



Soft Skills Assessment and Development: Establishing Its Value and Building Support for Implementation

The following describes one approach that organizations use to align the soft skills required by employers with corresponding competencies developed and documented by workforce providers.

Tasks

Questions to ask and answer

<p>1. Getting Started: An organization's leader/ champion reviews the competencies to be measured, takes a Learning Resources, Inc. (LRI) assessment and considers:</p>	<p>1. Are these the skills that should be measured...for what job? Is the program realistic? Would measuring these skills be valuable to those who you want to serve? Are the skills accessible to this audience? How are these behaviors measured and developed? How does this resource compare with current practice – pro and con?</p>
<p>2. Establishes a team and asks them to evaluate the competences to be assessed and take the assessment program. (The team may all be from one department – or, include others whose opinions would be important.)</p>	<p>2. Does this group share your enthusiasm? What are their responses to the questions under 1, above? Do they have additional concerns to address before moving forward?</p> <p>Relate results of 1 and 2 to management for its buy-in.</p>
<p>3. Meet with the team to clarify tasks to be accomplished. The goal is to create a specific assessment and development process that will document programs' outcomes, identify where improvement is required, and provide graduates/completers (and/or incumbents) with a competitive advantage when applying for work or promotion.</p>	<p>3. Are there issues of particular concern that must be addressed before next steps are taken? Should others be added to the group?</p> <p>Review the product of the assessment process, an Individual's Feedback Report. What does this information enable instructors and administrators to do and why is this important?</p> <p>Specifically: What programs, procedures, resources are in place and what must be developed to enable your group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer the assessment • Communicate results to those assessed (to individuals, small groups or...)? • Establish development options for these individuals • Identify specific education/training/work experience opportunities within or without your organization/agency that could remediate soft skill deficits; these might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ workshops within your department ○ integrating soft skills development into academic/career courses offered within your organization ○ work experience – if employers will support soft skills development ○ learning programs outside of your organization
<p>4. Define the vision/goal/message to inform and recruit partners /the administration and customers – both <u>internal</u> and external.</p> <p>Why internal customers? Your organization hires people. Would it be helpful to hire people who have more of the skills your jobs' require?</p>	<p>4. The message might include: evidence of the importance of soft skills to employers (many states survey employers to identify workforce needs); support DOL and SCANS-based research; provide individuals – and your organization – with a competitive advantage. Once you have created an initial message: Try it out – elicit feedback and make revisions – before moving to # 5.</p>

<p>5. Meet with individuals identified under 4 to build their support of soft skills measurement and development; be clear and specific as to how you see their role in this effort - what would they be asked to do and what is in it for each of the targeted groups with whom you intend to meet? Let individuals know what you would like them to do as a next step and agree to a time when tasks will be completed.</p>	<p>5. While the vision/goal will be applicable to all, different groups will have different interests and will require different information. Here are two examples – there will tend to be as many examples as there are partners listed under 3 (Questions) above:</p> <p>Employers: they seek workers who have the academic, technical and soft skills they require; currently, they receive little information about someone’s workplace behaviors/soft skills. By providing applicants with evidence of these skills, hiring becomes more efficient and turnover reduces. <i>What do you want from this group?</i> Perhaps, agreement that soft skills are important; a willingness to identify for you the soft skills they seek in applicants: This may involve looking at a list of relevant soft skills; and/or, benchmarking a limited number of effective incumbents; and, a willingness to seek evidence of applicant’s effective soft skills and, longer term, feedback as to the value of hiring workers who have evidence of soft skills competence.</p> <p>Faculty: Typically, CTE (career/tech. education), Pathways, ABE and workforce development-focused faculty will be an easier ‘sell’ than their academic colleagues. All have heavy teaching loads; all were hired because of the particular expertise, with soft skills and soft skill development not part of the equation. The goal is to identify staff willing to integrate into current classes a discussion of work-related interpersonal problems so learners gain an understanding of the kind of specific responses to these problems employers seek. <i>What do you want from this group?</i> Their willingness to look at examples of discussion questions and discuss how these might be integrated into their courses? Another goal might be to have several faculty members make soft skills building part of their effort – and to pre- and post-assess learners to determine the extent to which skills have developed.</p>
<p>6. What happens next?</p>	<p>6. Answers to the above provide the foundation for thoughtful and effective implementation of a soft skills assessment, development and documentation process.</p>

The above is offered as one way to begin a process that will enhance the work readiness of graduates and the perceived value of your organization – both internally and externally. It documents outcomes that clarify where programs are effectively developing soft skills and where these outcomes should be improved. The process should be adapted to better meet the specific needs of the community and/or the sponsoring group.

For an overview of LRI’s soft skills assessment programs for a wide range of jobs, from entry-level to high-skill to managerial/supervisory, please visit www.learning-resources.com .

If you have questions or would like to discuss the above, please contact:

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