

Soft Skills Development

*Improving
Organizational
Effectiveness*



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Introduction

It's been found that soft skills are essential to an organization's success. Unlike in the past, employees are viewed as the most valuable asset and are represented by the level of human capital an organization possesses. In order to leverage their human capital, organizations must commit to the development of their workforce. No longer do employees work in isolation but more as a collective entity that is in keeping with the organizational objectives. This increased demand of employees working together requires improved skills, knowledge and social behaviour that can lead to greater connectivity¹.

In order for collaboration to occur, employees must be able to interact with one another. Soft skills, which are associated with an individual's emotional intelligence¹, can reduce the dysfunction that exists within organizations. Although, soft skills may not eradicate dysfunction altogether, they can help to reduce it. Because organizations are a microcosm of real-world relationships, it's imperative that companies develop employee soft skills so that interaction can occur at a meaningful level and lead to higher performance.

Adding to this potential dysfunction is the diversity within our communities and how organizations reflect this. Bringing together various cultures, races and backgrounds can make it challenging for working together². Soft skills provide employees with the ability to self reflect and in turn understand how they view the world with an understanding that everyone views it differently. This opens up the opportunity for employees to look through multiple lenses that can lead to a greater understanding of how others view the world. As a result, this can help increase connectivity through tolerance of others and the openness to new ideas.

However, adding to these challenging times, Canadian employers believe there is a shortage of skilled workers³. On average, open positions are not being filled 12 weeks longer than they have historically been, impacting morale, productivity and retention among existing employees. As a result, a lower quality of work is being done due to employees being overworked, employees are less motivated, and there are declines in customer service and higher employee turnover rates³.

Ultimately, organizations are striving for success. In order to achieve success they must have a workforce that works together towards the same common goal. Soft skills enable employees to understand the required social behaviour to effectively work with others, thus increasing the likelihood of better performance. In light of the skills gap, organizations must provide soft skills development to improve performance and tap into this increased connectivity. By training in house, organizations can circumvent the skill shortage by hiring individuals who may not be the perfect fit but can be trained on the required soft skills, and/or developing soft skills with their existing employees.

Why Should Organizations Implement Soft Skills Training?

Prior to investing in anything, organizations need to realize their potential return. Implementing soft skills training is essential in a day and age where employees working together, interacting with customers and other stakeholders is commonplace^{4,5}. Ultimately, training helps to improve:

- Competitiveness
- Morale
- Profitability
- Customer satisfaction
- Market share
- Company reputation and profile

1 Mathew, S. & Pande, V.S. Soft Skill Training – A method of improving organizations productivity. Tactful Management Research Journal. ISSN: 2319-7943. <http://tmgt.lsrj.in/SeminarPdf/158.pdf>

2 Thiederman, S. Improving Relationships among Culturally-diverse staff. http://www.workforcediversitynetwork.com/docs/Articles/Article_ImprovingRelationships_Thiederman2.08.pdf

3 2015 – Half of Canadian Employers Feel There is a Shortage of Skilled Workers, CareerBuilder.ca Survey Finds. http://www.careerbuilder.ca/ca/share/aboutus/press-releasesdetail.aspx?sd=9%2f24%2f2015&siteid=cbpr&sc_cmp1=cb_pr95_&id=pr95&ed=12%2f31%2f2015

4 How can training courses be used as a company benefit? Retrieved from <http://hiring.monster.co.uk/hr/hr-best-practices/workforce-management/employee-pay-benefits/how-can-training-courses-be-used-as-a-company-benefit.aspx>

5 5 key benefits of organizational development. Retrieved from <http://www.explorance.com/5-key-benefits-organizational-development/>

It can also lead to reductions in:

- Inefficient use of time and materials
- Workplace accidents
- Maintenance costs of equipment
- Staff turnover and absenteeism
- Recruitment expenses

This report is an attempt to highlight the importance of soft skills development in a globally competitive marketplace and to provide a framework for moving forward in improving employee soft skills so that connectivity improves. Increased connectivity can lead to organizational effectiveness. More specifically, this report will help to:

1. Understand Soft Skills
2. Examine how Soft Skills improve organizational effectiveness
3. Identify Soft Skills requirements for organizations
4. Close Soft Skills gaps
5. Implement a Soft Skills development strategy
6. Identify Soft Skills Best Practices

The report has been structured to follow a sequential process for how to effectively incorporate soft skills development into an organization. Each phase of the process will provide information that can help with the implementation of a successful soft skills development program. Additionally, best practices are introduced that help to guide each phase of the process.

Visual Map of the Report

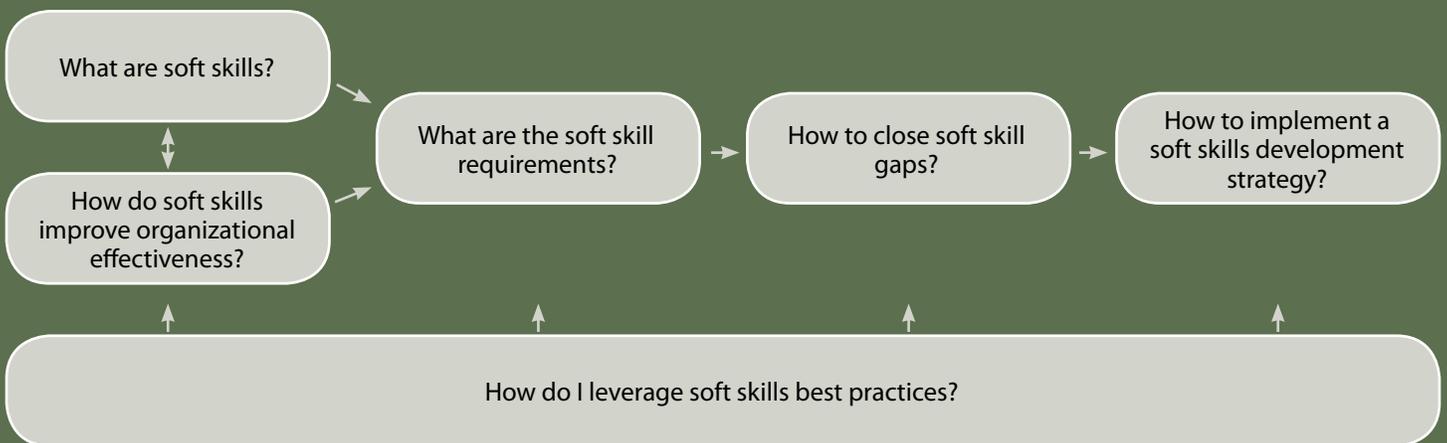


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1. Understanding

Soft Skills

Defining Soft Skills: What are soft skills and how do they impact business today?

Soft skills are personal attributes that enable individuals to interact effectively with one another. More specifically, soft skills are behaviours that allow individuals to work and socialize well with others. Ultimately, they are behaviours that foster relationships within an organization that may lead to improved productivity.

In a recent survey, it was found that organizations listed soft skills as the most important attribute in their hiring decision⁶. In fact, over 50% of respondents listed 'People skills/relationship-building' as a key skill. This is in line with the research that has demonstrated that organizations whose employees collaborate are more likely to be more productive and innovative⁷.

Competencies are often regarded as the effective application of soft skills as they outline the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) required to perform within a given organization and job role. There are typically two levels to competencies, one, core and two, job specific. Core competencies represent the KSA's required for an employee to work at the organization, where job specific competencies are specific to a particular position. For example, the competency 'collaboration' may be a key component to the organizational strategy and therefore is required of all employees. A competency such as 'Managing conflict' may be geared to a particular position such as a customer service representative.

Note: For the purpose of this report, competencies will be used as a means of effectively applying 'soft skills'.

Identifying soft skills and creating competencies can help organizations to:

- Develop a model for high-performing teams. Select and train team members, used for team building.
- Expand hiring and succession pool. Models usually challenge assumptions about required competencies and identify alternative sources of talent, thus improving diversity.
- Retain key employees. Target retention of top performers. Employees who see expanded opportunities for growth are more likely to stay (also impacts morale).
- Redesign jobs. Analysis of a job during model building can reveal ineffective job design plus suggested improvements from competency teams.
- Certify competence levels. Design certification programs to develop and reward competency development.
- Design feedback instruments and other developmental tools.
- Assess training needs and provide a conceptual framework for a curriculum with a common language and demonstrated impact on enhancing job performance.

⁶ Preliminary survey report: the skill needs of major Canadian employers. Taking action for Canada: Jobs and Skills for the 21st Century. January 2014. <http://www.ceocouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Preliminary-report-on-skills-survey-Jan-20-2014-2.pdf>

⁷ Exploring Employee motivation in Collaborative Ideation Communities. 35th DRUID Celebration Conference, 2013, Barcelona, Spain. http://druid8.sit.aau.dk/acc_papers/p6ye8716vkptgelqkx071vgne27.pdf

Soft Skills vs. Hard Skills: What is the difference between soft and hard skills?

