

Character Qualities for the Workplace: BIAC Survey

Synthesis Report, June 2015

I. Executive Summary

All individuals possess a certain mix of knowledge and skills that are learned either formally or informally throughout a lifetime. But knowledge and skills are only part of what determines a person's employability and participation in society, and the importance of an individual's 'character' cannot be understated.

According to the Oxford Dictionary Online, the term 'character' is defined as 'the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual'. Such qualities are sometimes referred to as 'social and emotional skills' (OECD), which include: agency, aptitudes, attitudes, behaviors, compass, dispositions, mind-sets, personality, temperament, and values. In this report, we use the term 'character qualities', covering both performance character (i.e. one's mastery and thrust for excellence in life, school, and the workplace) and moral character (i.e. relational and ethical – how one treats oneself and others in interpersonal and social matters).

A person's character plays a critical role in the workplace. Character qualities may affect the ability of an individual to lead, to overcome obstacles, to uphold ethical behavior, to generate new ideas, and to boost motivation, among others. More generally, the recruitment of personnel, the functioning of teams, and the productivity of enterprises may depend in many ways on individual character qualities.

Recognizing the importance of character qualities, the BIAC Education Committee administered a survey of national employer organizations in April 2015. The survey aimed to understand, from an employer's perspective, which character traits are considered important for an employee to succeed.

The BIAC Character Qualities for the Workplace Survey 2015 raises three key findings:

- 1. Employer organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of character qualities for the workplace.** Half of respondents report that they are already focusing a lot on this issue in their education policy activities, and 80% consider that character qualities for the workplace will become a more important issue for their organizations in the future.
- 2. Many character qualities are considered important for the workplace, including in particular ethics and leadership.** The majority of respondents indicated that character qualities such as mindfulness, curiosity, courage, resilience, ethics, and leadership are all important. This was most apparent in the case of ethics and leadership (reported by 67% of respondents as being of very high importance).
- 3. Education systems should do more to promote important character qualities in the workplace.** All respondents reported that national education systems should do more to focus on character qualities for the workplace.

II. Main Findings

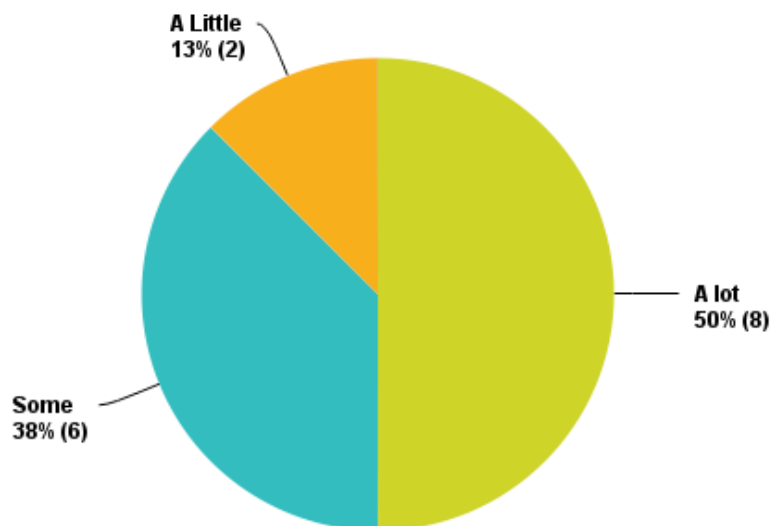
Importance of Character Qualities for the Workplace

National employer organizations' focus on character qualities for the workplace

The first question asked respondents to what extent their organization's activities on education policy and/or human resources focus on character qualities for the workplace. Respondents could select from: a lot, some, or a little.

Out of a total of 16 responses, 8 replied that their organization focuses a lot on character qualities for the workplace (Figure 1). A third of respondents replied that their organization focuses to some extent. The responses to this question suggest that a focus on character qualities for the workplace is important to BIAC member organizations.

