



Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board

Employability Skills Framework

FINAL REPORT

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In Association with:

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1 Project Overview and Key Findings

In today's competitive job market, technical competencies no longer ensure employment. The workplace has evolved and soft skills such as effective communication, organization, teamwork, initiative, and conflict resolution are paramount.

Responding to this identified need of employers, the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board (SMWDB) is working to develop a comprehensive curriculum framework, with broad employer appeal, that will enhance participants' soft skills and employability skills.

To this end, in mid-2013 the SMWDB engaged Millier Dickinson Blais to advance the current project, which seeks to tackle the soft skills gap within the labour force. This project centres on the following objectives:

- Identify and analyze related curriculum in Southern Ontario
- Identify global and national best practices in soft-skill curriculum framework delivery and content
- Develop the foundation for a curriculum framework
- Validate the proposed framework with project partners and employers, and test the concept of employability (soft skills) training and a credentialing system

To-date each of these objectives have been accomplished with the full project report providing the foundational research to inform a curriculum framework targeted at those individuals who are unemployed, or underemployed who are lacking soft skills.

According to the research, this curriculum or employability skills program should be broken into two components: an **in-class** component and a **work-integrated learning placement**. These components are outlined below along with a recommended framework designed to achieve the program goals. At its most fundamental level, this program would **explicitly address teaching and measuring employability skills concepts, and would put them in the context of the workplace.**

In Class Learning Component

- The program will begin with the in-class component consisting of about 6 modules to allow students to gain some basic skills, ease into the concept of employability, learn a common language etc.
- The in-class component should be between 24-35 hours to ensure change in patterns/behaviours and understanding in the students.
- When students complete this section they will receive a certificate of completion. This certificate marks a point where the individual may or may not be ready for full employment, but is ready to take the next step.

Work Integrated Learning Component

- The second component should be workplace integrated delivery where in-class knowledge is put into practice and measured.
- Supervisors will accurately see how learners navigate day-to-day operations in a real setting; noticing where they need guidance, and provide reinforcement.
- Give employers the chance to speak frankly to employee. The employee and employer can contact instructor for advice and guidance through difficulties.

Instructional Delivery

- Instructor must use a range of teaching methodologies.
- Task-based approaches and similar methods will be more relevant.
- The instructor will play a crucial role in the facilitation of employability skills.
- The instructor will need to assume multiple roles, such as mentor, coach, facilitator, modeller and evaluator.

Assessment

- Assessing soft skills is not like assessing most abilities and understandings. Conventional methods of assessment (tests, written assignments, etc.) cannot be used effectively. Instead assessment should rely on:
 - Holistic judgements by the instructor/teachers - Portfolios created by the students - Assessment based on work experience - Assessment using purpose-developed instruments



2 Introduction

In today's competitive job market, technical competencies no longer ensure employment. The workplace has evolved and soft skills such as effective communication, organization, teamwork, initiative, and conflict resolution are paramount. Employers across many sectors are experiencing difficulties finding and retaining employees who possess non-technical employability skills (Bloom & Kitagawa, 1999; Business Council of British Columbia, 2006, Prism Economics and Analysis, 2007). In this vein, all industries require employees to have some level of competence with what are commonly referred to as employability skills or soft skills. Employers realize that gaps in technical skills can be learned on the job; soft skills, on the other hand, are often seen as difficult and onerous to teach. While soft skills can be learned on the job, individuals without these skills often fail to advance through an interview process or are dismissed before the end of a probationary period. Moreover, in a recent report, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives reinforced the importance of these soft skills by identifying them as the number one evaluation tool for potential entry level hires. Accordingly, those who may have strong technical skills are ending up unemployed or underemployed, lacking the ability or opportunity to develop these essential employability skills.

Responding to this underlying challenge the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board (SMWDB) is working to develop a comprehensive curriculum framework, with broad employer appeal, that will enhance participants' soft skills and employability skills.

To this end, in late 2013 the SMWDB engaged Millier Dickinson Blais to advance the current project, which seeks to tackle the soft skills gap facing the labour force. This project centres on the following objectives:

- Identify and analyze related curriculum in Southern Ontario
- Identify global and national best practices in soft skill curriculum framework delivery and content
- Develop the foundation for a Curriculum Framework
- Validate and test the proposed framework with project partners and employers

This report addresses each of these objectives with a dedicated section or chapter. In sum, this report provides the foundational research to inform a curriculum framework targeted at those individuals who are unemployed, or underemployed, and lacking soft skills. The research indicates any such program should be broken into two components: an in-class component and a work-integrated learning placement. The work-integrated learning placement is what separates this program from others across Ontario and Canada. In other words, this program would explicitly address the teaching and measuring of these concepts in the context of the workplace.

The report concludes with the presentation of results from an employer based survey which was designed to elicit feedback on the importance of employability skills and the potential for a related certification or accreditation program. The results of this survey were instructive and unequivocally supportive of pursuing the next phase of this project, which will focus on:

1. Developing the curriculum for the program
2. Formulating and testing the accreditation framework
3. Recruiting and engaging training partners to support the piloting of the program
4. Piloting the program and evaluating results for continuous improvement



3 Related curriculum in Ontario

To develop a comprehensive understanding and analysis of related curriculum in Ontario, this section begins by examining what is currently available through Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities programs; the Ontario Secondary Curriculum for Guidance and Career Education; and community colleges. Programs such as the Employability Skills 2000+, as well as the job retention services, provide insight into what resources are already available to the public. This discussion provides an overview of the strengths and gaps of the programs currently available and then helps shape the curriculum development. Moreover, this analysis pinpoints effective ways to deliver employability skills.

3.1 Related curriculum in the public sector

Government organizations, funding and focus within Ontario has been responsive to the need to develop and improve the employability skills of the workforce. This can be observed in a variety of areas; mainly, within the curriculum in the Ontario education system, educational policy, and government funded initiatives.

