hospitality, Tourism, Education, Employability, Skills, Australia, Singapore

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many lives and industries since January 2020. As of Dec 4, 2020, 65 million people worldwide had been infected and 1.5 million people died as a result of COVID-19 (Reuters, 2020). One of the most impacted industries is the tourism and hospitality sector where international flights, cruise liners, road travels and border crossings came to a complete stop. Travel is now restricted, controlled and monitored. Over 100 million jobs were lost in the industry as of August 2020 with the Asia Pacific region losing the most at 63.4 million jobs (Lock, 2020).

Two modern economies in the Asia Pacific region that were hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic are Australia and Singapore. Australia's tourism and hospitality industry was poised to earn $115 billion in 2020 in overnight expenditure, a stark increase over the last decade from $70 billion in 2009 (Tourism Australia, 2020). The number of job losses in Australia amounted to over 272,816 jobs in the sector as of April 2020 (Hinton, 2020). Singapore's tourism and hospitality industry in 2019 employed 65,000 people (Anon, 2020; Tay, 2020). Several larger employers such as the Resorts World Sentosa and Marina Bay Sands have already shed over 2000 employees (Toh, 2020). The Singapore government's spending of SGD $100 billion may be helpful to retain another 7000 vulnerable jobs (Chew, 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) predicts a devastating 174 million jobs lost in the sector by the end of 2020 (HospitalityBiz, 2020).

A series of Australian reports and government documents account for continuous review of the tourism labour market. In 2009, *The Jackson Report* (Commonwealth Australia, 2009) advocated that the government use the *Tourism and Hospitality Workforce Development Strategy 2014-19* (Service, 2013) to recognise qualifications for workers to acquire transferable skills beyond the tourism and hospitality industry. Australia's long-term strategy also identifies the need to be inclusive of indigenous communities who possess unique skills and knowledge deployable in the rural and regional parts of the country (Government, 2009).

According to Australia's Higher Education Standards Framework 2015 (Australian Government, 2015) the learning outcomes for courses (degrees) must include generic skills which are deemed necessary to employment. The generic skills that are important to employment in the Tourism, Hospitality and Events Industry have been identified in numerous studies in the literature. Some studies have examined the most common skills that were identified by employers prior to the pandemic as being communication, leadership and teamwork skills (Oliver, 2011; Jorre & Oliver , 2018).

The Australian Tourism 2020 Plan aims to focus on the supply side of the industry identifying the need for 36,000 skilled professionals. The emphasis has been on digital skills with the aim of creating resilience in the industry (Tourism Australia, 2020). This report was written prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, preparations for a post-pandemic means the tourism and hospitality industry have to adapt to new spaces and hygiene practices aligned with health and industry service requirements (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

The Singapore government through the Singapore Tourism Board has been emphasizing the adoption of technology (Singapore Tourism Board, 2018). The Singapore Tourism Board is shepherding the various national agencies and trade unions to ensure that the human resource streaming into the industry is one that is future-ready. Through the Singapore government's SGUnited Traineeships Program, there is a pathway for new graduates of about 12000 young adults and another 4000 mid-career workers to be attached to various businesses for paid

training to help them prepare for the turnaround and evolving job landscape in the tourism sector and post COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Singapore Government , 2020; KPMG, 2020)

With tighter protocols, fear of a return wave of the virus and the gingerly move towards bilateral travel bubble arrangements means work and guests contact spaces may have to be adaptable to health and safety tight protocols. While the transition to post COVID-19 and thereafter may require 'touchless tourism' and greater emphasis on domestic tourism and staycations, it is imperative that the industry review deeper aspects of employability skills and new skills for the post-COVID-19 world. These can be divided into industry sector (IS) and national segment (NS):

- (IS) Restaurants offering 'picnic baskets' for guests to eat some other comfortable and safe distance location out of the restaurant establishment… [delivery services]
- (IS) (NS) 'Touchless travel' systems, services, Stay Home Notices and Vaccine Requirements
- (IS) Mass to private transport.
- (NS) Travel bubbles, bilateral and trilateral arrangements

These examples are some of the trends reflecting pivots in tourism and hospitality services due to COVID-19. But more importantly, as solutions are found to mitigate the disease and as the post-COVID-19 gradually relaxes travel restrictions, tertiary institutions and industry have to be ready for the next generation of job applicants and career seekers in hospitality and tourism. Many of which are expected to change in design, function, knowledge and specialization. For example, robots have already been deployed increasingly in this period where there are potentially high human touch points and there exists a prediction that at least a quarter of the 800 million jobs will be taken over by robots while leaving the higher skills work to humans (Zeng, Chen, & Lew, 2020). To prepare for post-COVID-19, the (UNWTO, 2020) emphasizes the need to:

1. Develop skills to design new products and marketing intelligence and promotions.
2. Acquire multiple languages.
3. Enable people to possess digital skills.
4. Nurture entrepreneurial innovations, as added by Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) to the list.

The vulnerability of the tourism and hospitality industry means that circumstances and new forms of work environment requires readjustments in skills sets, operations and even marketing. This study examines employability skills during COVID-19 by surveying the types of jobs available during the pandemic crisis. The literature review is addressed in the next section appraising various scholarly work related to the crisis and its impact on skill sets of workers in the tourism and hospitality sector. Thereafter, the chapter categorizes the various elements of the job advertisements that were captured, the method of analysis employed, and the rationale for adopting a deductive research approach. In the analysis section, we examine three broad areas such as the employability skills that the industry is desiring, the types of jobs available and more specifically an understanding of what is needed to resource the industry as the pandemic crisis continues, and into the post COVID-19 recovery phase. The conclusion reiterates the findings relating to the changing nature of jobs, contributions to the tourism discipline, and an overview of future directions for the tertiary education sector's role in resourcing the tourism and hospitality industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of the literature review is to identify how the literature that has defined employability skills, identify the known employability skills frameworks and choose the relevant framework to guide the primary data collection for this study. Finally, this section seeks to synthesis the employability skills that employers in hospitality and tourism are seeking, in order to inform hospitality and tourism educators in relevant curriculum design and development.