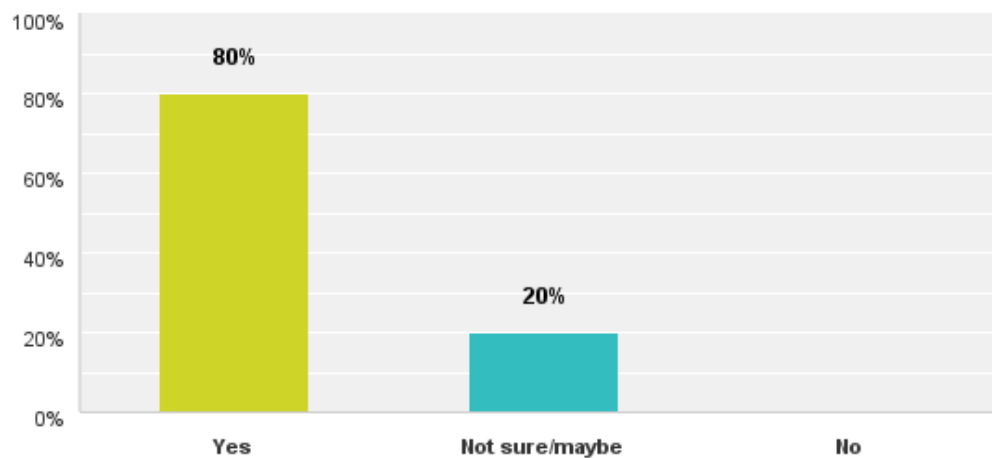
Figure 1: In your organization's activities on education policy and/or human resources, to what extent do you focus on character qualities for the workplace?



Growing importance of character qualities in the activities of employer organizations

The survey asked respondents to what extent they consider character qualities for the workplace becoming a more important issue for their organizations in the future. Out of 15 responses, 80% of respondents answered that character qualities will indeed become a more important issue in the future (Figure 2). A minority replied they were not sure. This finding suggests that the private sector is likely to focus increasingly on character qualities for the workplace in coming years.

Figure 2: Do you see character qualities for the workplace becoming a more important issue for your organization in the future?



Importance of Specific Character Qualities

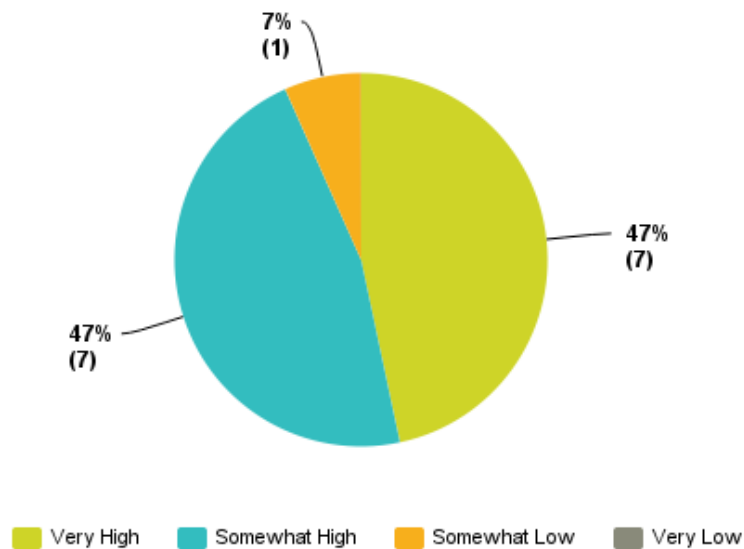
Respondents were asked for their views as to the relative importance of six character qualities for the workplace: mindfulness, curiosity, courage, resilience, ethics, and leadership.

Mindfulness

Respondents were informed that the term ‘mindfulness’ may include, for example, self-esteem, growth, vision, empathy, patience, balance, and interdependency.

Just under half of respondents (47%) indicated that mindfulness is a very important character quality for the workplace (Figure 3). The same number reported mindfulness as being of somewhat high importance. Only one respondent considered mindfulness to be of somewhat low importance for the workplace.

Figure 3: How important is MINDFULNESS as a character quality for the workplace?