3.1.1 Employability skills within Ontario's education system

Preparing students of all ages for the working world is a priority of the provincial government and employability skills can be seen interwoven throughout the education system. The teaching of employability skills is mandated from elementary all the way to postsecondary institutions (Choices into Action, 1999). For the purpose of this report only high school and post-secondary school curriculum will be examined as these are intended to directly prepare students for life outside of school.

Career Education, a dedicated career preparation course, is offered to all Ontario students from grades 9-12; however, only the grade 10 half-credit is compulsory. The goals of guidance education are to facilitate student career planning, lifelong learning, and interpersonal skills and inform how these are applied to their lives inside and outside school. The courses identify and develop essential skills and work habits that are required for success in the workplace. The material is delivered and applied in classroom and other contexts (ie. co-op) (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Ministry of Education: Ontario Secondary School Guidance and Career Education 9-12 (2006)

Relevant strands between grade 9-12 are course are:

- Personal Knowledge and Management Skills (grades 9 & 11)
- Interpersonal Knowledge and Skills (grades 9 & 11)
- Personal Management (grades 10 & 12)

Some relevant expectations include but are not limited to:

- demonstrate effective and respectful use of interpersonal and teamwork skills in their experiential learning activities
- communicate appropriately with various audiences (e.g., peers, employers) and in various situations (e.g., attending interviews, writing letters).
- demonstrate respectful and responsible behaviours (e.g., respect for levels of authority, respect for diversity, responsibility for one's actions) in groups at school and in community-based learning activities;



- explain how diversity (e.g., cultural, economic, gender, intellectual) among members in a group may affect group dynamics in a positive way;
- explain how conflict-resolution strategies (e.g., mediation, negotiation) can be used to reach mutually agreeable solutions in work-related situations;
- describe the skills necessary to act as an advocate for themselves or others in various situations involving prejudice, bullying, or discrimination.
- identify examples of ethical behaviour within the workplace (e.g., respecting the rights of others, taking a stand against discriminatory behaviour, honesty, not causing harm, obeying and respecting the law);
- demonstrate an understanding of career development as a lifelong process that will include transitions, changes, and life-long learning;
- use problem-solving strategies to reduce internal barriers (e.g., skill gaps, health problems) and/or external barriers (e.g., financial constraints, lack of local opportunities, cultural differences) that could interfere with the achievement of their work, learning, and personal goals.

Teaching approaches

Uses a wide range of approaches that require students to research, think critically, work cooperatively, discuss relevant issues, and learn through practice in a variety of settings. Some of the teaching and learning strategies appropriate for this program include: cooperative small-group learning, one-on-one teaching, guided learning, personal reflection, role playing, simulations, case-study analysis, presentations, tasks involving real workplace materials, experiential learning, and independent study. There is a focus on active and experiential learning strategies; which enable students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-life issues and situations. Students synthesize what they have learned by reflecting, analysing, evaluating, making decisions, and setting goals. Ultimately, students learn to take responsibility for their own learning in preparation for life beyond secondary school.

The curriculum expectations incorporate a broad range of experiential learning opportunities (e.g., information inter-views, worksite visits, job shadowing, community involvement, work experience, and virtual or simulated work experience) that are intended to meet the needs of students at various stages of readiness for work.

(Ministry of Education, 2006)

As colleges and universities play a major part in improving human capital, employability skills have been mandated into their curricula. Developing skills beyond technical skills is now an overt outcome outlined by Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities. A list of six Essential Employability Skills must be reliably met by all graduates with Ontario College credentials, Ontario College Certificate, Ontario College Diploma and Ontario College Advanced Diploma. The skills categories are: communication, numeracy, critical thinking and problem solving, information management, interpersonal and personal (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2009).



Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities: Postsecondary education partners' gateway

Skill category	Defining skills:	Learning outcomes:
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing • Speaking • Listening • Presenting • Visual literacy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. communicate clearly, concisely and correctly in the written, spoken, and visual form that fulfills the purpose and meets the needs of the audience. 2. respond to written, spoken, or visual messages in a manner that ensures effective communication.
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and applying mathematical concepts and reasoning • Analyzing and using numerical data • Conceptualizing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. execute mathematical operations accurately.
Critical thinking & problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing • Synthesising • Evaluating • Decision making • Creative and innovative thinking 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. apply a systematic approach to solve problems. 5. use a variety of thinking skills to anticipate and solve problems.
Information management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering and managing information • Selecting and using appropriate tools and technology for a task or a project • Computer literacy • Internet skills 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. locate, select, organize, and document information using appropriate technology and information systems. 7. analyze, evaluate, and apply relevant information from a variety of sources.
Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team work • Relationship management • Conflict resolution • Leadership • Networking 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. show respect for the diverse opinions, values, belief systems, and contributions of others. 9. interact with others in groups or teams in ways that contribute to effective working relationships and the achievement of goals.
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing self • Managing change and being flexible and adaptable • Engaging in reflective practices • Demonstrating personal responsibility 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. manage the use of time and other resources to complete projects. 11. take responsibility for one's own actions, decisions, and consequences.

(Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2009)



A simple internet search of “Essential Employability Skills” offers a list of major Ontario colleges and how they integrate these skills into their curriculum. After reviewing this material it is clear that these skills are not delivered in any specialized courses. Instead, employability skills are implicitly integrated into the existing curriculum.

Algonquin College: Essential Employability Skills Assessment Tool

Informed by Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities’ Essential Employability Skills are embedded into Algonquin College’s curriculum. Here is an example of an assessment tool:

Essential Employability Skills Outcome	T/A/CP	Yes/No	Course Learning Requirement(s) and/or assessment tool(s) that allow students to demonstrate achievement
	T		
	A		
	CP		

(Algonquin College, 2007)

Despite colleges integrating employability skills into the curriculum; specialized courses at these institutions that overtly teach these skills can still be found. These courses and workshops are generally offered as corporate training. Such courses are offered by Conestoga College, Algonquin College, and Humber College.