Hard skills are viewed as the technical skill set required for a specific job. The uniqueness of hard skills varies from position and industry. Often, hard skills are obtained through education, experience and/or technical training. Examples of hard skills include an accountancy diploma, fluency in a foreign language, knowledge of a particular software or experience in a particular industry sector.

In most cases, the technical skills required for a new job opening become the minimum entry point for consideration by the employer. What typically set candidates apart are their soft skills. Soft skills are skills, abilities and traits that pertain to personality, attitude and behaviour. For example, a technology company hiring a programmer is not going to interview someone who does not know how to code. In essence, all candidates for that role will have an understanding of programming with varying degrees of experience. What typically separates the chosen candidate is their ability to communicate their value and ability to integrate with an existing group of employees.

Soft skills have become an important component of an organization's competitive advantage⁸. Through higher levels of soft skills, employees can not only effectively work together but equally interact with customers, suppliers and other stakeholders that determine business success. Since 2008, there has been a growth in enrollment at colleges and universities across Canada⁹. This increase has improved the hard skills possessed by job candidates, but does not necessarily focus on soft skills. Soft skills development, although the responsibility of the individual should equally be shared with the employer. In essence, organizations need to hire hard skills and develop soft skills.

Not all Soft Skills are Equal: How do soft skills differ by sector, industry and geography?

Soft skills are typically universal across all organizational types¹⁰; however, there are instances where different sectors and industries have unique soft skills requirements. For example, the technology industry requires a high level of collaboration to enable innovation and therefore may require a higher level of soft skill. The ability of its workforce to work together requires a highly collaborative skill set. Although other industries require similar skills the uniqueness of the technology sector is that it is in constant flux and change occurs much more rapidly than others. Other industries experience constant change as well but might not require as high a level of the soft skill.

Soft skills are behaviours that allow individuals to work and socialize well with others.



8 Kil Kelly, E. (2025). Gaining a competitive advantage through soft skills. The Training Journal. <https://www.trainingjournal.com/blog/gaining-competitive-advantage-through-soft-skills>

9 AUCC (2011). Trends in Higher Education. Volume 1 – Enrolment. <http://www.aucc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/trends-2011-vol1-enrolment-e.pdf>

10 Ramesh, G. & Ramesh, M. (2010). The Ace of Soft Skills: Attitude, Communication and Etiquette for Success. Pearson Publishing.

2. Examining

How Soft Skills improve Organizational Effectiveness

Organizational effectiveness can be defined as reaching the overall objective and goals of the strategy. In order for this to occur, employee skill sets must be in line with the direction of the organization. Recognizing the behaviours required from the workforce is essential to staying competitive in the market place. If alignment can be achieved so can organizational effectiveness.

How do Soft Skills improve organizational effectiveness? How do soft skills make a business more competitive in their marketplace?

A collaborative organizational culture has been found to be an effective environment for innovation and productivity¹¹. Additionally, high-level soft skills, such as, communication, problem solving and conflict resolution lead to a more conducive environment that helps to retain employees¹². Essentially, organizations are a network that involves relationships among its employees, when individuals leave it disrupts the network. To some degree, there is a level of dysfunction in all relationships and organizations are not immune to this. A workforce with higher-level soft skills may minimize dysfunction and help to create an environment that is conducive to relationship building. Through these relationships, collaboration and connectivity is more likely to increase thus improving the chances of a more productive workforce.

In fact, most businesses are built on the ability to collaborate. Success depends on the ability of its employees to work together to achieve a common objective – organizational success¹³. However, highly collaborative organizations may face more conflict and without higher-level soft skills may not be able to deal with the stress that goes with it. If conflict can be minimized and collaboration increased the collective knowledge of employees can be leveraged to increase overall profitability of the organization.

In order for organizational effectiveness to occur, the importance of aligning employee behaviour to organizational objectives is critical. For example, if an organization's objective is to improve customer retention, the behaviours associated with that could include:

- **Emotional Control:** the ability to maintain a rational and objective demeanor when faced with stressful or emotional situations; a measure of self-composure in a difficult situation and the ability to act objectively, rather than impulsively or emotionally.
- **Empathetic Outlook:** the ability to perceive and understand the feelings and aptitudes of others; the ability to place oneself "in the shoes" of another and to view a situation from their perspective.
- **Handling Stress:** the ability to balance and defuse inner tensions and stresses; the ability to appropriately separate yourself from stressful situations and maintain your own sense of inner peace.

11 Preliminary survey report: the skill needs of major Canadian employers. Taking action for Canada: Jobs and Skills for the 21st Century. January 2014. <http://www.ceocouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Preliminary-report-on-skills-survey-Jan-20-2014-2.pdf>

12 Soft Skill Training – A method of improving organizations productivity. Tactful Management Research Journal. <http://tmgt.lsrj.in/SeminarPdf/158.pdf>

13 Leung, S. (2014). Here are the Soft Skills Most Important to Your Business. Salesforce Blog. <https://www.salesforce.com/blog/2014/08/business-soft-skills.html>

- **Human Awareness:** the ability to be conscious of the feelings and opinions of others; to value others as people instead of just their organizational role value.
- **Persuading Others:** the ability to convince others, to present one's viewpoint in such a way that it is accepted by others.

By ensuring that employees possess these soft skills it may be more likely that the organization will achieve their objective of improving customer retention. If employees do not possess these skills, training interventions can be introduced to address the gap.

What are some examples of Soft Skills inventories? What soft skills models have already been validated that can be used to determine business need?

Although there are no universally accepted soft skills models that have been adopted by organizations, there are a number of existing models that can help to serve as a starting point. Ideally, an organization is aligning its soft skills requirements to its overall strategic direction. Typically, the first step in the process is determining what skills are required (see section 'Identifying Soft Skills Requirements for Organizations') and then assessing the workforce to determine what soft skill gaps exist. However, having an idea of various soft skills can speed up the process for implementing a soft skills development program.

For this report, three inventories were reviewed to determine if there was a common thread identified among employer soft skill requirements. The models reviewed are presented in the form of competencies. This helps to group skills in to specific behaviours. In essence, the listed competencies represent the themes of a subset of skills required to effectively perform on the job.

The first model is one of the more popular resources called the Career One Stop, which is out of the U.S. and offers a free tool for organizations to build competency models. The framework is based on a 'building blocks model' and is divided in to various tiers with industry specific validated models¹⁴. The first tier of the 'building blocks' model is the Personal Effectiveness Competencies, essentially soft skills. The skills included at this tier include:

- **Interpersonal Skills:** Displaying the skills to work effectively with others from diverse backgrounds.
- **Integrity:** Displaying strong moral principles and work ethics.
- **Professionalism:** Maintaining a professional presence.
- **Initiative:** Demonstrating a commitment to effective job performance by taking action on one's own and following through to get the job done.
- **Dependability and Reliability:** Displaying responsible behaviours at work.
- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Displaying the capability to adapt to new, different or changing requirements.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Demonstrating a commitment to self-development and improvement of knowledge and skills.

Personal effectiveness competencies address an individual's ability to integrate into a workplace environment. This calls for a well-rounded individual who is able to coexist with fellow employees in a collaborative way and work with customers, suppliers and other stakeholders.

Additional tiers include:

- **Tier 2:** Academic Competencies (reading, writing, mathematics, science and technology, communication, critical and analytical thinking, basic computer skills)
- **Tier 3:** Workplace Competencies (teamwork, customer focus, planning and organizing, creative thinking, problem solving and decision making, working with tools and technology, scheduling and coordinating, checking and recording, business fundamentals, sustainable practices, health and safety)
- **Tier 4:** Industry-Wide Technical Competencies (specific to industry and model does not include any competencies)
- **Tier 5:** Industry-Sector Technical Competencies (specific to industry and model does not include any competencies)
- **Tier 6:** Includes Management Competencies and Occupation-Specific Competencies (e.g., staffing, informing, delegating, networking, monitoring work, entrepreneurship)

The second model is a recent study conducted out of the U.S. to determine what soft skills are required by youth (16-29) to effectively integrate into the labour market¹⁵. Findings revealed that there were 5 key competencies of soft skills for youth workforce success:

- **Social Skills:** refer to a number of skills required to get along well with others (i.e., respecting others, using context-appropriate behaviour and resolving conflict).
- **Communication Skills:** includes effective expression, transmission, understanding and interpretation of knowledge and ideas.
- **Higher-order Thinking:** consists of problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making.
- **Self-control:** the ability of an individual to delay gratification, control impulses, direct and focus attention, manage emotions, and regulate behaviours.
- **A Positive Self-concept:** includes self-confidence, self-awareness and beliefs, as well as self-esteem and a sense of well being and pride.