Employability Skills Definition

Due to the competitive nature of employment and the ever-changing business environment, employability skills have gained momentum and importance to employers around the world. It is no longer enough for graduates to have specific job skills. Employers are demanding additional sets of skills that are referred to as employability skills, in order to meet the criteria of perspective employers. In many studies, employers have identified that graduates are not meeting the necessary employability skills such as communication skills, teamwork and decision-making skills (OECD, 2019) (Jagannathan & Geronimo, 2013) (Aring, 2015). The importance of employability skill is now being identified by higher education and professional industry bodies. Many reports are now indicating employability skills to be indispensable in entering the workforce (OECD, 2016). For higher education institutions, it is essential to identify the required employability skills by professional bodies and by industry, for curriculum development, and in order to provide relevant skills and ensure graduates are prepared for the ever-changing business world.

What are employability skills and how can they be defined? Employability skills have been used interchangeably with generic skills, transferable skills, soft skills, non-technical skills, core skills, essential skills and even 21st century skills (NCVER, 2003). There are numerous definitions of employability skills from multiple studies around the world including the United States (Overtoom, 2000), United Kingdom (Yorke, 2006) and Australia (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002) For the purpose of this study we have used the DEST (2002) definition of employability skills which defines them as those 'skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions" (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002, p. 1).

Employability Skills Framework

There are numerous employability skills frameworks that have been developed by many different countries, and they all have similar employability skills and personal attributes. In Australia, the Business Deans Council of Australia (BDCA) and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) conducted a comprehensive study of the skills that were needed by workers to achieve success in their careers. They created the *Employability Skills for the Future Report* which outlined eight skills and personal attributes that workers needed to succeed. These included communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and

enterprise skills, planning and organization skills, self-management, learning skills and technology skills (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002).

In the United Kingdom, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) conducted a study of employability skills of that country. They created a series of documents referred to as the *Learning and Employability Series* which defined employability skills and personal attributes that were essential for individuals to achieve success in their respective occupations. These employability skills included personal qualities, core skills and process skills (Yorke & Knight, Embedding Employability into the Curriculum, 2006).

In Bangkok, 2012 and 2015 the UNESCO conducted studies on graduate employability in universities in ASEAN to develop their employability framework. It included attributes and competencies that employers were looking for in their employees. Some of the similar skills that they identified included communication skills, analytical, problem solving and team spirit (UNESCO, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, the researchers used BCA/ACCI 2002 Employability Skills Framework to guide this project since the primary data was collected in Australia and Singapore. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) funded Employability Skills Framework project to provide a comprehensive report of the Australian industry requirements for "employability skills". This project was managed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) and analysed employability skills needed by the industry in Australia in 2001.

The methodology that was used by the ACCI and the BCA included four main steps. The first step was a comprehensive literature review that informed the industry focus groups, interviews and case studies. They conducted focus groups and individual interviews with a sample size of 40 small and medium-sized businesses and an additional 13 case studies in large businesses in Australia. They interviewed the senior managers to determine the necessary employability skills needed in each business, and how educational providers can provide more effective development of these skills. The businesses ranged from two to over 1,000 employees. The fourth and final step was the development and validation of the draft Employability Skills Framework. They asked an additional 150 businesses and employers to provide an assessment of the draft framework which provided feedback and acceptance of the Employability Skills Framework. The outcome of the Employability Skills Framework was identified as a valuable tool to contribute to the curriculum development and evaluation of student performance in Australian education and training systems. DEST recommended the implementation of this framework in the schools, vocational training and higher education (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002).

The DEST (2002) Employability Skills Framework identified 13 personal attributes and eight employability skills that contribute to overall employability. The eight key skills identified in the Employability Skills Framework included:

1. **communication** skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers.
2. **teamwork** skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes
3. **problem-solving** skills that contribute to productive outcomes
4. **initiative and enterprise** skills that contribute to innovative outcomes.

5. **planning and organising** skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning.
6. **self-management** skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth
7. **learning** skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcome.
8. **technology** skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks (DEST, 2002, p. 7).

Please refer to the Employability Skills Framework from DEST in Appendix A for the detailed list of personal attributes, and the eight key skills with the elements that employers have identified as important for each skill.

The results of the employability skills framework by DEST (2002) were developed pre-COVID. Therefore, the researchers used the DEST 2002 Employability Skills Framework as a baseline for coding the eight key skills identified and personal attributes, to determine if these skills were still deemed necessary by the hospitality industry in 2020, i.e. during COVID. Six hundred job advertisements were collected in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry, in Australia and Singapore, between March and November 2020, during the COVID pandemic. The researchers used NVivo to code for the employability skills and personal attributes identified by DEST (2002).

Similar Studies Using a Content Analysis of Job Descriptions

Suarta, Suwintana, Fajar, & Hariyanti (2018) conducted a study about employability skills for entry level workers. The aim of the study was to identify what employers were looking for in job advertisements in Indonesia and to develop an employability skills framework. They used a content analysis of job descriptions from major newspapers that were circulated nation-wide in Indonesia from February to July of 2017. They analysed 57 job advertisements and identified 272 key terms for employability skills. This included 191 terms for generic skills and 81 terms that were identified for personal attributes. The top five employability skills that were identified were communication skills, self-management skills, teamwork skills, problem-solving skills and innovative skills and creativity.

Mussum, et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative integrative review of studies that used a content analysis of employability skills from job advertisements. They found that the most frequently identified employability skill was communication followed by teamwork skills. A similar study was conducted by Olawale (2015) in the construction industry and found nearly identical employability skills. The most desired employability skills in the job advertisements were teamwork, communication (oral and written), problem solving, flexibility, initiative and time management skills (self-management skills). Dunbar et al. (2016) conducted research on the technical and soft skills by employers for accounting positions. They found that communication skills were the most frequently required employable skill identified in the job advertisements. Warwick & Howard (2015) found similar results when analysing employability skills required by accounting graduates. The highest-ranking skills required by employers were communication skills, analytical skills, problem solving, interpersonal, teamwork, self-management and critical analysis. McMurray et al. (2016) conducted a similar

study in Scotland and found similar results from employers, communications skills, teamwork skills, initiative, interpersonal skills and adaptability. Across industries and across countries, the results are similar that employers are more interested in employability skills than they are in industry related skills. The top 3 skills identified in each of the studies included communication skills, teamwork and problem solving.