3.1.2 Employability Skills within Government Initiatives

The Ontario education system is not the only delivery method of employability skills. There are also a number of government funded initiatives to increase employability skills all across Ontario (The John Howard Society of Ontario, 2009).

One such program is the Ontario Skills Passport. This is informed by a federal initiative through Employment and Social Development Canada called Essential skills. The Ontario Skills Passport is a web-based program of four modules designed to build transferable skills for education, training, the workplace, and everyday life. The modules are delivered by teachers, counsellors, employers or other facilitators. Students watch videos and complete tasks for each module. Upon of completion of each module participants receive a certificate (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).



The Ontario Skills Passport (OSP)

The following is a breakdown of the Ontario Skills Passport modules and concentrations.

Module 1: Work Habits; Module 2: Essential Skills; Module 3: Search for Tasks by Occupation; Module 4: OSP Work Plan.

Essential Skills		
	Numeracy	Thinking Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Text • Writing • Document use • Computer use • Oral communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money Math • Scheduling or Budgeting and Accounting • Measurement and calculation • Data Analysis • Numerical Estimation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Task Planning and Organizing • Decision Making • Problem solving • Finding information

Work Habits	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working safely • Teamwork • Reliability • Organization • Working Independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative • Self-advocacy • Customer Service • Entrepreneurship

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013)

In addition, there are many non-profits within Ontario that teach some form of employability skills. Notable programs include: Ottawa Skills Plus – A Pre-Employment and Training Program, Peterborough Successful Achievement in the Fundamentals of Employment, and Sault Ste. Marie Options to Employment (The John Howard Society of Ontario, 2009). Many offer these skills for new immigrants to Canada. Such initiatives include: WIL Employment Connections, Career Bridge, Skills for Change, and One Step (National Adult Literacy Database, 2013).

After a comprehensive review of the current program offerings across Ontario, it is evident that this project and its employability skills outcomes would not be breaking ground as far as content. However, the proposed initiative appears unique in its delivery and will benefit by leveraging existing content.

3.2 Related Offerings in the Private Sector

In the private sector there are numerous courses focusing on employability skills. It is possible that this trend is a reflection of the skills gap that employers are trying to bridge. These programs are typically found in corporate training or HR programs (HR Proactive inc., Focused HR, Career Quest Canada). The employability skills programs in the private sector do not add to the preceding conversation with respect to content, but they are still worth examining because of their methods of delivery.

In terms of length of delivery, the more robust programs generally run between 24-30 hours. A notable program is the Canadian Workplace Essentials Program offered by Ontario Tourism Education



Corporation (OTEC) which can be delivered as a 35 hour standalone course that focuses on workplace culture and employee communication skills.

Success@Work: Workplace Essential Skills Training by Career Quest Canada (2010) is another notable program. It is delivered in three phases. The first phase, the Essential Skills Primer, is only for clients whose foundation skills (reading, writing, oral communication, mathematics etc.) are too low to be successful in the other phases in the program. This is important to address because there may be individuals who lack the base literacy skills to be employable. These skills should be targeted prior to program entry. There are many existing programs offered to improve an individuals' literacy in Ontario. It may be necessary to identify these programs and recommend them to individuals who lack foundation skills before they enter the Success@Work: Workplace Essential Skills Training.

Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC) – Canadian Workplace Essentials

The program teaches participants how to:

- use body-language and facial expressions effectively
- ask questions and express opinions in the workplace
- carry out their job with confidence
- interact with colleagues and guests
- show initiative
- be punctual
- follow a healthy personal regimen
- navigate organizational structures

Program Content

Module A – Demonstrating Nonverbal Communication

Module B – Demonstrating Confidence

Module C – Initiating Conversation

Module D – Maintaining a Healthy Regimen

Module E – Being Punctual

Module F – Expressing Personal Opinions

Module G – Asking Questions

Module H – Socializing With The Work Team

Module I – Understanding Organizational Culture

(OTEC, 2013)

Key2Careers: Outreach and continuing education (certification programs & workshops)

Offers over 100 courses or workshops on soft skills. Some skills delivered include:

communication skills, listening skills, critical thinking and problem solving, developing self-esteem, stress management, leadership skills, team building, cross-cultural diversity training, change management, time management, assertiveness skills, business ethics, emotional intelligence, preventing job burnout, conflict management, goal setting, workplace harassment and prevention, and business writing skills. Length of programs – between 12-24 hours

(Key2 Careers College, 2008)



4 Global and national best practices in soft-skill curriculum framework delivery and content

4.1 National Best Practices

It may be argued that Ontario's resources for employability skills are more advanced than those found in most provinces across the country. Accordingly, this section is comparatively brief because of the limited amount of information that would further the preceding discussion. This section, therefore, concentrates on the services offered nationally by the Conference Board of Canada.

4.1.1 Initiatives within Education

While Ontario's colleges and universities have mandated employability skills in their programming, similar programming is still found in provinces without such provincial mandates. As outlined by The Conference Board of Canada (2010), The University of Alberta, designed a course focusing on employability skills to be taken while students pursue traditional academic disciplines. The university is also putting emphasis on experiential learning through co-operative education and field work, and is also helping students with their career development.

Entry Level Employability Skills Program

Funded by Alberta Human Services, this 6 month skills training program, certified through Alberta Human Services provides graduates with the skills to become employed in entry-level positions within computerized environments. Though the program offers much of their programming on computer instruction, a large component of the program focuses on communication, employability skills, and personal development workshops, skills training in current workplace procedures, customer service, and life skills.