The study found that employers expect to see these skills in interviews and on the job. More specifically, the study describes that these skills are critical to fully integrating in to today's workforce. These soft skills are similar to the Career One Stop first tier and speak to the importance of an individual's ability to connect with other employees to work collaboratively.

The final model this report reviewed is the Government of Canada Essential skills¹⁶. In this model there are a mix of technical and soft skills. To understand the various levels of each skill there is an assessment of complexity component built into the model. For example, the skill 'reading' requires a complexity level of 3 for most jobs – even for those that don't require higher education or specialized training (e.g., level 3 reading is needed for workers to succeed in job-specific training and read safety-related information).

15 Workforce Connections: Key 'Soft Skills' That Foster Youth Workforce Success: Toward a Consensus Across Fields. June 2015.

16 Government of Canada Essential Skills Website. http://www.esdc.gc.ca/en/essential_skills/profiles/guide.page#h2.3-h3.4

The skills are as follows:

- **Reading***: skills needed to understand and apply information found in sentences and paragraphs.
- **Document Use***: skills needed to find, enter and use letters, numbers, symbols and images in electronic and paper formats.
- **Writing**: skills needed to compose handwritten or typed text to communicate information and ideas.
- **Numeracy***: skills needed to make sense of and apply mathematical concepts and information.
- **Oral Communication**: skills needed to exchange thoughts and information with other people by speaking, listening and using non-verbal cues, such as body language.
- **Thinking**: skills needed to solve problems, make decisions, think critically, plan, remember details and find information.
- **Digital Technology***: skills needed to understand and use digital systems, tools and applications, and to process digital devices.
- **Working with Others**: skills needed to interact with other people (one or more).
- **Continuous Learning**: skills needed to continually develop and improve one's skills and knowledge in order to work effectively and adapt to changes.

High-level soft skills allow connectivity to occur in organizations opening up opportunities for information sharing, relationship development and higher levels of productivity.



**Considered hard skills or technical skills*

All three of these models share some similarities. For example, the theme of collaboration is threaded throughout. The importance of connectivity among employees is important to increasing the likelihood of creativity and is based on trust¹⁷. In order for trust to build, employees must be able to relate to one another and be aware of who they are and how they interact with others. High-level soft skills allow connectivity to occur in organizations opening up opportunities for information sharing, relationship development and higher levels of productivity¹⁸.

Additionally, the commitment to continued development can be found in two of the models indicating that the responsibility of skill development is incumbent of the individual. This is an important theme as soft skills typically take time to fully develop and in partnership with the employer may occur if the individual and employer are committed to its relevance to the workplace. Also, the notion of critical thinking can be found throughout all models and represents an individual's ability to problem solve, make decisions and handle conflict.

17 Carmeli, A. C. & Spreitzer, G.M. (2011). Trust, Connectivity and Thriving: Implications for Innovative Behaviors at Work. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 42(3), 169-191.

18 Hatala, J.P. & Lutta, J. (2009). Managing information sharing within an organizational setting: A social network perspective. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 21(4), 5-33.

Comparison of Three Models

	Career One Stop	Workforce Connections	Essential Skills
Soft Skills	Interpersonal Skills	Social Skills	Working with Others
	Lifelong Learning	-	Continuous Learning
	-	Communication Skills	Oral Communication
	Adaptability and Flexibility	Higher-order Thinking	Thinking
	Professionalism	Self-control	-
	-	A Positive Self-concept	-
	Integrity	-	-
	Initiative	-	-
Hard Skills	Dependability and Reliability	-	-
	-	-	Reading
	-	-	Document Use
	-	-	Writing
	-	-	Numeracy
			Digital Technology

The three models presented here should serve as a starting point for considering the key skills required for organizational effectiveness. Taking a double-pronged approach, organizations can determine what skills are required to effectively meet their overall objectives while at the same time ensuring that employees are being developed. Linking soft skills to organizational objectives is a way to align training investment with the business strategy.

It's important to know what soft skills are important to an organization and these three models provide an example of what organizations are doing across North America. However, making sure required soft skills are aligned with the strategic direction is key. In the section 'How to Identify Soft Skills Requirements' (Page 15), the process of aligning soft skills to business strategy is discussed.

Can Soft Skills be taught?

Exploring the difference between must have soft skills
and those that can be taught on the job.

When it comes to hiring soft skills, employers often take a two-pronged approach. The first approach is to identify the critical soft skills for organizational success and hire new employees based on those criteria. The second approach and often combined with the first is to hire candidates with the potential to become more competent in the required soft skills and offer training while employed.

In order to improve soft skills development among employees the need to offer well-rounded training opportunities is key¹⁹. A study conducted by UdeMy for Business found that 72 percent of companies surveyed provide training that is only related to employees' roles²⁰, not the development of soft skills. When organizations invest in soft skills training it adds value for the employee knowing that their own development is being considered. In return, organizations get well-rounded individuals who know how to effectively contribute to a team environment. In the end, everyone benefits.

¹⁹ Fallon, N. (2015). Soft Skills Matter: Can They Be Taught? Business News Daily, April 10, 2015. <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/7907-improve-employee-soft-skills.html>

²⁰ UdeMy Report (2014). <https://business.udemy.com/>

What's the organization's responsibility in soft skill development?

The old adage 'You get out of it what you put into it' holds true for organizational success. The human capital of an organization does not only represent the success of the organization but whether it can remain competitive over time. Soft skills represent the competitive differentiator in that the company has a better chance of working collaboratively which can lead to increased productivity. Additionally, soft skills development assists employees working with customers, suppliers and a number of different stakeholders. Ultimately, if organizations want to stay competitive, stay in business and continue to keep loyal customers, soft skills development is necessary. Those organizations who do not develop their workforce may suffer as a result.



In order to improve soft skills development among employees the need to offer well-rounded training opportunities is key.

3. Identifying

Soft Skills Requirements for Organizations

Before an organization starts to develop soft skills, it's important to identify two key components: 1) what soft skills are important? and 2) what are the soft skills gaps?.

How to identify Soft Skills requirements:

Methods and approaches to identifying soft skill needs.

Before identifying soft skills gaps, it's imperative that organization's understand which competencies (skills) will lead to organizational success. This can be done through the identification of skills that are aligned with the organizations objectives. For example, if an objective involves developing long-lasting customer relationships with repeat sales, the soft skills required to accomplish this may include 'relationship development' and 'conflict resolution'.

Questions to consider working through the identification of competencies could include:

1. What are the ongoing and anticipated changes – in the organization, industry and marketplace – that are affecting the job?
2. What are the key responsibilities of the position?
3. What skills and/or knowledge are required?
4. Describe a recent problem you had that was successfully resolved. Why did this end successfully?
5. Describe a recent problem you had that was not successfully resolved. Why did this end unsuccessfully?
6. What behaviors distinguish the more successful from the less successful individual?
7. What is the primary challenge the position faces? What are the skills, knowledge, and characteristics that need to be developed to meet that challenge?

The following are suggestions when identifying soft skills for a specific job position:

- When developing the list, try to think in terms of areas of knowledge and skills. Review some examples of lists of competencies to get an idea of how competencies are worded.
- Conduct a job analysis to understand the various tasks in the job and in what sequence.
- Think back to when you performed or observed yourself or an employee perform a task or conduct the role. What areas of knowledge do you see the employee using? What skills do you see the employee performing?
- Describe certain practices and procedures to carry out the task or perform the role in the best way possible, e.g., for a managerial role, ask about the best way to conduct performance appraisals, conduct hiring procedures, etc.
- Describe the necessary areas of knowledge and skills for superior performance.

- From a customer’s point of view, what knowledge and skills are useful in delivering the best quality services to them?
- What would the job description for all of the general responsibilities and duties of the role look like? Note that job descriptions may not describe the position in terms of needed areas of knowledge or skills.

Once the competencies (skills) have been identified it’s time to survey employees. To get the best results it’s advantageous to get both the frontline and supervisory staff to complete the survey. The purpose of this is to ensure that the organization gets a sense of how both the frontline and supervisory employees perceive the existing skill level, this way, if discrepancies are identified, efforts can be taken to manage the perceptions of what’s required and important to the organization.

The survey questions are based on the list of skills identified. For example, a survey could look like this:

As you look at the following skills, determine the level of competency among your co-workers based on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very low and 5 = very high. There are two ratings: 1) current skill level, and 2) desired skill level.