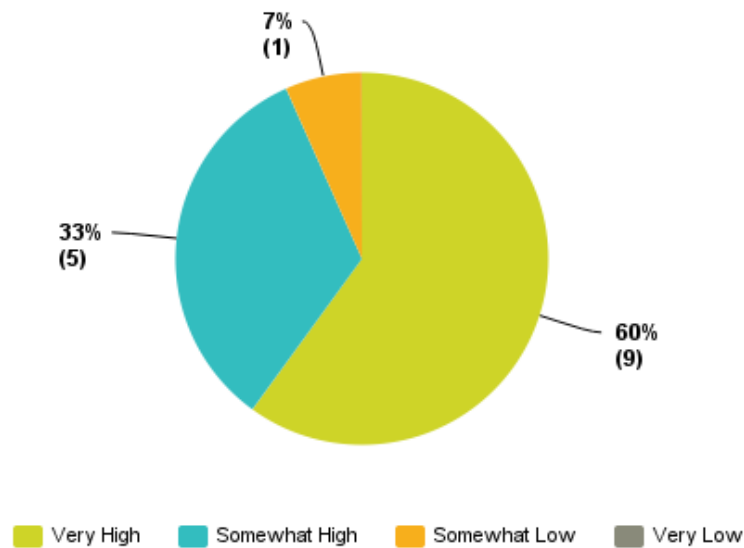


Curiosity

Respondents were informed that the term ‘curiosity’ may include, for example, open-mindedness, exploration, passion, self-direction, motivation, initiative, and innovation.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents expressed that curiosity is of very high importance in the workplace, while one third expressed it as being of somewhat high importance (Figure 4). This suggests that employers tend to consider curiosity as being of relatively more importance than mindfulness in the workplace, though both qualities are important.

Figure 4: How important is CURIOSITY as a character quality in the workplace?

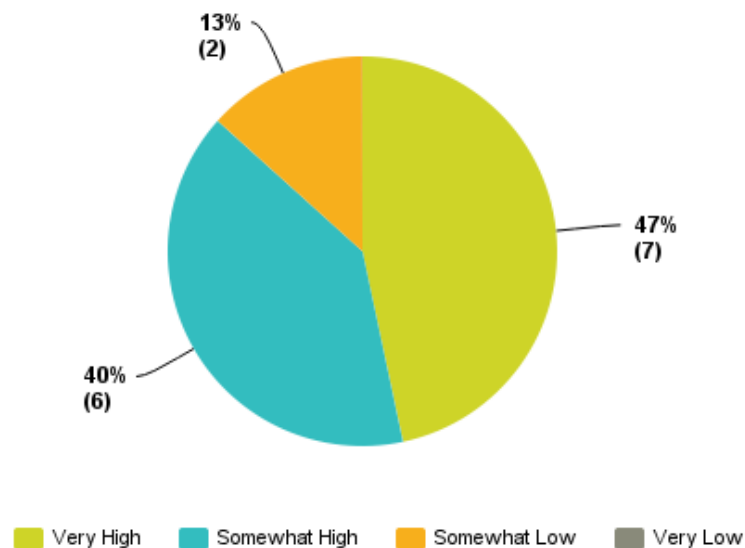


Courage

Respondents were informed that ‘courage’ may include traits and concepts such as determination, confidence, risk taking, persistence, toughness, optimism, energy and cheerfulness.

Just under half of respondents considered courage as a very important character quality for the workplace (Figure 5). 40% of respondents reported that courage is somewhat important for the workplace, while 13% felt it was of somewhat low importance. The findings suggest that, relatively speaking, courage is not considered quite as important for the workplace as curiosity (Figure 4).

Figure 5: How important is COURAGE as a character quality for the workplace?

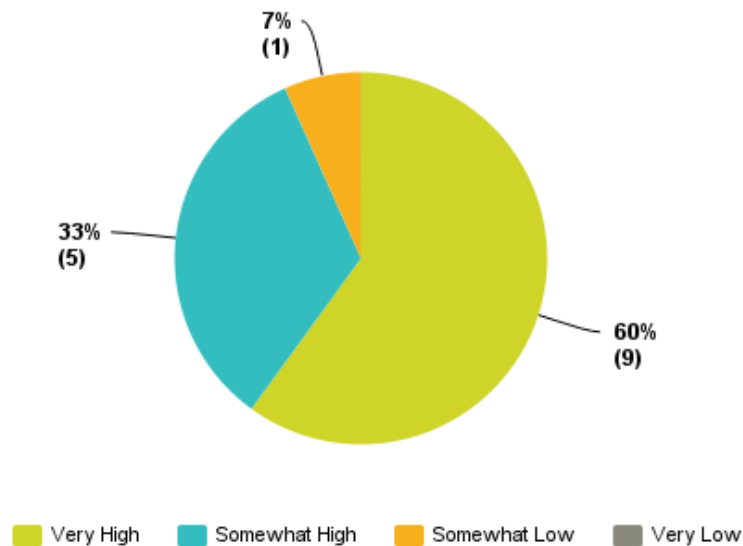


Resilience

Respondents were informed that ‘resilience’ includes, for example, perseverance, resourcefulness, tenacity, grit, adaptability, dealing with ambiguity, flexibility, self-discipline, and commitment.