Methodology

This study sought to identify the employability skills that emerge from the job descriptions drawn from job advertisements for the Hospitality, Tourism, and Events Industry in Australia and Singapore. These skills were compared across the two countries. In order to determine the impact of COVID-19 on these jobs, the job descriptions were collected from March 2020, at the onset of the pandemic until the end of November 2020, with all collected once the pandemic had been declared. Hence, it was justified that the job descriptions present a good insight into how the emerging situation with COVID-19 was impacting on the employability skills of hospitality and tourism workers, especially given that the skills identified in the DEST Employability Skills Framework (2002) were used to drive the deductive data analysis.

To begin with, job advertisments were searched to identify a range of positions for investigation – from frontline to back-of-house and from junior supervisory to executive levels. Fifteen positions were chosen (Table 1) and for each position 20 job descriptions as detailed in the job advertisements were collected from Australia, and 20 respective job descriptions from Singapore, resulting in 40 job descriptions for each position for a total of 600 job description being analysed. The selection criteria of the job search were within the parameter of the tourism and hospitality industry specifically the hotels, restaurants, attractions and transport. Initially, job advertisements from the following websites were used to sort out the various identified job functions: The initial data was collected from March 6, 2020 to May 21, 2020, with attention to jobs advertised in the last 30 days from Singapore and Australian data collection sites:

1. Singapore data collection site: https://www.jobstreet.com.sg
2. Australia data collection site: https://www.seek.com.au/

Due to the COVID 19 Pandemic, the number of positions on the search engines declined drastically during the May to June timeframe. Therefore, the researchers had to expand their search to include additional job search engines to gain specific job descriptions in hospitality. The additional websites used for Singapore were:

https://www.asiahospitalitycareers.com/sg/en/#/;

http://www.mycareersfuture.com

For Australia, the additional website was: https://au.jora.com/j?l=Australia&q=Hospitality+Travel+Tourism&surl=true&since=lv&r=100&sp=facet_distance

The researchers reached their sample size of 600 job descriptions and the data collection ceased on 30th November 2020.

Table 1: Position Titles Searched

General Manager	Sales & Marketing Manager	Public Relations
Assistant General Manager	Front Office Manager	Customer Service Manager
Duty Manager	Food & Beverage Manager	Chefs
Recruitment Consultant / HR Manager	Housekeeping Manager	Concierge
Revenue/Financial Manager	Events Coordinator	Hotel Manager

The researchers used a qualitative approach and NVivo software to analyse the employability skills for each of the job descriptions in order to determine the similarities and differences between employability skills between Australia and Singapore.

As per the DEST Employability Skills Framework, the researchers utilised the 'personal attributes' category and the eight 'skills' categories and associated elements for each category, for the collation and analysis of data from the job description. The elements assisted in capturing the dimensionalities of the categories and use of the 'stemmed' and 'synonyms' functions in NVivo further assisted in capturing the nuances in some of the terms. Further details of the elements can be found in the DEST document and Table 2 presents a summary of the categories and elements for personal attributes, as used in this study.

Table 2: Categories and sub-categories as adapted from DTES Framework (2002)

BROAD CATEGORIES FROM DEST (2002)	**ELEMENTS / SUB-CATEGORIES CODES (Adapted from DEST, 2002)**	**CODE NUMBER**
PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES	PA - ABILITY TO WORK UNDER PRESSURE	1.
	PA - ADAPTABILITY	2.
	PA - COMMITMENT	3.
	PA - COMMON SENSE	4.
	PA - HONESTY	5.
	PA - ENTHUSIASM	6.
	PA - INTEGRITY	7.
	PA - LOYALTY	8.
	PA - MOTIVATION	9.
	PA - PERSONAL PRESENTATION	10.
	PA - PERSUADING-CARRY OUT	11.
	PA - RELIABILITY	12.
	PA - SELF	13.
	PA - SENSE OF HUMOUR	14.
	PA - WORK-LIFE BALANCE	15.
COMMUNICATION	COMM - CARRY OUT	16.
	COMM - CUSTOMERS	17.
	COMM - EMPATHY	18.
	COMM - LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH	19.
	COMM - LISTENING	20.
	COMM - MAINTAIN	21.
	COMM – NEGOTIATING	22.
	COMM - NETWORKING	23.
	COMM - NUMERACY	24.
	COMM - READING	25.
	COMM - SHARING	26.
	COMM - SPEAKING	27.
	COMM - UNDERSTANDING	28.
	COMM - WRITING	29.
	COMM - COMMUNICATION	30.
TEAMWORK	TEAM-TEAMWORK	31.
	TEAM-TEAMS	32.
PROBLEM-SOLVING	PS-PROBLEM-SOLVING	33.
	PS- BUDGETING	34.
	PS-DATA	35.
	PS-INNOVTIVE	36.
	PS-PRACTICAL	37.

	PS-PROJECT ISSUES	38.
	PS-STRATEGIC/STRATEGIES	39.
INITIATIVE & ENTERPRISING	IE-INITIATIVE	40.
	IE-ENTERPRISING	41.
	IE-CREATIVE	42.
	IE-VISION	43.
PLANNING & ORGANISING	PO-PLANNING	44.
	PO-ORGANISING	45.
	PO-RESOURCEFUL	46.
	PO-COORDINATING	47.
	PO-DECISION-MAKING	48.
	PO-CONTINUOUS-IMPROVEMENT	49.
	PO-RISK-MANAGEMENT	50.
	PO-BUSINESS-SYSTEMS	51.
LEARNING & PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	LPD-LEARNING	52.
	LPD-LEARN	53.
	LPD-PROFESSIONAL-DEVELOPMENT	54.
SELF-MANAGEMENT	SM-PERSONAL-VISION	55.
	SM-PERSONAL-PERFORMANCE	56.
	SM-KNOWLEDGE	57.
	SM-ARTICULATING	58.
	SM-RESPONSIBILITY	59.
TECHNOLOGY SKILLS	TECH-TECHNOLOGY	60.
	TECH-COMPUTER	61.
	TECH-WHS	62.

Once the data was collated into the elements in NVivo, it was analysed to determine the importance of the employability skills across both Australia and Singapore. These and other results are presented in the next section.