Example item: Handles conflict in a fair and effective way

Current level:	1	2	3	4	5
Desired level:	1	2	3	4	5

Once results have been collected, the comparison of the current level of skills versus the desired level can be calculated to highlight the gaps and required areas of development.

In the example provided, the perceived current skill level was rated at a 3 and the desired skill level was rated at a 5. This indicates that there is a gap of 2. Since ‘handling conflict in a fair and effective way’ is important to the organization, efforts can be made to close this gap. From a ‘return on investment’ perspective, resources allotted to closing this gap can be justified as the skill of handling conflict is aligned with the organizational objective. Ultimately, this can help to justify the expense of implementing an intervention for dealing with this skill gap.

The purpose of identifying skill gaps is to allocate resources to the development of staff that targets specific shortfalls. This will allow a targeted approach to training eliminating the need to spend countless hours of employee’s time focusing on areas that are not necessary or aligned to the organization’s strategy.

Once the initial gap analysis has been completed, a benchmark has been created. The benchmark can be used to determine if the training has lessened the gap between the current skill level and the desired skill level. This can be done immediately after the training, using the same survey to determine if the perceived gap has changed. For the post assessment, only the skills addressed in the training will be included in the survey. The timing of the second survey will depend on the complexity of the skills being trained. For simple skills sets (e.g. following directions) the time between surveys can be relatively short. However, more complex cognitive skills (e.g. conceptual thinking) should have more time between surveys due to how long it will take employees to exhibit those skills on the job. For more critical skills that are aligned to high-ranking organizational objectives, a third survey may be administered to determine the stability of the new skill over time.

4. Closing

Soft Skills Gaps

Closing the soft skill gap: Interventions for closing soft skill gaps.

Once the gaps have been identified, implementing an intervention that addresses it is critical. One approach to closing skill gaps is for organizations to be more realistic about their expectations²¹. When hiring a new candidate or working with existing employees, it's important to be realistic of the skill level required to perform the job. Essentially, there needs to be a balance between hard skills and soft skills and in some instances a strategy needs to be developed to determine how to address the gaps. Many of the soft skills can be taught (as mentioned earlier) so expectations to train new hires and employees needs to be considered.

What's more important is to try and align the workforce strategy with the business strategy. In essence, an attempt to forecast the skills that will be necessary in the near and long-term future is required. When critical skills are identified, only then should training interventions be introduced. Ultimately, the objective is to generate a return on the training investment and targeting interventions is the only way this is possible.

Potential Learning Interventions:

Soft Skills/Personal Effectiveness Training: The key to improving soft skills is to create awareness among new and existing employees regarding how important they are to organizational effectiveness. Offering soft skills training based on the gaps identified through assessment surveys will ensure that targeted interventions are taking place. Soft skills/Personal effectiveness training can include such diverse topics as:

- Work/Life balance
- Time management
- Career goal setting
- Managing workplace stress
- Negotiating for win/win results
- Public speaking
- Time management
- Communicating your message
- How to handle difficult people
- Developing self-confidence, self-motivation and personal initiative
- Inspiring confidence, motivation and initiative in others

Mentorship Programs: Teaching soft skills do not have to come from formal training programs. Often, informal relationships with seasoned coworkers can help with soft skill development²². Selecting mentors who already exhibit appropriate behaviours can help to provide examples to new and existing employees on how to act in certain situations. Ultimately, the objective of the mentoring relationship is that mentees mirror the behaviours of the mentor over time.

21 Freifeld, L. (2015). Bridging the Skills Gap. Training Magazine. <http://www.trainingmag.com/trgmag-article/bridging-skills-gap>

22 Kalman, F. (2012). Leverage Mentoring to Teach Entry-Level Workers Soft Skills. Chief Learning Officer Website. <http://www.clomedia.com/articles/leverage-mentoring-to-teach-entry-level-workers-soft-skills>

Performance Management and Talent Development: Closing soft skills gaps can only occur when the organization is aware of what the gaps are. Through the performance management process, organizations can leverage employee development plans to work on soft skills areas of improvement. By building this into an employee's job role, focus can be placed on improving their soft skills as a part of their daily routines. Creating an employee development plan can take these steps:

1. Specify what skill gap(s) are trying to be closed and how they are aligned with organizational success. What will success in this area look like? Describe the knowledge and skill that the employee will gain.
2. Limit the focus to no more than three major developmental goals.
3. Make a commitment to the employee that opportunities, resources and encouragement for development will be provided.
4. Divide activities into small, reasonable steps. Expecting too much too soon can discourage the process.
5. Identify on-the-job opportunities. These are the most powerful forms of development.
6. Provide resources and verbal support throughout the development effort.
7. Establish time frames for accomplishment.
8. Provide adequate variety. Greater learning and enthusiasm develops with a variety of tasks such as projects, workshops, readings, and mentoring.

Leadership Development: Train managers to become soft skills trainers. In many cases, individuals are selected as managers because they have the soft skills to effectively manage a team of people. The key is to leverage that talent and encourage managers to work with their staff to fill in any identified soft skill gaps. A strong leadership development program should have a dedicated component that deals with the facilitation of soft skills development. Most important is to make sure managers are aware of how soft skills are aligned with organizational objectives and are able to observe and provide feedback to appropriate employee behaviour on the job.



The key to improving soft skills is to create awareness among new and existing employees how important they are to organizational effectiveness.

5. Implementing

Soft Skills Development Strategy

A soft skills development strategy should take a two-pronged approach: 1) hiring candidates who closely match the required soft skills, and 2) continuous development of employee soft skills.

Interviewing for soft skills: Approaches and techniques for determining candidate's soft skill competency level.

Once the required soft skills are identified for the organization, multiple uses including performance reviews, employee development plans and interviews can be implemented. Interviews are an opportunity to determine if candidates possess the required skills to join the organization. Prior to conducting the interviews, a review of the required soft skills should take place to determine what skills are mandatory and which ones can be developed through training. For example, managing multiple projects at once might be something that is required to start the job, where dealing with conflict can be trained on the job. Preparing interview questions that address the required soft skills (behaviours) can help to determine if the candidate either possesses the skill or can acquire it through training on the job. The following is a list of sample interview questions²³:

1. Tell me about the last time you had to learn a new task. How did you go about learning it? What, if any tools, did you employ? (learning agility, curiosity)
2. Tell me about the last time a manager rejected one of your ideas. How did you react to his/her feedback? (intellectual humility, ability to take criticism, influencing skills)
3. Tell me about the last time you had to stay late at work. Was that unusual for you? (work ethic, time management skills)
4. What tools do you use to keep yourself organized? (organization and planning)
5. I see from your resume that you were the lead on the XYZ project. Tell me about your greatest challenge as lead. (time management and planning skills, intellectual humility, learning agility, coaching skills, and work ethic)
6. Tell me about the last project you worked on where you were made to understand you could not fail. What steps did you take to ensure success? (planning, emergent leadership)
7. Tell me about your biggest work failure. What did you learn? (learning agility, work ethic, problem solving)
8. Tell me about the last time you were asked to do something that violated your personal code of ethics. (work ethic, influencing skills, communication skills)
9. Have you ever had to fire someone? Why? (leadership skills, work ethic)
10. How do you stay on top of developments/trends in your field? (learning agility, curiosity, work ethic)

²³ 10 Great Interview Questions to Identify Candidates' Soft Skills. <http://www.omniagroup.com/identify-candidates-soft-skills/>

Developing employee soft skills:

How to incorporate a soft skills development program in an organization.

The best way to institutionalize a soft skills development program is to embed it in the existing organizational systems. For example, the performance review process, which typically includes an employee development plan (EDP), allows managers to focus their staff on specific skill gaps identified as a result of the performance review. Emphasizing soft skills in the performance review allows managers to observe whether employees are exhibiting the behaviours necessary to be successful.

In order to ensure development, two important components of any soft skills development program should be considered: 1) formal learning, and 2) informal learning. Formal learning occurs through a controlled and structured approach on a broad-based institutional level. Informal learning happens more spontaneously between groups of people.

Formal learning opportunities can include:

- Workshops and training sessions
- Online learning programs
- Conferences
- Mentoring programs
- Formal written procedures

Informal learning opportunities can include:

- On the job training
- Job shadowing
- Networking
- Informal mentors
- Proximity (arranging work spaces for easy access and communication)
- Company events
- Online company chat room

The benefits of *formal learning* allow for a large number of employees to learn the same information and processes at the same time. When designed properly the course content should be accurate and in line with the organizational objectives. Also, formal training programs allow new employees to come up to speed faster and are able to quickly contribute to their jobs in a meaningful way.