(Employ Abilities, 2013)

Conference Board of Canada

Perhaps the most substantial and outstanding resources available across Canada are those offered by the Conference Board of Canada. The Conference Board of Canada offers five main resources: Employability Skills Profile, Skills Crediting Tool for Individuals, Employability Skills Toolkit for the Self-Managing Learner, Skills Credentialing Tool for Organizations, and the National Employability Skills Program.

Employability Skills 2000+

This is a crucial framework to explore as it will inform curriculum development going forward with this project. This resource, first developed in the early 90s by the Conference Board of Canada, is widely used and internationally recognized. It was referenced in numerous reports examined while researching international best practices. This resource has undergone multiple versions with the latest being Employability Skills 2000+ (Conference Board of Canada, 1999).



The purpose of this resource is to identify generic academic, personal management and teamwork skills which are required in every job. The Conference Board created this document for students, teachers, parents, employers, labour, community leaders, and governments to use as a framework for dialogue and action. Understanding and applying these skills will help individuals enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work. The most recent version lists 56 specific skills and attributes. Employability Skills 2000+ includes: communication, problem solving, positive attitudes and behaviours, adaptability, working with others, and science, technology and mathematics skills (Maggie Patterson, personal communication, August, 15th 2013).

The Conference Board of Canada: Employability Skills 2000+

Fundamental Skills

Communicate

- read and understand information presented in a variety of forms (e.g., words, graphs, charts, diagrams)
- write and speak so others pay attention and understand
- listen and ask questions to understand and appreciate the points of view of others
- share information using a range of information and communications technologies (e.g., voice, e-mail, computers)
- use relevant scientific, technological, and mathematical knowledge and skills to explain or clarify ideas

Manage information

- locate, gather, and organize information using appropriate technology and information systems
- access, analyze, and apply knowledge and skills from various disciplines (e.g., the arts, languages, science, technology, mathematics, social sciences, and the humanities)

Use numbers

- decide what needs to be measured or calculated
- observe and record data using appropriate methods, tools, and technology
- make estimates and verify calculations

Think and solve problems

- assess situations and identify problems
- seek different points of view and evaluate them based on facts
- recognize the human, interpersonal, technical, scientific, and mathematical dimensions of a problem
- identify the root cause of a problem
- be creative and innovative in exploring possible solutions
- readily use science, technology, and mathematics as ways to think, gain, and share knowledge, solve problems, and make decisions
- evaluate solutions to make recommendations or decisions
- implement solutions
- check to see if a solution works, and act on opportunities for improvement



Personal Management Skills

Demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours

- feel good about yourself and be confident
- deal with people, problems, and situations with honesty, integrity, and personal ethics
- recognize your own and other people's good efforts
- take care of your personal health
- show interest, initiative, and effort

Be responsible

- set goals and priorities balancing work and personal life
- plan and manage time, money, and other resources to achieve goals
- assess, weigh, and manage risk
- be accountable for your actions and the actions of your group
- be socially responsible and contribute to your community

Be adaptable

- work independently or as part of a team
- carry out multiple tasks or projects
- be innovative and resourceful: identify and suggest alternative ways to achieve goals and get the job done
- be open and respond constructively to change
- learn from your mistakes and accept feedback
- cope with uncertainty

Learn continuously

- be willing to continuously learn and grow
- assess personal strengths and areas for development
- set your own learning goals
- identify and access learning sources and opportunities
- plan for and achieve your learning goals

Work safely

- be aware of personal and group health and safety practices and procedures, and act in accordance with them

Teamwork Skills

Work with others

- understand and work within the dynamics of a group
- ensure that a team's purpose and objectives are clear
- be flexible: respect, and be open to and supportive of the thoughts, opinions, and contributions of others in a group
- recognize and respect people's diversity, individual differences, and perspectives
- accept and provide feedback in a constructive and considerate manner
- contribute to a team by sharing information and expertise
- lead or support when appropriate, motivating a group for high performance
- understand the role of conflict in a group to reach solutions



- manage and resolve conflict when appropriate

Participate in projects and tasks

- plan, design, or carry out a project or task from start to finish with well-defined objectives and outcomes
- develop a plan, seek feedback, test, revise, and implement
- work to agreed-upon quality standards and specifications
- select and use appropriate tools and technology for a task or project
- adapt to changing requirements and information
- continuously monitor the success of a project or task and identify ways to improve

(Conference Board of Canada, 2013)

Skills Crediting Tool for Individuals

The Skills Crediting Tool for Individuals is a free online resource that is a self-assessment and portfolio-building tool for students, employees and job-seekers. The tool helps individuals self-assess their essential skills and employability attitudes and behaviours, and create an evidence portfolio that they can share with an employment counsellor, instructor or workplace supervisor (Maggie Patterson, personal communication, August, 15th 2013). This will fit into the work-integrated learning component of this project's proposed programming.

Employability Skills Toolkit for the Self-Managing Learner

The Employability Skills Toolkit is a suite of practical tools designed to help learners use and develop the skills needed to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work. The Toolkit offers practical support for managing lifelong learning for personal growth and workplace success, and provides learners with much-needed information about what employability skills look like, and examples of ways they can develop and demonstrate their skills at home, school, work and in the community.

There are two cost options:

- Option 1 – A binder copy of the Employability Skills Toolkit is available at the cost of \$160.00.
- Option 2 – A one-time payment of \$3,000 for exclusive and indefinite use; The Conference Board of Canada will provide a link to the PDFs which can be accessed on-line. (Maggie Patterson, personal communication, August, 15th 2013).