Results

In exploring the job descriptions from job advertisements in order to ascertain the employability skills for the Hospitality and Tourism Industry, the results showed that amongst the nine Broad Categories from DEST (2002) the top skill for both Australia and Singapore was communication at 28.90% and 27.86%, respectively (Table 3). The next top three skills were variable between the two countries, while the remaining five categories were in the same order for each country. Of the second skills considered to be most important in the job descriptions were teamwork (21.73%) for Australia and self-management (17.45%) for Singapore. Following these skills, for Australia subsequent important skills in descending order were: self-management (11.88%) and problem-solving (11.42%) while for Singapore, these

were problem-solving (15.34%) and teamwork (11.77%). The category of personal attributes was equally important in 5th position for both Australia (9.63%) and Singapore (9.99%). The other skills in order of descending importance were: planning and organising, technology skills, initiative and enterprising, and learning and personal development.

Table 3: Numbers and percentages of occurrence of the attributes and skills in the data

Broad Categories from DTES 2020	**AUSTRALIA**			**Broad Categories from DTES 2020**	**SINGAPORE**	
	#	**%**			**#**	**%**
Communication	1233	28.90		Communication	672	27.86
Teamwork	927	21.73		Self-Management	421	17.45
Self-Management	507	11.88		Problem-Solving	370	15.34
Problem-Solving	487	11.42		Teamwork	284	11.77
Personal Attributes	411	9.63		Personal Attributes	241	9.99
Planning & Organising	300	7.03		Planning & Organising	204	8.46
Technology Skills	187	4.38		Technology Skills	137	5.68
Initiative & Enterprising	126	2.95		Initiative & Enterprising	57	2.36
Learning & Personal Development	88	2.06		Learning & Personal Development	26	1.08

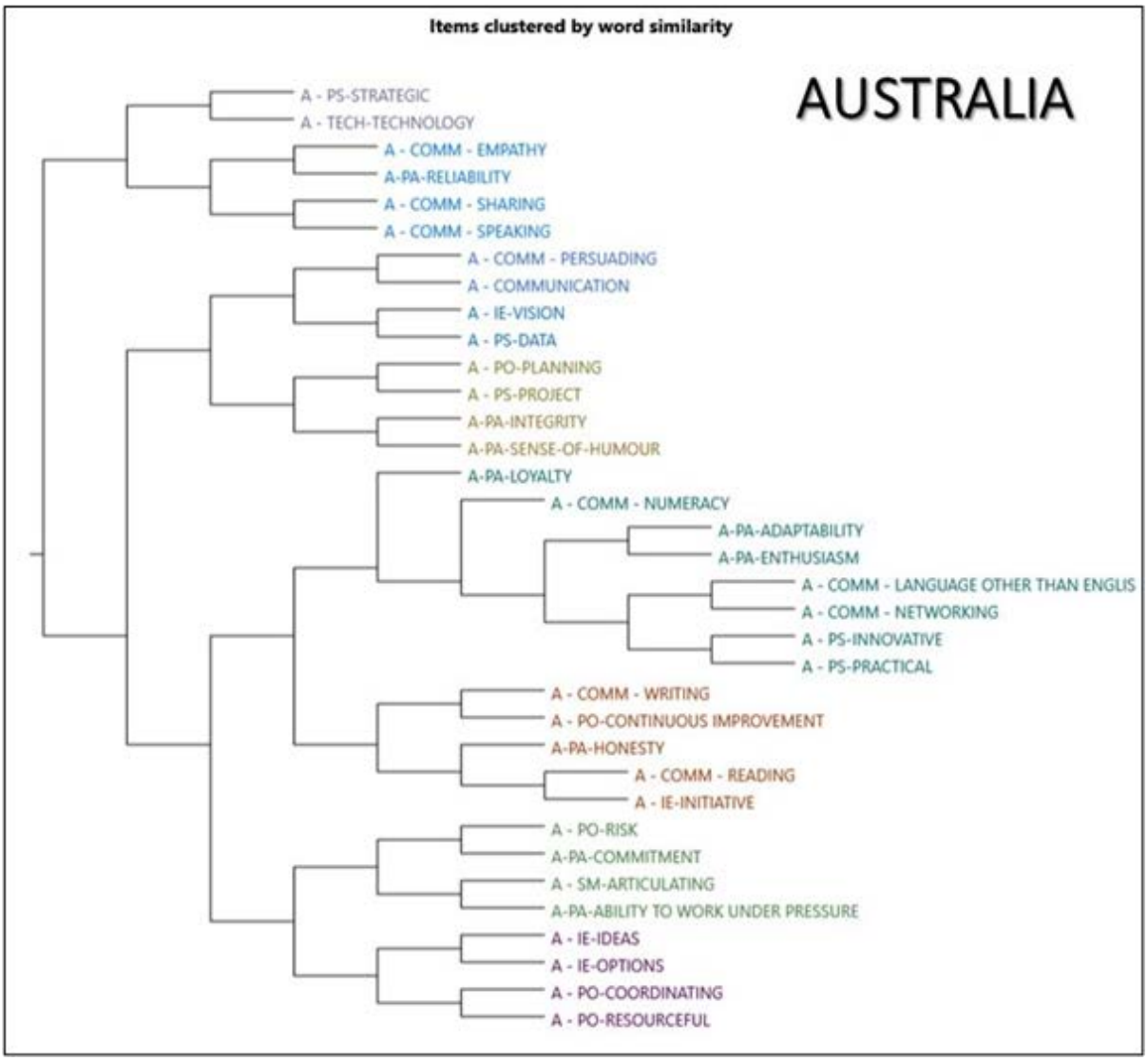
The DEST Employability Framework (2002) separates a set of personal attirbutes from the skills that "are commonly understood to refer to an ability to perform a specific task" (p. 3). The DEST Employability Framework (2002) defines these attributes as 'qualities', 'characteristics' and 'capabilities' that an individual is required to have to meet the specific requirements of the job in the workplace. Hence, it was considered worthwhile to explore these personal attributes in more detail. Table 4 presents the elements of the category personal attributes in descending order for Australia and Singapore. As these elements are drawn from the NVivo analysis, the nuances of the elements are captured in the table.