The benefits of *informal learning* are the costs savings that can be obtained through informal connections and the use of technology to connect employees (e.g. social media). Additionally, learning informally can be less intimidating than formal training and subject-matter experts may be more willing to share their knowledge with others this way. The key here is to build an organizational culture where informal learning can take place by promoting the importance of connectivity amongst staff.

Ultimately, the key to developing a soft skills program is to leverage both the formal and informal learning approaches. If resources are scarce, the informal approach can get the process started and a gradual introduction of formal learning can eventually be introduced.

Measuring progress in employee soft skill development:

Method for monitoring employee soft skill development.

In order to measure soft skill development, the need to develop a benchmark becomes an important starting point. Determining where employees are at is important to monitoring their progress. After identifying the soft skills gaps (see How to identify Soft Skills Gaps section), developing interventions that address these gaps become the focus.

Employee Development Plans (EDP) are typically the vehicle for ensuring that employee's are following a process for improvement. EDPs include performance and learning goals, specific skill gaps and a plan for filling the identified gaps.

By including EDPs in the performance review process, a road map can be established for the employee's soft skills development. However, the key is to consistently refer to the EDP throughout the year versus reviewing it when the performance review is conducted at the end of the year.

A typical EDP can be developed following these steps:

1. In each area where the manager and the employee agree improvement could be made, discuss and agree upon an objective for improving performance and an action plan for reaching that objective. The manager should address ways they can support the employee in achieving their objectives.
2. The amount of employee involvement in the setting of objectives will depend on the manager's leadership style and the type of performance problem being talked about. Participation of the employee in objective setting, however, is often a very beneficial way to get the employee's input and a sense of commitment to working toward the objective.
3. The manager and employee should discuss an employee development plan for training in the next review period.
4. Objectives must be realistic, measurable and appropriate to the employee's position.
5. Establish a timetable for each objective and a specific follow-up date to check on progress.

By including EDPs in the performance review process, a road map can be established for the employee's soft skills development.



Best Practices in Soft Skill Development

There are a number of different practices when it comes to employee soft skills development. Overwhelmingly, it is believed that in order for organizations to remain competitive and relevant, employees must possess the appropriate skills to ensure that success can occur. When examining the various practices to employee soft skill development across industries a theme emerged that encompassed the following areas:

- 1. Openness to Change:** Organizations need to be open to change and so do its employees. The key is to remember that change takes time and it's more efficient to make incremental changes versus transformational ones. Don't expect employees to develop soft skills over night, instead allow for change to gradually occur. Not only is change more likely to occur but it will be more stable over time.
- 2. Embracing Lifelong Learning:** Soft skill development is a life long learning process that requires being open to various forms of learning (i.e., training, attending conferences, reading). Additionally, soft skill development is not a singular event but an ongoing process that takes place in many shapes and sizes. More important, learning within an organizational context is not an activity for the sake of learning but more for the purpose of changing behaviour that impacts employee performance. As long as the learning activities are linked to an employee's performance as stronger connection to the organizational strategy can be made.
- 3. Measurement:** Determining a benchmark of employee soft skills is important to determine whether improvement has been made as a result of developmental efforts. Creating a soft skills profile of employees will help to determine skill gaps that can be addressed through specific interventions. Conducting pre-evaluations (what is the present skill level of an employee or group of employees) and post-evaluations (what is the skill level of an employee or group of employees after the intervention) will help to determine if skill development took place and the efficacy of the skill development intervention. Ultimately, metrics help to determine if the organization is being effective in delivering soft skills development.
- 4. Allow for Self-Reflection:** Building a culture of employee self-reflection is a crucial component to soft skills development. As employees learn more about themselves (i.e., strengths, faults, behaviours) it's important to allow them to reflect on what they learned so they can apply to it to their job. Encouraging self-reflection and creating mechanisms that support it (i.e., having team discussions, conducting personality assessments) will ensure that employees become more aware of who they are and how they influence the organizational direction.
- 5. Setting Goals:** Setting goals help to guide organizations towards success. Soft skills development should support the attainment of those goals. This means that those goals set at the organizational level must cascade down to the departmental and then individual

6. Soft Skills

Best Practices

employee level. When goals are connected at the three levels it can help to facilitate goal attainment. Often, when organizational goals are set (e.g. improve customer retention), soft skills development plays an important role in achieving them. Setting both performance (e.g. increasing the number of repeat customers) and learning (e.g. developing relationships with customers) goals will help to ensure the goal is met. Goals in and of themselves can help motivate employees to change behaviour that leads to improved performance. Aligning soft skills development to performance goals can help accomplish that.

6. **Practice:** Ultimately, soft skills development is about changing behaviour. In order for behaviours to become prevalent on the job, practice is required. It's important to allow employees to practice what they learn into real-world experiences over a period of time. Organizations need to realize that implementing these newly learned behaviours and aligning practice with goals is imperative to determining if progress has been made.
7. **Benchmark:** Connect with organizations that are similar and have experienced soft skill gaps. Determine what they have done successfully/unsuccessfully to address their gap.
8. **Pilot first:** Before implementing a large learning program, pilot it with a smaller group of employees who are representative of the larger organization. Build a team of employees to go through the training and provide feedback on what worked and what requires improvement. This gets employees involved in the learning development process and can increase buy-in.
9. **Implement Networking Mechanisms:** Not all employees are comfortable connecting with others they don't know. Networking, as a soft skill is a fundamental component of creating a connected organization. In order to support networking amongst employees across units, departments and locations, it's imperative that mechanisms are put in place that foster connectivity. For example, during the onboarding of new employees, allowing them to reach out beyond their own department will help to get them connected with others. Additionally, creating a community of practices to allow employees to share similar interests will facilitate the connections of employees across the organization.

Service Provider Practices

Working with Clients:

It is safe to say that any client considered for a position within an organization must contribute in some meaningful way to the overall competency of the firm. If a job seeker can demonstrate that they are competent in the same capabilities required by the organization, the greater the likelihood that there is an opportunity for employment. More importantly, there is a better chance that the organization will increase its competency level.

Service providers have an opportunity to work with their clients to prepare them for and help them find employment by assessing and developing soft skills. Using the assessment process identified in this report (Identifying Soft Skills Requirements), service providers can get clients to conduct a self-assessment on their soft skills. For each skill, clients can justify their rating by providing evidence of where they demonstrated the soft skill previously. For example, the soft skill 'working with others', clients can provide a time when they worked with others, what they specifically did and what was the outcome. To demonstrate each skill, the client must provide a three phase answer: 1) where was the skill demonstrated, 2) what they do to exhibit the skill, and 3) what was the outcome.

Not only does this help the client to reflect on their soft skills but prepare them for behavioural interviews, which are typically conducted by organizations today. Additionally, this will provide the vernacular that is commonly used among organizations throughout North America. In addition to interview preparation, it will also help with resume development.

Additionally, evaluating client soft skills can become a strategic component of their career development plan²⁴. To begin with, clients typically make an occupational choice at the beginning of their job search. However, over time, this occupational choice can change due to factors impacting their ability to find a job (i.e., economic conditions, supply and

24 Hatala, J.P. (2012). *The Job Search Cookbook: A Recipe for Strategic Job Search Management*. Get in the Flow Publishing, Baton Rouge, USA.

demand levels, competition). By identifying the required soft skills for their occupational choice they can realistically assess as to whether they will be competitive for the position. Regardless, knowing what skills are required will allow them to take alternative positions that help to build on those skill sets. For example, if the client's occupational choice is an accountant, they could also look for an accounts receivable or payable clerk position because the experience would help them develop skills for the accountant position (both hard and soft skills).

Addressing client soft skills gaps is essential to a strategic job search. Using work experience to fill those gaps is an efficient and effective means of doing that. In order for this to occur, the client must clearly understand what skill sets are required for the position they seek and link other job opportunities to developing in those areas. This potentially can not only lead to decreasing the time it takes to find a job, but improve retention rates.

Job Developers Working with Employers:

Service providers must modify their approach to working with employers by adopting a competency-based Job Development perspective²⁵. Competency-based job development takes a two-pronged approach: linking candidates to employers not only through a "fit" with the job function, but more strategically through determining if there is a "fit" with the organization. Job developers have the opportunity to not only place a client based on the requirements of the job function, but also on whether the job seeker fits into the organization. This provides the job developer some leeway in getting their client a placement with an employer when the individual may not have all the skills or experience to provide the best "fit" for the position, but is a nice "fit" within the overall organization. Negotiation for placement with the employer can be focused on a strategic alignment between the client and the organization, as some of the job specific requirements may be trainable and can be done over time. This helps the employer think strategically about reducing turnover and increases the likelihood that the client will stay with the job longer because there is a "fit" between them and the organization.