60% of respondents selected resilience as being of high importance to the workplace (Figure 6), while a third considered it of somewhat high importance. The findings suggest that resilience and curiosity (Figure 4) are both perceived as being relatively more important in the workplace than mindfulness or courage.

Figure 6: How important is resilience as a character quality in the workplace?

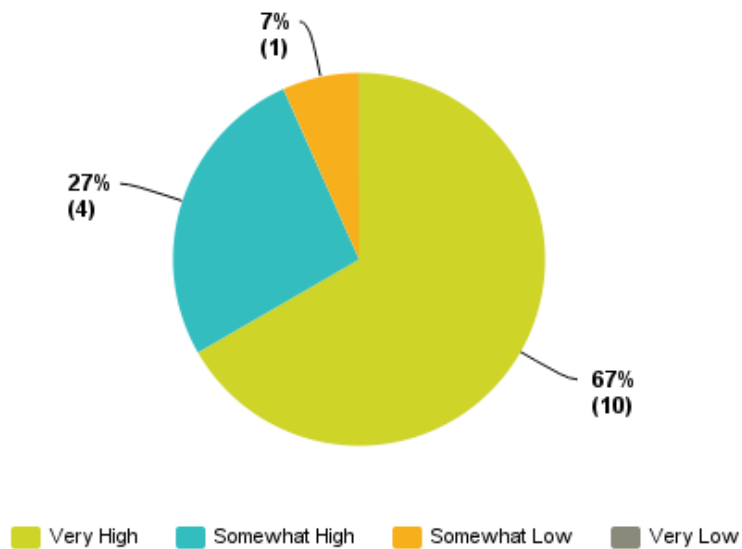


Ethics

Respondents were informed that ‘ethics’ may refer to humaneness, kindness, respect, justice, fairness, tolerance, integrity, loyalty, honesty and generosity.

Two-thirds of respondents rated ethics as having very high importance for the workplace, while just over a quarter reported ethics as having somewhat high importance (Figure 7).

Figure 7: How important is ethics as a character quality in the workplace?



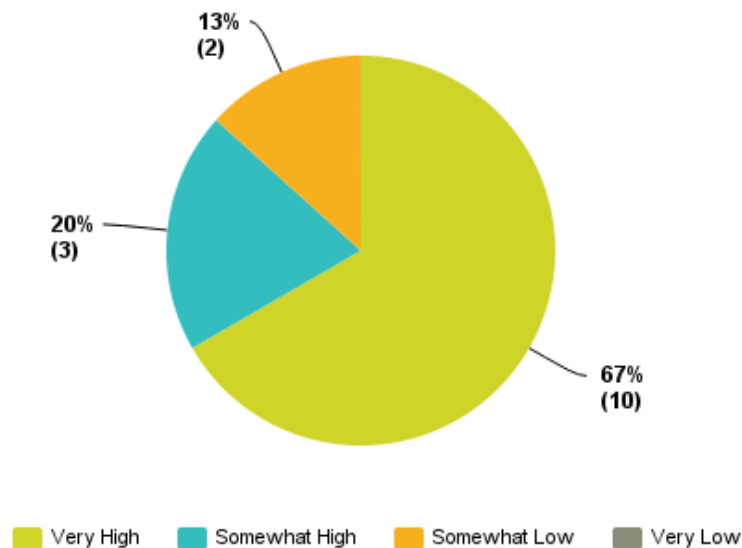
Leadership

Respondents were informed that ‘leadership’ may refer to responsibility, accountability, integrity, organization, delegation, social awareness, cross-cultural awareness, reliability, productivity, results orientation, socialization and negotiation.

Similar to ethics (Figure 7), two-thirds of respondents expressed that leadership is of very high importance for the workplace (Figure 8).

Thus while all six character qualities examined in the survey were considered as being of very high or somewhat high importance by the vast majority of respondents, some qualities were considered as being of relatively higher importance than others – notably ethics and leadership.