Table 4: Elements of personal attributes for each country

AUSTRALIA				SINGAPORE		
	#	%			#	%
MOTIVATION	129	35.54		COMMITMENT	51	20.90
SELF	58	15.98		MOTIVATION	51	20.90
COMMITMENT	53	14.60		ADAPTABILITY	43	17.62
ABILITY TO WORK UNDER PRESSURE	35	9.64		INTEGRITY	33	13.52
INTEGRITY	20	5.51		ABILITY TO WORK UNDER PRESSURE	19	7.79
PERSONAL-PRESENTATION	15	4.13		SELF	17	6.97
ENTHUSIASM	12	3.31		LOYALTY	12	4.92
WORK-LIFE BALANCE	11	3.03		ENTHUSIASM	7	2.87
RELIABILITY	9	2.48		HONESTY	5	2.05
HONESTY	7	1.93		RELIABILITY	3	1.23
ADAPTABILITY	6	1.65		WORK-LIFE BALANCE	2	0.82
LOYALTY	5	1.38		PERSONAL-PRESENTATION	1	0.41
SENSE-OF-HUMOUR	2	0.55		COMMON-SENSE	0	0.00
COMMON-SENSE	1	0.28		SENSE-OF-HUMOUR	0	0.00
	363	**100**			**244**	**100**

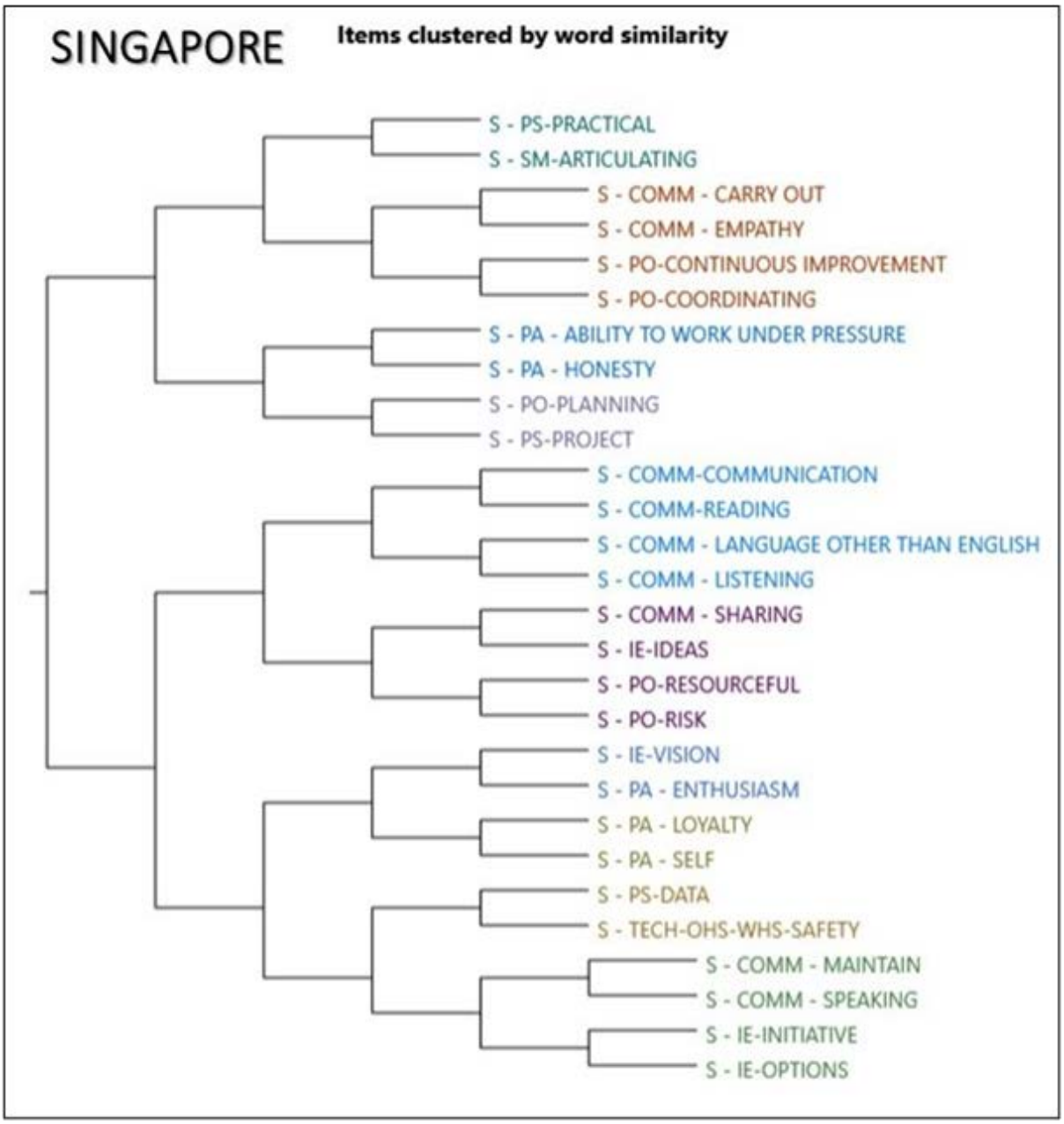
Looking further into the similarities and differences in employability skills between Singapore and Australia, cluster analyses were run separately in NVivo for Australia and Singapore (Figures 1 and 2). The cluster analyses showed that for both Australia and Singapore, most of the skills were clusterd together under the category ‘knowledge’ but there was variability in the skills clustered under this category and the relationships that were identified. For example, for Australia (Figure 1), skills such as planning, project, integrity and sense-of-humour showed a relationship to each other, with another cluster identifying relationships between networking, innovative, practical and language-other-than-English. Other skills that were related for Australia, were strategic and technology while empathy, reliability, sharing and speaking were clustered together. For Australia, honesty showed a strong relationship with initiative, reading, writing and continuous-improvement, while articulating was also closely aligned with ability-to-work-under-pressure and risk, but equally, it was connected with ideas, options, coordinating, resourceful.

Figure 1: Cluster analysis of employability skills for Australia



For Singapore (Figure 2), some of the communication skills showed a strong relationship with each other, e.g. listening, reading, language-other-than-English, and communication (generally). Other skills that clustered together were resourceful, risk, ideas, and sharing, while another cluster of closely related skills for Singapore were some of the personal attributes (ability-to-work-under-pressure and honesty) with planning and project. The elements of persuading (i.e. identified in NVivo as a synonym for ‘carry out’) and empthay were showing a relationship’ these two elements were in a close cluster to continuous-improvement and coordinating. The Singaporean data showed that maintain (i.e. identified in NVivo as a synonym for ‘assertive’) and speaking were closely related and aligned with initiative and options. In another cluster, self was clustered with loyalty and close to enthusiasm and vision., while risk and resourceful were closely aligned with ideas and sharing.