This "fit" or matching process is done through Competency Models (soft skills identification) created by the job developer and employer using the processes identified in this report. When a model is created, the employer can determine a minimum competency level they are seeking in potential candidates. The job seeker can quickly determine up front if they possess the level of competency required by the organization, and determine if their past work experiences have helped to develop these competencies. Core competencies are those that define the ideal individual working for the organization. For example, many organizations require cooperation among staff, so "team player" naturally becomes one of their core competencies. Verbalizing this competency helps the employer direct their hiring practices towards individuals who possess this quality. For the job seeker, it gets them to think about past experiences where they acquired the "team player" competency to see if there is a fit. If they prefer working autonomously and their work history supports that, it is probably not a good fit. However, if they enjoy working with others, they then have to demonstrate how they developed the competency from past experiences. Following this process can improve the "matching" process and can lead to improved retention newly hired employees.

The competency-based approach is a way of making a strong match between job seeker and employer. More importantly, job developers can demonstrate added value by truly getting to understand the employer's business model. This provides time to develop a relationship with the employer so that if issues do arise, the stronger connection may provide more understanding and encourage the employer to work with the job developer to find the right solution. A good relationship with an employer is key to successful job development. The understanding of the employer through competency models will help strengthen that relationship and increase the likelihood that a better match between job seeker and employer can be made.

7. Summary & Conclusions

It is well documented that higher-level soft skills can increase the competitive advantage of an organization. In light of the perceived skills gap Canadian companies are experiencing, the challenge of finding suitable candidates for job openings can represent a huge challenge. Skill level expectations of candidates are within control of an organization and should be tempered with a realistic outlook that skill development on the job can compensate for this short fall. Developing a soft skills development program can assist in filling the 'skills gap' by providing learning opportunities for new and existing employees.

When developing a soft skills development program, identifying the skills that are aligned to accomplishing organizations objectives are key. The soft skills reviewed in this report represent a starting point for determining which skill sets are required. Once the skills are identified, a skills gap analysis can be conducted to determine what specific areas should be focused on, which can increase the return on investment. Based on the identified gaps, learning interventions can be introduced to address soft skills deficits.

Learning interventions can be either formal or informal. Formal interventions, such as training and online programs require resources that may not be immediately available so informal approaches to soft skills development can be introduced. An example of an informal intervention could include informal mentors. Ideally, organizations are creating a culture of learning and personal development. Creating this needs to start from the organization by providing mechanisms that support soft skills development growth.

Ultimately, research has demonstrated that increased employee connectivity improves productivity. The higher the levels of soft skills employees possess the greater the likelihood that collaboration will occur. With collaboration comes the possibility of innovation and improved productivity. Investing in soft skills development can help to ensure an organization's competitiveness in the marketplace.

With the perceived lack of a qualified candidate pool, organizations have no choice but to develop new and existing employees in house. Determining the best approach is critical to ensuring that soft skills development becomes ingrained in the organization's culture. In order to ensure the greatest return on investment dollars, organizations need to align soft skills development with the business strategy. As employees become more competent, interaction with customers, suppliers and other stakeholders will be more impactful and create loyalty towards the organization that is stable over time.

Most importantly, when implementing a soft skills development program, ensure that metrics have been identified to determine whether the program has been successful and are in fact closing skill gaps. Conducting pre-, post- and post-post evaluation surveys will help to determine if the learning interventions are effective and stable over time. Ultimately, the goal of any program should be to change the behaviours of employees to effectively work with others (i.e., coworkers, customers, suppliers, stakeholders). The more functional the workforce the less likely conflict will cause issues impacting productivity. Minimizing dysfunction can occur with employees having higher-level soft skills. Investing in this effort should be paramount in light of the diversity existing in organizations today. With different employee backgrounds, values and beliefs, it's important that individuals are able to view the world through different lenses. A strong soft skills development program will allow this to occur.

The phases of implementing a soft skills development program introduced in this report included:

1. Understanding soft skills
2. Examining how soft skills improve organizational effectiveness
3. Identifying soft skills requirements for organizations
4. Closing soft skills gaps
5. Implementing a soft skills development strategy
6. Identifying soft skills best practices

Whether an organization has an existing soft skills development program or is considering implementing one, these phases serve as a means for ensuring that the program is aligned to the company's strategy. To develop soft skills independent of this does produce a return on investment.

Those organizations that are proactive and open to developing employee soft skills will not only emerge as industry leaders but will be around for a long time. Achieving organizational effectiveness not only requires an investment in resources but a commitment to developing the workforce.

Those organizations that are proactive and open to developing employee soft skills will not only emerge as industry leaders but will be around for a long time.



8. Appendix A

Sample Competency (Soft Skills) Library

Accountability

Takes personal responsibility for completing commitments to customers, co-workers, and stakeholders promptly. Demonstrates the desire and ability to meet and exceed business objectives even when faced with obstacles.

Client Focus

Demonstrates strong commitment to meeting the needs of clients, co-workers, and stake holders, striving to ensure their full satisfaction.

Integrity

Knows and lives what is important to the organization and maintains his/her ethical principles even in the most challenging circumstances.

Learning and Continued Growth

Keeping abreast of technological change, to learn from and reflect on the past, to ensure effective training & development, and to find the most expedient way to develop new skills and knowledge.

Quality and Excellence

Demonstrates the ability and drive toward continual quality improvement and achieving excellence in safety, quality, performance, communications and relationships.

Action Oriented

Consistently maintains high levels of activity or productivity; sustains long working hours when necessary, works with vigor, effectiveness and determination over a sustained period.

Adaptability

Adapts well to changes in assignments and priorities; adapts behavior or work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; approaches change positively and adjusts behaviors accordingly.

Building Trust

Interact with others in a way that gives them confidence in one's motives and representations and those of the organization. Is seen as direct and truthful; keeps confidences, promises, and commitments.

Coaching

Providing timely guidance and feedback to help others strengthen knowledge/skills areas needed to accomplish a task or solve a problem.

Collaboration

Builds constructive working relationships with clients/customers, other work units, community organizations and others to meet mutual goals and objectives. Behaves professionally and supportively when working with individuals from a variety of ethnic, social and educational backgrounds.

Communication

Clearly conveys and receives information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the listener, helps them understand and retain the message, and invites response and feedback. Keeps others informed as appropriate. Demonstrates good written, oral, and listening skills.

Conflict Management

Uses appropriate interpersonal styles and techniques to reduce tension and/or conflict between two or more people; able to size up situations quickly; able to identify common interests; facilitates resolution.

Cultural Competence

Cultivates opportunities through diverse people; respects and relates well to people from varied backgrounds, understands diverse worldviews, and is sensitive to group differences; sees diversity as an opportunity, challenges bias and intolerance.

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Builds a logical approach to address problems or opportunities or manage the situation at hand by drawing on one's knowledge and experience base, and calling on other references and resources as necessary.

Delegating Responsibility

Comfortably delegates responsibilities, tasks, and decisions; appropriately trusts others to perform; provides support without removing responsibility.

Facilitating Change

Facilitates the implementation and acceptance of change within the workplace; encourages others to seek opportunities for different and innovative approaches to addressing problems and opportunities.

Flexibility

Adapts to change and different ways of doing things quickly and positively; does not shy away from addressing setbacks or ambiguity; deals effectively with a variety of people and situations; appropriately adapts one's thinking or approach as the situation changes.

Formal Presentation Skills

Effectively presents ideas, information and materials to individuals and groups. Effectively prepares and provides structured delivery; facilitates workshops or meetings in a structured manner, can facilitate and manage group process.

Influence

Uses appropriate interpersonal skills and techniques to gain acceptance for ideas or solutions. Uses influencing strategies to gain genuine agreements; Seeks to persuade rather than force solutions or impose decisions or regulations.

Initiative

Takes action without being asked or required to; achieves goals beyond job requirements; being proactive; taking prompt action to accomplish objectives.

Innovation

Uses creativity and imagination to develop new insights into situations and applies new solutions to problems. Comes up with new and unique ideas.

Leadership and Teamwork

Promotes and generates cooperation among one's peers in leadership to achieve a collective outcome; fosters the development of a common vision and fully participates in creating a unified leadership team that get results.

Negotiation

Explores positions and alternatives to reach outcomes that gain acceptance of all parties.

Risk Taking

Seeks opportunities and calculates risks to accomplish results that can lead to substantial benefit knowing the real possibility of significant negative consequences.

Strategic Thinking

The development, creation and application of unique and effective business plans and opportunities intended to create a competitive advantage for a company in line with the company goals and objectives.

Stress Tolerance

Maintains effective performance under pressure; handling stress in a manner that is acceptable to others and to the organization.

Time Management

Working independently and knowing when and where to direct their efforts in an efficient and organized manner.

