



What does employability mean for veterinarians?

The VetSet2Go Project

The VetSet2Go project defined employability as:

"A set of adaptive personal and professional capabilities that enable a veterinarian to gain employment, contribute meaningfully to the profession, and develop a career pathway that achieves satisfaction and success."



Employability, simplistically the ability to **gain and sustain employment**, is becoming an increasingly important concept in higher education and career development in many fields. Since vets typically graduate with high employment prospects and predefined professional career paths, employability has not often been talked about in the veterinary context.

But employability is more than just the ability to remain employed, it is also the capacity to productively **employ your abilities** through harnessing your strengths. It implies being **sustainably satisfied** in work that is personally meaningful. It also refers to the ability to continually develop and transfer skills across multiple jobs or roles over the course of your working life. In other words, employability describes the ingredients and the **recipe for career success**.

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A framework for veterinary employability

The VetSet2Go project developed a **framework for veterinary employability** defining the capabilities most important for employability and success in the veterinary profession. This process was guided by a conception of the successful veterinary professional as one capable of navigating and balancing the (sometimes competing) needs and expectations of multiple stakeholders: employers, colleagues, clients, patients, the broader profession – and importantly, the veterinarian themselves.

After conducting extensive research around the expectations of key stakeholder groups, the VetSet2Go project identified 18 key **capabilities** that are consistently important to employability in veterinary contexts. These aligned to broad, overlapping domains defined by their outcome orientation: **Psychological Resources** (for the self), **Effective Relationships** (for others), **Veterinary Capabilities** (for the task), and **Professional Commitment** (for the mission), all activated by a central element of **Self-Awareness** (for the process).



Domain	Oriented to:	Key capabilities:
Effective Relationships	Effective interactions with others	Collaboration, interpersonal skills, trustworthiness, empathy, respect
Veterinary Capabilities	Efficacy in work-related tasks	Effective communication, confident technical expertise, problem-solving, managing workflow
Professional Commitment	Achieving the broader organisational and professional ' mission '	Commitment, diligence, sustainable engagement, continual learning
Psychological Resources	Supporting the self for satisfaction and wellbeing	Motivation, resilience, adaptability, emotional competence
Self-awareness	Metacognitive development of other capabilities	Reflective self-evaluation, confidence, self-efficacy, personal and professional identity

Employability depends not only on these domains and capabilities as 'assets', but also on the actions and social processes through which they are realized – that is, employability is not only a set of attributes, but also a contextually adaptive process. A fundamental part of the employability process is about self-awareness through **discovering yourself** – your employability strengths and areas for development; your values, ideals and goals; your personal and professional identity. Other process aspects of employability (often called **career engagement**) include:

Work & Life Experience

Actively seeking opportunity for personal and professional growth through experience



Social & Cultural Capital

Building social and professional networks, and learning the 'culture' of the profession



Career Alignment

Building career awareness, to find best fit between work opportunities and congruent ideals

This framework is intended to complement, not replace, existing capability frameworks defined around other essential outcomes such as **competency** and **professionalism**. While competency (the knowledge, skills and attributes underpinning complex professional tasks) and professionalism (the attitudes and behaviours expected of a professional) are fundamental pillars of an effective veterinarian, these primarily represent threshold standards protecting the needs of those served by the profession, rather than the needs of the practitioners themselves. Turning attention to employability helps to balance stakeholder expectations, and highlight the personal and professional attributes which most influence career success and satisfaction.

Capability:

A veterinarian who...