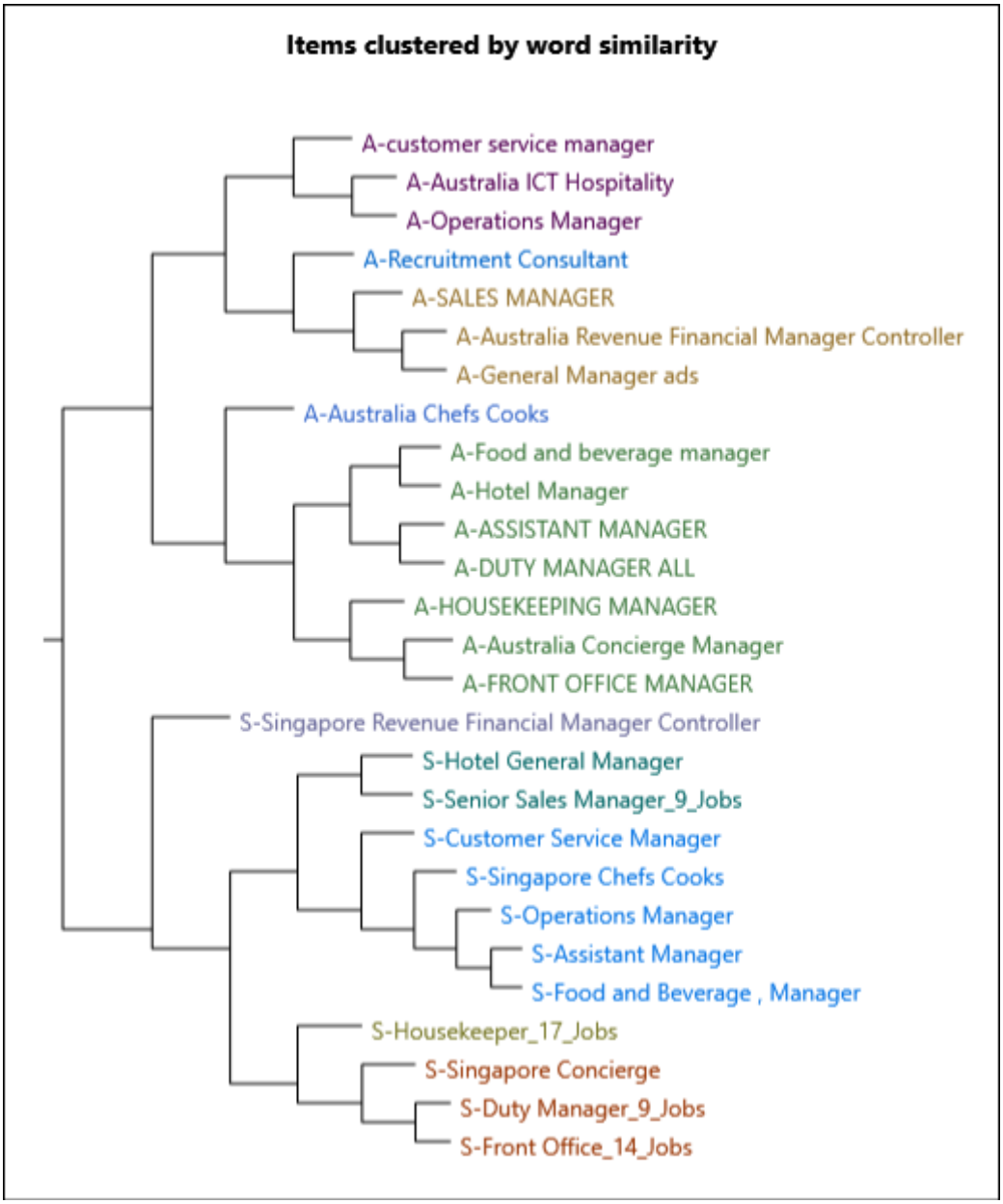
Figure 2: Cluster analysis of employability skills for Australia and Singapore



While organisational charts do provide information of the relationships between job positions in hotels and afford insights into options for cross-training for staff, it was thought worthwhile to consider the data in terms of the job categories and to see how they aligned with each other, with a view to exploring any differences or similarities between the two countries. The results showed that for both Australia and Singapore the Front Office Department brought together the positions of Housekeeping Manager, Concierge, and Front Office Manager, Similarly, for what can be considered to be the Food and Beverage Department, the positions of Chef and Food & Beverage Manager were brought together for both Australia and Singapore. With the latter, however, other positions that were considered to be close were Assistant Manager, Operations Manager, Customer Service Manager, Senior Sales Manager and Hotel Manager. For Singapore, these positions under both the Front Office Department

and the ‘Food and Beverage Department’ are subsumed by the Revenue Financial Manager position. This clustering of these positions suggests the emphasis and importance of these departments in generating income for the hotels, in Singapore. By contrast, the relationships for the positions in Australia indicate that the Revenue Financial Manager is closely aligned with the General Manager and that both are related to the Sales Managers’ positions and ultimately answerable to the Recruitment/HR Department.

Figure 3: Cluster analysis for Job Positions for both Australia and Singapore



Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to determine if the employability skills needed in the Tourism, Hospitality and Events Industry in Australia and Singapore have changed since the Pre-COVID

era. The DEST Employability Framework was used to identify skills that were deemed important. This framework had identified nine main categories of employability skills, from which this research utilised 62 sub-categories.

Overall, the results indicate twelve top employability skills that are consistent across the two countries, although the order of importance for each of the skills is variable between Australia and Singapore. Skills relating to the 'customer' were given top priority in both countries, followed by 'communication' and 'planning'.

The results from this study and the previous literature confirmed the importance of employability skills with all of them noted in the advertisements for jobs within tourism, hospitality and events in Australia. In Singapore, all of the skills were evident except for budgeting, negotiating, numeracy, common-sense, personal presentation, and sense of humour. By contrast 'language other than English' was in the top ten for Singapore and not so for Australia, but 'creative' was in the top ten for Australia and not for Singapore.

Between 2015 and 2020, there have been six studies that conducted a content analysis on job advertisments to determine employability skills. When comparing the results of this study to the previous literature it is evident that employability skills have not changed during COVID 19. Please refer to Table 5 for a comparative analsis of the employability skills identified in previous literature compared to the findings from this study.