Skills Credentialing Tool for Organizations

The Skills Credentialing Tool (SCT) for Organizations is an on-line tool that helps employers work with employees to assess and develop employees' Essential Skills and employability attitudes and behaviours for high performance, leading to increased productivity in the workplace. The SCT Tool offers the employee an opportunity to have their experience recognized via a certificate or credential. Managers have a framework to talk about the skills, attitudes and behaviours they expect from their employees. Employees and employers have the opportunity to clarify and document their activities. The SCT Tool creates open lines of communication about workplace expectations and engages employees to reflect on personal performance. This on-line tool has also been successfully utilized in high schools for co-op placements. Once completed, a certificate is generated (Maggie Patterson, personal communication, August, 15th 2013).



The cost of the tool is \$500 (\$10 per use/blocks of 50), plus a one-time admin fee \$150 (to cover the training sessions, ongoing maintenance, helpdesk); codes are valid for 1 3-year period (Maggie Patterson, personal communication, August, 15th 2013).

National Employability Skills Program (NESP)

The Conference Board of Canada also offers an educational program called the National Employability Skills Program. This program is most notably offered by Correctional Service of Canada to incarcerated federal offenders. The NESP assists offenders to develop a set of generic employability skills, attitudes and behaviours necessary to secure and maintain employment upon their release. A nationally-recognized certificate from the Conference Board of Canada is awarded for successful completion of the program (Correctional Service Canada, 2010; Maggie Patterson, personal communication, August, 15th 2013).

This program has had great success with 87% of program stakeholders stating it was a worthwhile initiative. The program received positive feedback because it addressed the employability needs of offenders (83%), and it provided them with the skills necessary to respond to the needs of employers (80%). Program stakeholders noted that NESP facilitated offenders' skills development (88%), contributed to the successful reintegration of offenders in the community (58%) and helped offenders to understand behaviours and expectations in the workplace (37%; Correctional Service Canada, 2010).

This population is well documented for their underdeveloped employment skills. Consequently, the target audience is very specific and this resource has been used primarily by correctional and rehabilitation facilities. However, recently The Royal Ottawa Health Care Group purchased the program and the Conference Board of Canada is working with them to update and refine it to reach a wider audience. Thus far the resource has been met with positive feedback (Maggie Patterson, personal communication, August, 19th 2013).

Correctional Service of Canada – National Employability Skills Program

Using Employability Skills 2000+ framework a curriculum was developed comprised of 12 employability skills which are divided into three main skill categories:

1. fundamental;
2. personal management; and
3. teamwork skills.

Delivered in 12 2 hour lessons with the full length of the NESP session is between 30 and 37.5 hours. This includes both in-class lessons and time spent in the workplace. NESP consists of more than 100 exercises (e.g., role-plays, poster presentations, etc.) which are completed during in-class lessons and as homework assignments. There are a maximum of people in a group. In order to be eligible for the certificate, participants must achieve a score of 75% in participation and 80% in class attendance.

The program has a participant evaluation component built into its design both during and after the program. Participants' progress in NESP is monitored based on three key assessments: self-assessment, facilitator assessment, and workplace supervisors' assessment.

(Correctional Service Canada, 2010)



Online Canadian Resources

There are many helpful online resources to assist individuals with their employability and related skills. Most of these sites are funded by government and are targeted towards people entering the workforce. Some notable resources include: tutela.ca, Service Canada's Blueprint for life, Common Assessment of Basic Skills Online (CABS), ESPortfolio, Measure Up (TOWES), Workplace Essential Skills Learning Assessment Tool (WESLAT), and Essential Skills: The Obvious Choice. These websites have excellent material and would be a great resource for instructors that teach this program.

The most notable online resource is the Essential Skills Program. Employment and Social Development Canada develops policies, programs and tools that promote job-specific and non-technical skills training for Canadians. They focus on both the general population and special groups identified as being in need of skills development with the goal of producing a skilled, adaptable and inclusive Canadian labour force. They have developed a set of nine workplace competencies, called Essential Skills. The Essential Skills Profiles also outline how they can be used by workers in a particular occupation. ESCD is being used in many different contexts and has partnered with various organizations to further promote Essential Skills. Examples of such partnerships include: Applications of Working and Learning, Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board, Ontario Skills Passport, Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES), (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2013).

Essential Skills			
Essential Skills	Typical Applications	Workplace Examples	Community Examples
Reading Understanding materials written in sentences or paragraph (e.g. letters, manuals).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan for information or overall meaning. • Read to understand, learn, critique or evaluate. • Analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources or from complex and lengthy texts. 	An airline sales agent reads notices on a computer screen, such as special handling requirements or weather information.	You may use this skill to understand a lease agreement for a new apartment.
Document Use Finding, understanding or entering information (e.g. text, symbols, numbers) in various types of documents, such as tables or forms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read signs, labels or lists. • Understand information on graphs or charts. • Enter information in forms. • Create or read schematic drawings. 	A bricklayer interprets blueprints to determine the height, length and thickness of walls.	You may use this skill when referring to a bus schedule to plan an outing.
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make calculations. • Take measurements. 	Payroll clerks monitor	You may use this skill to