(The) Career Foundation

Completing the Circle Youth Employment Program

During the program staff work with the clients on Communication skills, Team work and Collaboration, Conflict Resolution, Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, Adaptability and Life Skills Development.

Tools used: Work Motivation Scale, Job Search Attitude Inventory, Barriers to Employment Success Inventory, The Holland Code, Self-Directed Search, True Colours, The Thomas Kilmann Instrument Mode, The Johari Window, The Work Motivation Scale, The Career Planning Scale, Interview Style Inventory, Employability Skills Inventory, The Transferable Skills Scale.

Contact: 905-667-0321

Website: <https://www.careerfoundation.com/>

Location: 110 James Street South, Hamilton

City Of Hamilton, Career Development Centre (for OW/ODSP clients)

Helping Hands – Provides a valuable community service and offers OW/ODSP participants the opportunity to gain beneficial work experience and essential job retention skills.

Making Change Happen - A social life skills program that helps participants become more self-aware and become a better problem solver.

Career Essential - Assists participants in identifying skills, and defining steps to a successful career. The program focuses on resume/cover letter/references, assistance with job searching techniques, and assisting with interview skills.

Applied Job Search - Assists clients who are employment ready and will prepare clients to network, cold call and apply for jobs on line.

Job Finding Club Program is open to clients currently working at the CDC and who are job ready and understand networking.

Community Placement is a part-time, unpaid community service activity in a non-profit or public sector agency.

Job Developers develop tailored training plans for clients and work closely with employers to ensure job retention is priority for OW Participants. 1 to 1 employment counselling meetings.

Tools used: Complete monthly 1 to 1 employment meetings

Complete an Employment Assessment at all employment intake appointments. Discussion is around, education, work experience, strengths/opportunities and hard and soft skills

Complete mock interviews with clients

Work placement evaluations are completed when client is in a community placement

Workshops

Online computer assessments

Contact: 905-546-2424 ext. 5208, or speak to a case manager or employment counsellor.

Website: <http://www.hamilton.ca/social-services/ontario-works/receiving-ontario-works>

Location: 181 Main St. West, 3rd Floor, Hamilton

Appendix B

Hamilton Based Programs With a Soft skills Component

Community Living Hamilton

Employment Access

Community Living Hamilton provides services to people with an intellectual disability. The program utilizes a number of different techniques and approaches to assess the soft skills of the individuals that they provide service to.

They provide “Success in the Workplace” classes, which are pre-employment classes. The facilitator of these classes monitors the participants’ engagement during the course of the classes, their answers to questions in the curriculum, and during the course of the classes. The results of the facilitator’s observations and the results of the different tests are compiled and recorded in a final report which is presented to the individual in a review meeting. It is here where it is determined whether an individual is ready for competitive employment, requires further skill development and exploration, or is more suited to volunteerism.

Tools used:

Personal Presentation/Hygiene, a hygiene check list may be necessary for an individual to remember to follow a daily hygiene routine.

Social Skills/Attitude/Behaviour/Self-Esteem: If the individual is registered with DSO, they may be referred to their Access Co-ordinator for Behaviour Therapy Consultation Services for Social Skills Enhancement Group, Anger Management. For Self-Esteem it may be recommended that they attend a suitable class/workshop through the Self-Esteem Network.

Commitment/Motivation: Connecting an individual with a volunteer opportunity that fits their skills and expressed interest, is something Community Living does to assist an individual in developing soft skills that are missing. Feedback from a volunteer co-ordinator is valuable in assessing an individual’s progress in development of the missing soft skills.

Clients are also referred to suitable online courses, or community programs, ie WHMIS training, Excellence in Customer Service Certificate, (Employment Hamilton) Wesley Employment Services.

Contact: 905-528-0281

Website: <http://www.communitylivinghamilton.com>

Location: 191 York Blvd. Hamilton

Employment Hamilton

EH workshops

All of Employment Hamilton workshops reference the importance of soft skills in the work place. One-to-one counselling allows for mentoring and helping with all issues. Mock interviews are held. Employers are also helpful with addressing soft skills when the client is on a job placement.

Tools used: Total Testing Soft Skills Test which includes tests for Core Abilities; Customer Success; Customer Service Success + Sales; Customer Service Success + Turnover Risk; Employee Retention; Employee Risk; Guest Service; Healthcare Services – Clinical Roles Profile – Healthcare Success + Applied Reasoning; Management Success + Applied reasoning; Professional Sales; Professional Sales + Applied Reasoning; Professional Success; and Professional Success + Applied Reasoning.

Contact: 905-522-4902

Website: <http://www.employmenthamilton.com/>

Location: 67 Victoria Avenue South, Hamilton

Employment Hamilton

Job Smart

An interactive group session that helps participants to understand employer expectations in the workplace. Topics discussed are problem solving and real workplace issues with solutions that apply to any job. Includes Employment Standards, Human Rights and safety information.

Contact: 905-522-4902; Clerical67@EmploymentHamilton.com

Website: <http://www.employmenthamilton.com/>

Location: 67 Victoria Avenue South, Hamilton

Hamilton Regional Indian Centre

Self-Management, Self-Direction

This program helps to develop self-confidence, a sense of identity, place and worth, effective communication skills, time management skills, realistic short and long-term goals, decision making skills, and the ability to receive and give constructive criticism.

Contact: 905-548-9593 x 236; ljenkins@hric.ca

Website: <http://www.hric.ca/>

Location: 34 Ottawa Street N, Hamilton

Hamilton Regional Indian Centre

Work Skills Program

This training includes life skills, work skills, and certificates.

Contact: 905-548-9593, achilds@hric.ca

Website: <http://www.hric.ca/>

Location: 34 Ottawa St N, Hamilton

Mohawk College

Career Cruising

Clients gain insight into their top occupations based on how they answered assessment questions. This provides useful real-world career information allowing clients to make information decision on their future. They will receive a customized report listing their top 10 occupations and how your skills match up with those occupations:

Contact: 905-575-2029

Website: www.mohawkcollege.ca

Location: 135 Fennell Avenue West at West 5th Street, Hamilton

Mohawk College

Career Exploration Workshop

What basic knowledge and skills do people need to make educated choices about their career direction? In the workshop people discover how their personality, interests and relevant abilities relate to different occupational areas. This 4-part workshop will provides clients with the personal data they need to start planning their future.

Contact: 905-575-2029; upgrading@mohawkcollege.ca

Website: www.mohawkcollege.ca/AU

Location: 135 Fennell Avenue West at West 5th Street, Hamilton

Mohawk College

Discovering Your Skills and Abilities

Clients are provided with various facts/sheets including: self-assessment; identifying one's skills and abilities; inventory of past experiences/education, training and activities; looking at values, interests and accomplishments; discussing personality/interest inventories; discussing how skills match different types of work; and transferable skills.

Contact: 905-575-2177

Website: <http://www.mohawkcollege.ca/community-training/job-search-services/employment-workshops.html>

Location: 135 Fennell Avenue, Hamilton (corner of Fennell Ave/West 5th)

Mohawk College - J137; and 211 Centennial Pkwy. Unit 5, Stoney Creek

Mohawk College

Employment Readiness Skills

Essential skills for employment and personal development are identified and strengthened through a variety of activities. The client will perform multiple tasks related to the employment goal path.

Contact: 905-575-2029; upgrading@mohawkcollege.ca

Website: www.mohawkcollege.ca/AU

Location: 135 Fennell Avenue West at West 5th Street, Hamilton

Mohawk College

Learning Styles

Clients discover their learning style and the methods of learning that best fit themselves. Understanding how they learn can help them both in the classroom and on the job by helping them to learn more efficiently.

Contact: 905-575-2029; upgrading@mohawkcollege.ca

Website: www.mohawkcollege.ca/AU

Location: 135 Fennell Avenue West at West 5th Street, Hamilton

Mohawk College

Strengths Quest Assessment

The assessment helps to gain insight into how individuals use their talents to achieve success, explore careers and leadership development. Upon completion, clients receive a customized report that lists their top five talent themes, along with action items for development and suggestions about how they can use their talent to achieve academic, career and personal success.

Contact: 905-575-2029, upgrading@mohawkcollege.ca

Website: www.mohawkcollege.ca/AU

Location: 135 Fennell Avenue West at West 5th Street, Hamilton

PATH Employment Services

To assist in upgrading clients' soft skills PATH offers a series of workshops such as: Time Management, Self-Esteem, Career Planning, Best Foot Forward, Job Seeker Fast Track, Personality Dimensions, Barriers to Success, and Customer Service.

PATH has access to informal assessments and provides 1-1 pre-employment preparation and job retention coaching.