Table 5: Comparative Analysis of the Top Employability Skills Compared to Previous Studies

Comparative Analysis of the Top Employability Skills from This Study Compared to Previous Studies	
Studies	**Top Employability Skills Identified**
Findings from this study (2020)	Communication, teamwork, self-management, problem solving, and personal attributes
Suarta, Suwintana, Fajar, & Hariyanti (2018)	communication, self-management, teamwork, problem-solving and innovative and creativity
Mussum, et al. (2016)	communication and teamwork
Olawale (2015)	teamwork, communication (oral and written), problem solving, flexibility, initiative and time management skills (self-management skills)
Dunbar et al. (2016)	communication
Warwick & Howard (2015)	communication, analytical, problem solving, interpersonal, teamwork, self-management and critical analysis
McMurray et al. (2016)	communications skills, teamwork, initiative, interpersonal skills and adaptability

Table 5 shows the results from this study compared to similar studies using the same methodology, analysing the job descriptions from employers, the results are very similar even during COVID-19 in 2020. Employers are more interested in employability skills than they are in industry related skills. The top 3 skills most frequently identified in each of the studies were communication skills, teamwork and problem solving. The number 1 skill that was

identified in all of the previous literature as well as the number one employable skill in this study was communication.

So, what does this mean for tertiary education and how can this data be used to create a curriculum that teaches the top employability skills that the employers are looking for? First, these skills need to be embedded in every subject. Creating ways to assess the development of these skills in university students is the next step. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study the researchers make the following recommendation for educational institutions to prepare our students for post-COVID-19 world. The primary recommendation is to design and develop assessments and activities that build on these three key areas communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills. Further to this, it is recommended that new research adopting an inductive approach is conducted as the world emerges from the pandemic to capture any employability skills that may not have been captured in studies prior to this brave new world.

References

Anon. (2020, July 7). Singapore finds staycations can't fill $27.7 billion tourism hole. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved December 20, 2020, from https://www.straitstimes.com/business/economy/singapore-finds-staycations-cant-fill-277-billion-tourism-hole

Aring, M. (2015). *ASEAN Economic Community 2015 : Enhancing competitiveness and employability through skill development.* Bangkok: ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Australian Government. (2015, October 7). Higher Education Standards Framework 2015. Retrieved from https://www.teqsa.gov.au/higher-education-standards-framework-2015

Chew, H. M. (2020, July 22). Retrenchments in tourism industry are 'inevitable' without resumption of mass market travel. *Channel News Asia*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/tourism-industry-retrenchment-air-trave

Commonwealth Australia. (2009). *The Jackson Report On Behalf of the Steering Committee.* Retrieved from https://www.tourism.australia.com/content/dam/assets/document/1/6/x/5/p/2002525.pdf

Department of Education, Science and Training. (2002, March). *Employability skills for the future*. Retrieved from VOCEDplus NCVER's International Tertiary Education Research Database: http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/62282

Dunbar, K., Laing, G., & Wynder, M. (2016). A content analysis of accounting job advertisements: Skill requirements for graduates. *e-Journal of Business Education & Scholarship of Teaching, 10*(1), 58 – 72.

Government, A. (2009). *National on-term Tourism Strategy.* Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism. Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved November 1, 2020, from https://www.tourism.australia.com/content/dam/assets/document/1/6/x/6/k/2002556.pdf

Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2020). Socialising tourism for social and ecological justice after COVID-19. *Tourism Geographies, 22*(3), 610-623.

Hinton, T. (2020). *Job losses and suspensions during the COVID-19 crisis in Australia 2020 by industry*. Retrieved December 20, 2020, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/1113718/australia-job-losses-and-suspensions-during-coronavirus-crisis-by-industry/

HospitalityBiz. (2020, November 10). 174 million Travel & Tourism jobs could be lost due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, says WTTC. NA. Athena Information Solutions Pvt. Ltd. *HospitalityBiz*. Retrieved November 26, 2020, from https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A641088769

Jagannathan, S., & Geronimo, D. (2013). *Skills for Competitiveness, Jobs, and Employability in Developing Asia-Pacific.* Manila: Asian Development Bank.

Jorre, d. J., & Oliver , B. (2018). Want students to engage? Contextualise graduate learning outcomes and assess for employability. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(1), 44-57.

Kaushal, V., & Srivastava, S. (2021). Hospitality and tourism industry amid COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives on challenges and learnings from India. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 92*(102707). doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102707

KPMG. (2020, November 18). Government and institution measures in response to COVID-19. Singapore. Retrieved from https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/singapore-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html

Lock, S. (2020, August 21). *COVID-19: Job Loss in Travel and Tourism Sector Worldwide 2020, By Region*. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104835/coronavirus-travel-tourism-employment-loss/

McMurray, S., Dutton, M., McQuaid, R., & Richard, A. (2016). Employer demands from business graduates. *Education + Training, 58*(1), 112-132. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-02-2014-0017

Messum, D., Wilkes, L., Peters, K., & Jackson, D. (2016). Content analysis of vacancy advertisements for employability skills: Challenges and opportunities for informing curriculum development. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability, 6*(1), 72 – 86.

NCVER. (2003). *Defining Generic Skills: At a glance.* Adelaide: Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

OECD. (2016). *Enhansing employability.* Retrieved November 10, 2020, from http://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/employment-and-social-policy/Enhancing-Employability-G20-Report-2016.pdf

OECD. (2019). *OECD Skills Outlook 2019*. doi:https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-outlook-2019_df80bc12-en#page1

Olawale, Y. (2015). The employability skills provision within a construction Project Management Degree programme. *Raidén, A B and Aboagye-Nimo, E (Eds) Procs 31 Annual ARCOM Conference* (pp. 959-968). Lincoln, UK: Association of Researchers in Construction Management.