Collaboration & Teamwork	Fits into and supports an effective veterinary team; works with others collaboratively towards shared goals; is friendly and personable
Trustworthiness	Builds trust through honesty, transparency, integrity
Empathy & Respect	Is attentive to others feelings, perspectives and concerns; is non-judgmental, respects diversity of opinion and worldview
Relationship-centred Care	Bases healthcare approaches in human relationships and decision-making in partnership; respects the human-animal bond
Effective Communication	Is a clear and effective communicator (verbal, non-verbal, written); listens and seeks understanding; confidently discusses difficult issues including financial aspects of care
Application of Expertise	Inspires confidence through compassionate animal handling, sound practical skills, and application of specialized knowledge
Problem-solving	Evaluates evidence in support of clinical reasoning and problem-solving; can make decisions despite incomplete information; uses good judgment and 'common sense'
Managing Workflow	Is self-organised in their work; manages priorities and uses time efficiently and productively; uses initiative; is independent
Continual Learning	Is keen to learn, open to feedback, and strives for improvement and best practice
Commitment	Is committed to the veterinary mission, including quality care and welfare, and to organisational goals; takes responsibility
Diligence	Is hard-working, persistent, reliable; gives attention to detail and quality assurance
Sustainable Engagement	Sustains an energetic connection with their work; balances and refreshes their interest, passion and enthusiasm for work with other needs; is self-sustaining
Motivation	Finds motivation and purpose in their work; is self-motivated and intrinsically driven
Resilience	Deals with pressure and adversity; draws on personal and contextual resources, and utilizes strategies to navigate challenges and sustain wellbeing
Adaptability	Is flexible in dealing with change, uncertainty, and shifting priorities; is open-minded
Emotional Competence	Is able to navigate emotional situations and self-regulate emotional responses; remains calm
Reflective Self-evaluation	Is aware of their own strengths and limitations, reflective and learns from experience; is self-aware of emotional responses and behaviours
Self-confidence & Identity	Has positive self-esteem and self-belief, anchored in a professional self-concept based on personal values, beliefs, and goals

The VetSet2Go Project

The VetSet2Go project (2015-2018, www.vetset2go.edu.au) set out to explore what employability means in the veterinary context, to define the capabilities most important for employability and success in the veterinary profession, and create assessment tools and resources to build these capabilities.

The project was a multi-national collaboration between 14 academics across veterinary schools in Australia (Murdoch, Queensland, Sydney, Adelaide), the United Kingdom (Edinburgh, Nottingham) and the United States (Washington State). Additional perspectives, including those of practitioners, professional bodies and interdisciplinary experts, were gathered through consultation, advisory groups, a world-first Veterinary Employability Forum (48 delegates, February 2017), and a Delphi process.

The VetSet2Go evidence

Systematic Review

- 32 included sources
- 10 consensus frameworks

Case Studies

- 9 semi-structured interviews of Australian employer-employee pairs

Employers - Recruitment

- 18 semi-structured interviews of Australian employers

Resilience

- Literature review
- 340 survey respondents – veterinarians
- 110+ surveys - recent graduates (ongoing)
- 15+ interviews of graduates (ongoing)

Client Expectations

- 1599 survey responses
- 8 focus groups
- 6 interviews

Stakeholder Survey

- 1519 survey responses from stakeholders (recent graduates, employed veterinarians, vet and non-vet employers, allied staff, academics and policy makers)

Delphi Panel

- 32 international experts, representatives, practitioners
- 3 rounds of consensus voting

What's important for employability & success

- Effective communication, empathy, relationship-centred care, awareness of limitations, professional values, problem-solving, teamwork, resilience, confidence, business skills

- Self-confidence, communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, 'interpersonal skills', resilience and work-life balance, keenness to learn

- Personal attributes (responsible, agreeable, confident, independent, proactive, organized, diligent, resilient, self-aware, teachable, work ethic)
- Interpersonal skills (teamwork, communication, leadership, manners, professional image, client relations)
- Veterinary capabilities (animal handling, business sensibilities, veterinary knowledge & skills, physical capability, problem-solving)
- Job match (career goals, cultural fit, retention likelihood, realistic expectations)

- Emotional competence, motivation, personal resources (self-efficacy, optimism, reflection), social support, organisational culture, life balance, wellbeing strategies
- Self-compassion, mindfulness, social support

- Commitment to quality care and animal welfare, decision making and problem solving, commitment to quality and the profession, professionalism, communication skills

- Communication skills (clients and colleagues), teamwork, working behavior (work ethic, honesty, integrity), technical competence, psychological capital (motivation, resilience, personal efficacy)

- Communication (clients and colleagues), teamwork, reflection, professionalism, keen to learn, resilience, adaptability, knowledge & skills, proactive, problem-solving, workflow management, diligence, responsibility

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