<p>thinking in quantitative terms to complete tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform scheduling, budgeting or accounting activities. • Analyze data. • Make estimations. 	<p>to prepare budget and scheduling forecasts.</p>	<p>calculate deductions on personal tax forms.</p>
<p>Writing Communicating by arranging words, numbers and symbols on paper or a computer screen.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write to organize or record information. • Write to inform or persuade. • Write to request information or justify a request. • Write an analysis or a comparison. 	<p>Human resources professionals write recommendations on issues such as workplace health and safety.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to complete an application for a credit card.</p>
<p>Oral Communication Using speech to exchange thoughts and information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide or obtain information. • Greet, reassure or persuade people. • Resolve conflicts. • Lead discussions. 	<p>Office clerks take messages and share information by phone and in person.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to explain a food allergy to a server at a restaurant.</p>
<p>Working with Others Interacting with others to complete tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work independently, alongside others. • Work jointly with a partner or helper. • Work as a member of a team. • Participate in supervisory or leadership activities. 	<p>Municipal engineers work with technicians, inspectors, and suppliers to complete construction projects.</p>	<p>You may use this skill when working with volunteers to organize a fundraising activity.</p>
<p>Thinking Finding and evaluating information to make rational decisions or to organize work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and resolve problems. • Make decisions. • Find information. • Plan and organize job tasks. • Use critical thinking. • Use memory. 	<p>Paramedics diagnose a patient's condition based on medical charts and their own observations. They use their judgement to start an appropriate treatment plan.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to research and select courses at your local adult learning centre.</p>
<p>Computer Use Using computers and other forms of technology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use different forms of technology, such as cash registers or fax machines. • Use word processing 	<p>Telephone operators use customized software to scan databases for</p>	<p>You may use this skill when withdrawing or depositing</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send and receive emails. • Create and modify spreadsheets. • Navigate the Internet. 	or long distance rates.	automatic teller machine (ATM).
<p>Continuous Learning Participating in an ongoing process of improving skills and knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn on the job. • Learn through formal training. • Learn through self-study. • Understand your own learning style. • Know where to find learning resources. 	Retail sales associates improve their skills and knowledge by attending sales training and reading product brochures.	You may use this skill when attending a first aid course at a community centre.

(Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009)

Other national resources

Another national program of interest is Futureworx. FutureWorx is a non-profit organization whose objective is to help clients overcome barriers in attaining employment. One of the programs they offer is focused on what they call “integrated skills development”. This program focuses on technical and sector specific skills, and also employability skills and essential skills. The program uses technical skills to initiate growth in other areas of the student (Lindsay & Brinkhurst, 2011). This is an interesting approach and it may increase student buy-in. FutureWorx also has a well-developed assessment model for measuring employability. This will be addressed later in the report.

4.2 Global Best Practices

Employability skills issues are not unique to Canada as this section will demonstrate. This issue, also referred to as generic skills, key competencies, core skills, essential skills, and soft skills, has been long standing and growing in an international context. Similar programs and initiatives can be seen in the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK along with many other countries.

When examining programs available in the international context, many similarities reflected in Ontario’s range of programming were evident. A scan of programs offered in other developed countries shows a general agreement in terms of employability skills. Additionally, employability skills seem to be most prevalently delivered through secondary and post-secondary education. This is not surprising as it is the easiest way to reach the largest group of people. However, these skills can use further reinforcement in specialized courses and in the workplace, taking learning beyond the formal education system.

The Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) - USA

The Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report (1991) was developed by the United States Department of Labor. It was created to outline the skills and attributes which young people require in order to successfully enter and maintain employment in the United States. The purpose of this initiative was to cultivate a high-performance economy characterized by high-skill, high-wage employment. Although SCANS finished its work in 1992, the outcomes are still valued by individuals and organizations involved in workforce development (United States Department of Labor, 2009).



SCANS developed a report “What Workplaces Require of Schools” (United States Department of Labor, 1991). This report explains the shortcomings of US high schools and discussed how they could be transformed to better deliver the skills needed for employment.

SCANS workplace know-how components	
<p>Workplace competencies</p> <p>Effective workers can productively use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resources (time, money, materials, personnel)• Interpersonal skills (teamwork, lead, negotiate)• Information (acquire, evaluate, organise data)• Systems (social, organisational, technical)• Technology (use technology, diagnose faults)	<p>Foundation skills</p> <p>Competent workers in high performance workplaces need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basic skills (literacy, numeracy, communication)• Thinking skills (decision making, problem solving)• Personal qualities (responsibility, self-esteem, integrity)
<p>(United States Department of Labor, 1991)</p>	

Since SCANS the United States Department of Labor has developed new initiatives. Currently there is a five-Year Research and Evaluation Strategic Plan for 2012-2017. The projects will focus on employment and training priorities for the five-year period following the plan which . The plan is to contain strategies to address national employment and training problems (United States Department of Labor, 2009).

Key Skills – United Kingdom

Similar to Canada, the UK has found that as higher skill level jobs are growing, a skills gap is increasing in the workforce. In addressing this problem the UK government expects to benefit individuals, businesses and the nation. It is believed Key Skills will make the UK’s workforce more competitive (Campbell, 2001). Key Skills outlines the attributes needed for success both during and beyond school. This framework is often integrated into the senior school years in the UK. Like other similar programs, Key Skills encourages students to develop and demonstrate their abilities and apply them in the appropriate contexts. They are the generic skills that support success in every aspect of the individual’s life (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

Key Skills – United Kingdom
<p>Information processing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessing information from a range of sources• Selecting and discriminating between sources based on their reliability and suitability for purpose• Recording, organising, summarising and integrating information• Presenting information using a range of information and communication technologies <p>Critical and creative thinking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examining patterns and relationships, classifying and ordering information



- Analysing and making good arguments, challenging assumptions
- Hypothesising and making predictions, examining evidence and reaching conclusions
- Identifying and analysing problems and decisions, exploring options and alternatives, solving problems and evaluating outcomes
- Thinking imaginatively, actively seeking out new points of view, problems and/or solutions, being innovative and taking risks

Communicating

- Analysing and interpreting texts and other forms of communication
- Expressing opinions, speculating, discussing, reasoning and engaging in debate and argument
- Engaging in dialogue, listening attentively and eliciting opinions, views and emotions
- Composing and performing in a variety of ways
- Presenting using a variety of media

Working with others

- Working with others in a variety of contexts with different goals and purposes
- Identifying, evaluating and achieving collective goals
- Identifying responsibilities in a group and establishing practices associated with different roles in a group (e.g., leader, team member)
- Developing good relationships with others and a sense of well-being in a group
- Acknowledging individual differences, negotiating and resolving conflicts
- Checking progress, reviewing the work of the group and personally reflecting on one's own contribution

Being personally effective

- Being able to appraise oneself, evaluate one's own performance, receive and respond to feedback
- Identifying, evaluating and achieving personal goals, including developing and evaluating actions plans
- Developing personal qualities that help in new and difficult situations, such as taking initiatives, being flexible and being able to persevere when difficulties arise
- Becoming confident and being able to assert oneself as a person

(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2013)

Each key skill qualification comprises various elements at different levels, allowing students to progress through 4 levels. Students must accomplish specific performance criteria to achieve a qualification. Students are assessed through evidenced based criteria by putting together a portfolio that is thoroughly inspected by an examining body (DfES, 2003).