Oliver, B. (2011). *Assuring graduate outcomes.* The Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Retrieved November 18, 2020

Overtoom, C. (2000). *Employability skills: An update.* Columbus, Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from https://www.ericdigests.org/2001-2/skills.html

Reuters. (2020, December 4). Coronavirus claims 1.5 million lives globally with 10,000 dying each day. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved December 20, 2020, from https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/coronavirus-claims-15-million-lives-globally-with-10000-dying-each-day

Service, S. A. (2013). *Tourism, Travel & Hospitality Workforce Development Strategy 2014 - 2019.* Sydney: Service Skills Australia. Retrieved October 1 , 2020, from http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/372918

Singapore Government . (2020, June 19). Seizing Opportunities and Preparing for the Future. Retrieved December 19, 2020, from https://www.gov.sg/article/seizing-opportunities-and-preparing-for-the-future

Singapore Tourism Board. (2018, November 8). New Measures to Promote Technology Adoption and Create Better Jobs across Hotels. Retrieved December 18, 2020, from https://www.stb.gov.sg/content/stb/en/media-centre/media-releases/new-measures-to-promote-technology-adoption-and-create-better-jobs-across-hotels.html

Suarta, M. I., Suwintana, K. I., Fajar, P. S., & Hariyanti, D. N. (2018, December). Employability Skills for Entry level Workers: A Content Analysis of Job Advertisements in Indonesia. *Journal of Technical Education and Training*, 49-61. doi:10.30880/jtet.2018.10.02.005

Tay, T. F. (2020, July 17). RWS layoffs bode ill for tourism sector. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved November 14, 2020, from https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/rws-layoffs-bode-ill-for-tourism-sector

Toh, T. W. (2020, July 17). Job losses likely to hit MBS eventually, say analysts. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved December 20, 2020, from https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/job-losses-likely-to-hit-mbs-eventually-say-analysts

Tourism Australia. (2020). *Tourism 2020*. Retrieved November 1, 2020, from http://www.tourism.australia.com/en/about/outr-organisation/our-performance-and-reporting/tourism-2020.html

Tourism Australia. (2020). *Tourism 2020.* Retrieved November 1, 2020, from http://www.tourism.australia.com/en/about/outr-organisation/our-performance-and-reporting/tourism-2020.html

UNESCO. (2012). *UNESDOC Digital Library*. Retrieved November 10, 2020, from Graduate employability in Asia: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000215706

UNWTO. (2020). *SUPPORTING JOBS AND ECONOMIES THORUGH TRAVEL TOURISM.* Madrid. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284421633

Warwick, J., & Howard, A. (2015). A note on structuring employability skills for accounting students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 5*(10), 165 – 174. doi:10.6007/IJARBSS/v5-i10/1860

Yorke, M. (2006). *Employability in Higher Education: What it is – What it is not.* York: United Kingdom: The Higher Education Academy.

Yorke, M., & Knight, P. (2006). *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum.* York, United Kingdom: The Higher Education Academy.

Zeng, Z., Chen, P. .., & Lew, A. A. (2020). From high-touch to high-tech: COVID-19 drives robotics adoption. *Tourism Geographies*, 724-734.

Authorship List, Author Affiliation and Contact Information

Dr. Janice Scarinci,

Coordinator Tourism, Hospitality Events Degrees

James Cook University, Townsville Campus

College of Business Law & Governance, Building 28
1 James Cook Drive

Townsville QLD 4811, Australia

Tel: +61 7 4781 4594

Email: Janice.scarinci@jcu.edu.au

Associate Professor Josephine Pryce,

James Cook University, Cairns Campus

College of Business Law & Governance
Australia

Tel: +61 742321426

Email: Josephine.pryce@jcu.edu.au

K Thirumaran

JCU Singapore Business School

James Cook University Singapore

149 Sims Drive, SGP 378380, Singapore

Tel: +65 6709 3716

Email: k.thirumaran@jcu.edu.au

Appendix A: Employability Skills Framework (DEST, 2002, p. 8-9).

Employability Skills Framework

Personal attributes that contribute to overall employability	• Loyalty • Commitment • Honesty and integrity • Enthusiasm • Reliability • Personal presentation • Commonsense	• Positive self-esteem • Sense of humour • Balanced attitude to work and home life • Ability to deal with pressure • Motivation • Adaptability

Skill	Element– (facets of the skill that employers identified as important, noting that the mix and priority of these facets would vary from job to job)
Communication that contributes to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers	• Listening and understanding • Speaking clearly and directly • Writing to the needs of the audience • Negotiating responsively • Reading independently • Empathising • Using numeracy effectively • Understanding the needs of internal and external customers • Persuading effectively • Establishing and using networks • Being assertive • Sharing information • Speaking and writing in languages other than English
Teamwork that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes	• Working with people of different ages, gender, race, religion or political persuasion • Working as an individual and as a member of a team • Knowing how to define a role as part of a team • Applying teamwork skills to a range of situations, e.g. futures planning, crisis problem solving • Identifying the strengths of team members • Coaching, mentoring and giving feedback
Problem solving that contributes to productive outcomes	• Developing creative, innovative solutions • Developing practical solutions • Showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them • Solving problems in teams • Applying a range of strategies to problem solving • Using mathematics including budgeting and financial management to solve problems • Applying problem-solving strategies across a range of areas • Testing assumptions taking the context of data and circumstances into account • Resolving customer concerns in relation to complex project issues

Initiative and enterprise that contribute to innovative outcomes	• Adapting to new situations • Developing a strategic, creative, long-term vision • Being creative • Identifying opportunities not obvious to others • Translating ideas into action • Generating a range of options • Initiating innovative solutions
Planning and organising that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning	• Managing time and priorities – setting timelines, coordinating tasks for self and with others • Being resourceful • Taking initiative and making decisions • Adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies • Establishing clear project goals and deliverables • Allocating people and other resources to tasks • Planning the use of resources including time management • Participating in continuous improvement and planning processes • Developing a vision and a proactive plan to accompany it • Predicting – weighing up risk, evaluating alternatives and applying evaluation criteria • Collecting, analysing and organising information • Understanding basic business systems and their relationships
Self-management that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth	• Having a personal vision and goals • Evaluating and monitoring own performance • Having knowledge and confidence in own ideas and vision • Articulating own ideas and vision • Taking responsibility
Learning that contributes to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes	• Managing own learning • Contributing to the learning community at the workplace • Using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support, networking, information technology (IT), courses • Applying learning to 'technical' issues (e.g. learning about products) and 'people' issues (e.g. interpersonal and cultural aspects of work) • Having enthusiasm for ongoing learning • Being willing to learn in any setting – on and off the job • Being open to new ideas and techniques • Being prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills • Acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change
Technology that contributes to effective execution of tasks	• Having a range of basic IT skills • Applying IT as a management tool • Using IT to organise data • Being willing to learn new IT skills • Having the occupational health and safety knowledge to apply technology • Having the appropriate physical capacity

The framework is discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this report.