Figure 8: How important is leadership as a character quality in the work place?



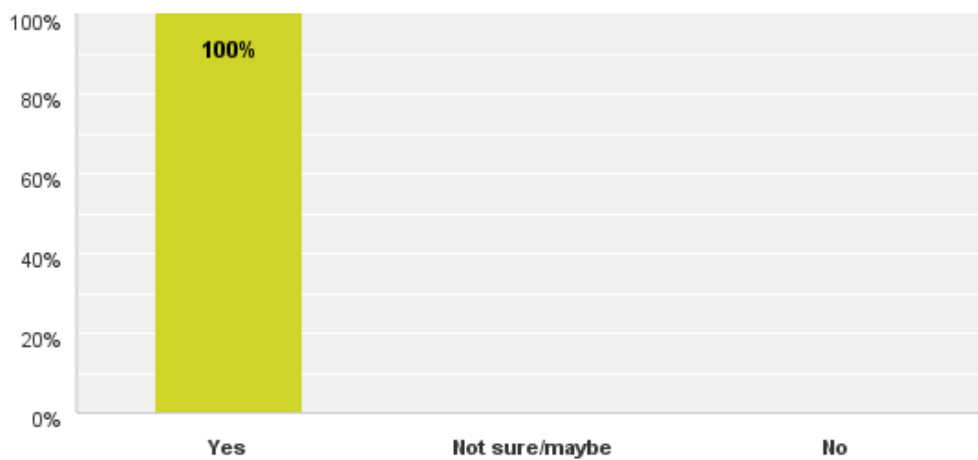
Other qualities

In addition to the six qualities presented in the BIAC survey, respondents were encouraged to identify other character qualities that they considered important for the workplace. Commonly recurring themes included *ambition, humility, enthusiasm, and empathy*.

Role of the Education System

When asked whether national education systems should do more to promote important character qualities for the workplace, 100% of respondents answered yes (Figure 9). This finding points to a widespread impression that education systems can do more to promote character qualities for the workplace.

Figure 9: Do you think the education system in your country should do more to promote important character qualities for the workplace?



III. Conclusions

The results of the BIAC Character Qualities for the Workplace Survey 2015 reinforce several important business messages to the OECD and governments:

- **Employer organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of character qualities for the workplace.** Half of respondents report that they are already focusing a lot on this issue in their education policy activities, and 80% consider that character qualities for the workplace will become a more important issue for their organizations in the future.
- **Many character qualities are considered important for the workplace, including in particular ethics and leadership.** The majority of respondents indicated that character qualities such as mindfulness, curiosity, courage, resilience, ethics, and leadership are all important. This was most apparent in the case of ethics and leadership (reported by 67% of respondents as being of very high importance).
- **Education systems should do more to promote important character qualities in the workplace.** All respondents reported that national education systems should do more to focus on character qualities for the workplace.

BIAC trusts that the findings contained in the BIAC survey should provide useful input to the OECD's ground-breaking work on social and emotional skills, and the work of the OECD Education Policy Committee in future.

Annex: Methodological Notes

Timeline

This survey was launched in late March 2015 and concluded in April 2015. This synthesis report was prepared from May-June 2015.

Respondents

16 national business and employer organizations from several continents participated in the survey on a voluntary basis.¹ Only one response per country and per organization was accepted.

While the sample size remains relatively small, it is important to consider that each participating business and employer organization holds thousands of companies across several economic sectors in their respective memberships. In completing the survey, it was expected that the organizations would ensure well-balanced and representative responses.

Confidentiality

In order to encourage respondents to freely put forth their respective views and priorities, it was decided to ensure the confidentiality of their responses. For the purposes of this synthesis report, the names of participating organizations and their responses have been anonymized.

Survey Structure

The survey was structured into five main parts:

- I. Basic information of respondent
- II. Extent of focus on character qualities in the workplace
- III. Importance of specific character qualities in the workplace
- IV. Role of the education system
- V. Additional comments and feedback

Contact

If you would be interested to receive further information, please contact BIAC Policy Director, Mr. Jonny Greenhill, at greenhill@biac.org.

¹ Respondent countries were: Austria, Australia, Brazil, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Latvia, Mexico, New Zealand, Sweden, Slovenia, United Kingdom, and United States.