Tools used: Staff are trained in the Common Assessment Counselling Practices and complete a work readiness assessment with clients during the Intake Interview. Using various probing questions (opened ended questions) the ECs guide a conversation with the clients where they self- identify their soft skills – asking what they have to offer an employer? What would they bring to the work force? What skills help to keep or secure employment?

The team has access to various self-inventory assessment tools and the Conference Board of Canada Employability 2000 toolkit materials that assess the skills employer are looking for as well as the nine essential skills materials.

Some of the informal assessment tools include:

Work Readiness Inventory; Common Assessment Counselling Process; Barriers to Employment Success Inventory; Job Search Knowledge Scale; Job Search Attitude Inventory; Assessing Barriers to Education; Picture Interest Career Survey; Personality Dimensions and Career Dimensions; Communication Styles Inventory; Basic Self – Care Needs Assessment; Substance Abuse Self Test; Mental Health Assessment Check list - mental health workbook; Life Skills Inventory; Career Cruising; Career Values –Knowdell Career Values Card Sort and Assessment; Skillscan – Personal Skill Profile; Work Motivation Scale; Transition to Work Inventory

Contact: 905-528-6611

Website: <http://www.pathemployment.com/>

Location: 31 King St. East, Suite 100, Hamilton

Threshold School of Building

Ready to Work Program

Soft skills are taught as part of their program and adapted on a case by case basis. Most of their teaching is done on a daily, ongoing basis and is mostly verbal. They do personality tests, and use the skill matcher tool.

Tools used: Skill Matcher helps clients to generate job ideas based on the skills they enjoy using or are interested in learning. Clients select any combination of skills, and write a list of jobs where they could utilize their skills. Categories include Data and Information; working with people; working with ideas; and practical skills. Threshold also aids clients in understanding and developing their transferable skills.

Contact: 905-522-8686

Website: <http://www.tsob.ca/>

Location: 110 Catharine St. North

YWCA Hamilton

Life Skills Workshops

The Life Skills Workshops have been taken from YWCA Toronto Curriculum. The topics include: Time Management, Communication Skills, Anger Management, Goal Setting, Group Building, Personality Dimensions, Learning Styles, Problem Solving, Criticism and Feedback, Managing Work and Life, Self Esteem, and Assertiveness.

Also used are asset maps (at beginning, middle and end of program), Personality Dimensions games, icebreakers, journaling, scenarios, coaching, and events.

Tools used: Formally through self-assessment usually upon entering and exiting the program. Soft skills are also assessed informally through one-on-one client meetings and in classroom settings.

Contact: 905-522-9922

Website: <http://ywcahamilton.org/programs-services/employment-services>

Location: 75 MacNab Street South, Hamilton

Aamjiwnaang Adult Education Program **Four Directions: Annishinaabe Self-Growth program**

The self-growth resource used was created by the ONLC called Self-Management, Self-Direction: Back to Basics.

Contact: 519-336-8410 x 286; terryplain@aamjiwnaang.ca

Website: www.aamjiwnaang.ca

Laubach Literacy Ontario

Variety of modules

Working on My Own: Managing Myself; Working on My Own: Personal Learning Styles and Goal Setting; Working on My Own: Problem Solving and Critical Thinking; Working on My Own: Time Management and Organization

The modules incorporate self- assessment opportunities, individual activities and activities to build relationships and soft skills.

Contact: 519-743-3309; literacy@laubach-on.ca

Website: www.laubach-on.ca

Niagara Regional Native Centre

Variety of workshops and courses

Gift of Self-Esteem; Driver's Ed/Written Test or G1 training; Reaching to Succeed-Employment/Post Secondary Transition Course; Financial Literacy; Self-Management/Self-Direction.

Participants will receive a certificate on completion of each course

Contact: 905-685-8547, literacypc@nrnc.ca

Website: www.nrnc.ca

Literacy Network Northeast **Essential Skills for Personal Success**

This resource includes 4 modules including: Manage My Basic Needs; Manage My Health; Manage Personal Issues and Contacts; and Participate as a Member in My Community.

Contact: 705-267-5663; director@literacynet.ca

Website: www.northernliteracy.ca

Project READ Literacy Network **Working Together, Working Well**

This resource includes chapters on:

1. Understand and work within the dynamics of a group
2. Ensure that a team's purpose and objectives are clear
3. Be open and flexible to the thoughts and opinions of others
4. Recognize and respect diversity, individual differences and perspectives
5. Provide feedback in a constructive manner
6. Contribute to a team by sharing information and expertise
7. Lead or support when appropriate, motivating a group for high performance
8. Problem solving and managing and resolving conflict

Contact: 519-570-3054; jane@projectread.ca

Website: www.projectread.ca

Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network **Bridging the Employment Gap – Ready for Work**

Ready for Work includes units focused on skills people need including before applying for the job; on the job; succeeding in the workplace: personal and interpersonal skills; working with others; employee responsibilities; employer responsibilities; messages; time management.

Contact: 705-326-7227

Website: www.literacynetwork.ca

Appendix D

Soft Skills Resources From Literacy Networks

Kingston Literacy and Skills

Paving the Way to Lasting Employment

This is a manual and twelve interactive training videos demonstrating the importance and practice of Essential Skills in the small business environment. The soft skills covered in the videos are oral communication, working with others, thinking skills and continuous learning.

Contact: 613-547-2012

Website: www.klandskills.ca

Northwest Territories Literacy Council

Communications Skills Instructional Resource

This resource has the following sections:

1. Communicating with Others: what is communication, communication quiz, body language, communication at work, assertive behaviour versus passive or aggressive behaviour
2. Active Listening: listening to instructions, good listening techniques, practice and improving your active listening skills
3. Oral Presentations: public speaking, oral speaking self-assessment, oral presentations, PowerPoint presentations, digital storytelling
4. Working with Others: good team members, personality types, working with others self-assessment, working with others in work situations, fun team building activities
5. Dealing with Conflict: definition of conflict, why do we have conflict, conflict management, working through conflict, conflict at work

Contact: 1-866-599-6758; nwtliteracy@nwtliteracy.ca

Website: www.nwtliteracy.ca

Northwest Territories Literacy Council

Soft Skills for Work - Workbook

Sections include: personal qualities; communication skills; working with others; problem solving and decision making

Contact: 1-866-599-6758; nwtliteracy@nwtliteracy.ca

Website: www.nwtliteracy.ca

Timmins Learning Centre

EmployAbility Success

This is a practitioner resource with the following modules: Communication; Think and Solve Problems; Demonstrate Positive Attitudes and Behaviours; Be Responsible; Be Adaptable; Learn Continuously; Work with Others; and Put Your Skills Together for Job Search.

Contact: 705-268-8900; learn@ntl.sympatico.ca

Website: www.learntlc.org

1. Teach soft skills through work experience. Youth, in particular, learn soft skills best when they actually observe and learn them 'on the job' and being part of a team with positive role models and mentors. Having a mentor that leads by example is extremely important in the development of the soft skills required to make a good employee.
2. Use employers as guest speakers to discuss soft skills and what is important to them. Develop employer panels to encourage employers to speak directly to clients about the need for strong soft skills.
3. Strategies to address soft skills should be incorporated into the school system as early as elementary school.
4. Have successful clients address groups of job seekers explaining what they have learned about many issues, including the need for soft skills, in the work place. A peer-to-peer approach would be effective.
5. Pre-employment training and life skills programs need to be reintegrated back into employment for clients that need to develop these soft skills for employment success.
6. Selling the importance of soft skills to clients is essential for participation and future application.
7. Use of mentorship (including expectations, learning outcomes, feedback, and seizing coachable moments).
8. Soft skills should be embedded into programs.
9. When soft skills workshops take place they should be tailored for specific groups of people (ie. youth, long term unemployed, newcomers, etc.)
10. Some job seekers may not understand the terminology and be able to identify what their soft skills are. A better way to explain what soft skills are is to explain that they describe the skills which characterize relationships with other people, and how you approach life and work.

(Information compiled from local Employment and Training service providers)

Appendix F

Top 10 Local Best Practices for Improving the Soft Skills of Job Seekers

Workforce Planning Hamilton

Business, Labour & Community: Planning for Prosperity

Since 1997 Workforce Planning Hamilton has provided planning, partnerships and projects that highlight local labour market trends and support workforce development.

WPH is a member of Workforce Planning Ontario, a network of 25 labour market planning areas across Ontario.

Our evidence-based approach relies on key industry sector and demographic data combined with local intelligence from employers and other local partners to develop a strategic vision for Hamilton.

Log on to WPH's website at www.workforceplanninghamilton.ca and you will:

Discover our community **Projects and Partners** that promote labour force development

Learn about local labour market trends, opportunities, and priorities in our **Publications**.

Connect to **Links** on training, employment, and labour market information.



Workforce Planning Hamilton
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