Employability Skills/Core Skills - Australia

Employability skills have been around in Australia for at least 20 years, and have experienced an increased focus more recently, with a push to make them more explicit in education and training. An Employability Skills Framework was developed in 2002 by government organizations partnering with employers. In 2009 a Job Ready Certificate was created by the Australian government. Employability skills outlined in the report are delivered in schools, vocational education and training, university and on-the-job. In recent years a new framework, "Core Skills for Employment" (Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, 2012), has been in development.



My future: Employability Skills

Communication

- listening and understanding
- speaking clearly and directly
- writing to the needs of the audience
- negotiating responsively
- reading independently
- empathising
- using numeracy effectively
- understanding the needs of internal and external customers
- persuading effectively
- establishing and using networks
- being assertive
- sharing information
- speaking and writing in languages other than English.

Team work

- working with people of different ages, gender, race, religion or political persuasion
- working as an individual and as a member of a team
- knowing how to define a role as part of a team
- applying teamwork skills to a range of situations, e.g. futures planning, crisis problem solving
- identifying the strengths of team members
- coaching, mentoring and giving feedback.

Problem solving

- developing creative, innovative, practical solutions
- showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them
- solving problems in teams
- applying a range of strategies to problem solving
- using mathematics including budgeting and financial management to solve problems
- applying problem-solving strategies across a range of areas
- testing assumptions taking data and circumstances into account
- resolving customer concerns in relation to complex project issues.

Initiative and enterprise

- adapting to new situations
- developing a strategic, creative, long-term vision
- being creative
- identifying opportunities not obvious to others
- translating ideas into action
- generating a range of options
- initiating innovative solutions.

Planning and organising

- managing time and priorities – setting timelines, coordinating tasks for self and with others



- being resourceful
- taking initiative and making decisions
- adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies
- establishing clear project goals and deliverables
- allocating people and other resources to tasks
- planning the use of resources including time management
- participating in continuous improvement and planning processes
- developing a vision and a proactive plan to accompany it
- predicting – weighing up risk, evaluating alternatives and applying evaluation criteria
- collecting, analysing and organising information
- understanding basic business systems and their relationships

Self-management

- having a personal vision and goals
- evaluating and monitoring own performance
- having knowledge and confidence in own ideas and vision
- articulating own ideas and vision
- taking responsibility.

Learning

- managing own learning
- contributing to the learning community at the workplace
- using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support networking, information technology (IT), courses
- applying learning to 'technical' issues (e.g. learning about products) and 'people' issues (e.g. interpersonal and cultural aspects of work)
- having enthusiasm for ongoing learning
- being willing to learn in any setting – on and off the job
- being open to new ideas and techniques
- being prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills
- acknowledging need to learn in order to accommodate change.

Technology

- having a range of basic IT skills
- applying IT as a management tool
- using IT to organise data
- being willing to learn new IT skills
- having occupational health and safety knowledge to apply technology
- having appropriate physical capacity

(Australian, state and territory governments, 2012)



5 Best and promising practices in curriculum design and delivery framework

Expanding on the research and analysis of Ontario's services and broadening our lens to global and national practices, this section applies the best and most promising practices to curriculum design and delivery framework. Programs of this nature are being offered in most developed countries and much can be learned by examining how they have executed such programs.

Specific areas of interest include:

- the methodologies used in delivering soft skills
- themes in content
- target audience
- barriers in delivery

To begin this discussion, the following sub-section defines employability skills to allow for a common starting point in the subsequent sections.

5.1 Defining and listing employability skills

After examining the literature summarized in the preceding pages, employability skills can be characterised as:

- Multi-functional
- Highly relevant
- Critical for obtaining, retaining, and growing at work
- Needed for participation in: School, labour market, and interpersonal relationships
- Develop a sense of social well-being
- Beyond technical competence

(Bloom R. M., & Kiagawa K. G., 1999; Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, 2012; Precision Consultancy, 2007; Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, 2012).

Employability skills most often include:

Soft skills

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Time management
- Critical thinking
- Personal Management
- Continuous Learning

Key Understandings

- Mathematics and numeracy
- Computer use and technology
- Reading
- Writing



(Bloom R. M., & Kiagawa K. G., 1999; Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, 2012; Precision Consultancy, 2007; Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, 2012; Lindsay & Brinkhurst, 2011).

Other notable skills identified are: accountability, planning, adapting to change, initiative, work safety, business skills, managing resources, respecting diversity, community involvement, and work life balance (Bloom R. M., & Kiagawa K. G., 1999; Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, 2012; Precision Consultancy, 2007; Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, 2012; Australian National Training Authority, 2004;).

5.1.1 Delivery Methods

Classroom Delivery

As previously identified, soft skills frameworks are often delivered in an educational context. The themes are usually interwoven into other curriculum. In very few circumstances is the material directly delivered through specialized courses. These skills are not explicit so there is a risk that this method may not be the most effective way to teach these skills. In a questionnaire vocational education instructors were asked how generic skills could be better facilitated. The comments of the teachers indicated there is a need for more specification of skills and explicitly embedding them into their program (Australian National Training Authority, 2008). By offering a specialized program where these skills are the direct focus of learning outcomes, there is the opportunity to strengthen both delivery and knowledge and understanding as it relates to employability skills.

Work Integrated Delivery

One trend in the national and global delivery of employability skills is work-integrated learning (Precision Consultancy, 2007; Universities Scotland, 2002; Correctional Service Canada, 2010). This involves the learning, teaching, and assessment on the job. This is usually a critical component to many of the skills programs and in some cases this is the only component.

Although employability skills can be developed in a variety of educational settings, workplaces are arguably the best site in most instances, given the immediate and direct application. Work-integrated learning provides workplace supervisors with the opportunity to see how learners navigate the complex day-to-day operations in a real setting. Supervisors can observe areas where an individual may be struggling and offer guidance and reinforcement to address these areas. In a report on employability skills and work-integrated learning, it was found that supervisors and managers enjoyed working with the learners (Precision Consultancy, 2007). This approach provides employers the opportunity to speak frankly and constructively with employees, and to demonstrate a commitment to employee learning in the workplace. This communication would support worker integration into the work environment, and better align employer needs with employee capability.

Online Delivery

This research uncovered a variety of online resources for delivering employability skills; many available specifically for Ontarians. The research further clarified that there are very few programs that teach employability skills with large online components. Employability skills are complex and often involve human interaction making online delivery less than an ideal delivery method. However, it must be noted that such programs do exist; Aztec's *Ready for Work Series* is one such example. This program teaches content such as: time management, following directions, and getting along with your coworkers. The program is targeted towards non-traditional students and is delivered modularly on PCs. The software



uses a variety of scenarios to deliver content. The program uses audio and graphics combined to enhance the delivery (Aztec Software, 2013).

On-line delivery is generally a self-guided approach with the participant working through modular curriculum and tasked with applying learning beyond the module. A model that is grounded in introduction, application and observation of skills among learners is seen as a value-add, and resulting in a greater absorption of the expected learning outcomes. On-line learning is also influenced by the type of learner that is participating, as not all learners are self-directed learners.

Instructional Delivery

The delivery of soft skills curricula requires going beyond traditional lecturing and use a range of teaching methodologies. Task-based approaches and similar methods will be more relevant. In a 2007 report completed by Precision Consultancy successful learning methods for teaching soft skills included: adult learning principles, holistic approaches to learning, learner-centred, problem-based learning, lifelong learning skills, questioning and predicting, reflecting, and active learning methods. Integration of multiple methods will support strong learning outcomes and understanding. It would help increase student buy in and strengthen the value of learning, and knowledge take away. The same report found that in this teaching style, the instructor had to assume multiple roles, such as mentor, coach, facilitator, modeller and evaluator. The instructor plays a crucial role in the facilitation of employability skills.

Teaching strategies suited to development of employability skills	Teaching Strategies
Communication	Writing and presenting written and verbal reports Role plays Demonstrations Working in groups
Teamwork	Team or group projects Learning sets Group discussion Syndicates Communities of practice
Problem solving	Case studies Simulations Investigative projects and research Using various problem solving tools and techniques Developing or designing models Problem solving in teams and networks Decision making activities
Initiative and enterprise	Brainstorming activities Designing innovative and creative practices and solutions Initiating change / designing change processes Simulation activities
Planning and organizing	Research and data collection Developing action plans Planning and organizing events Time management activities Goal setting activities and scheduling tasks Collecting and analyzing information
Self-management	Development of portfolios Work plans Using log books to record time management skills and



	monitor own performance Career planning exercises
Learning	Reflective journals log books, diaries Mentoring and coaching activities Self-evaluation tools

Employability Skills: from framework to practice (Department of Education Science and Training, 2006)

5.1.2 Assessment Methods

Finding the correct assessment methods for this program will be crucial to its success. The evaluation system needs to inform the learner and the instructor of an individual's specific level of understanding and achievement; when measuring soft skills this can be difficult. Making this process complicated is the fact that there are a variety of assessment methods with a range of uses and goals. To help determine the best assessment method, it is important to consider the validity, reliability, and authenticity of the tools. Validity will require that the tool is useful and appropriate. A reliable tool will give consistent and accurate results across a variety of students and teachers. Authenticity will ensure the tools are relatable to real world applications (Australian National Training Authority, 2004).

Assessing soft skills is not like assessing most abilities and understandings. Therefore, conventional methods of assessment (tests, written assignments, etc.) may not be the most effective method. In a review of literature by D. Curtis four broad approaches were used to assess generic skills:

- Holistic judgements by the teachers
- Portfolios created by the students
- Assessment based on work experience
- Assessment using purpose-developed instruments

The review of literature also found that the assessment of generic skills is best when assessed by teachers, experts in the field and the individual themselves (gathering portfolios, self-reflection).

In light of the prevailing literature, it would be ideal to integrate all four assessment approaches when measuring soft skill development in this program. This would strengthen the assessment and its applicability across a diverse participant audience, in multiple context situations. Moreover, it is recommended that multiple assessors be utilized, when appropriate. By having multiple assessors it will increase the reliability of the assessment model. By using these methods it would gather measurements for real-world outcomes.

Something that is important to recognize when assessing employability skills is the fact that they are highly subjective. An interesting resource that attempts to overcome this is the Employability Skills Assessment Tool by FutureWorx. The tool acknowledges that measuring employability is highly subjective so they ensure common skill definitions, involve all staff who have client interaction, include self-assessment, base their assessment on observed behaviours, and seek consensus (Lindsay & Brinkhurst 2011). These methods help to make the measurements more accurate and meaningful.



Employability Skills Assessment Tool - FutureWorx

Self-Assessment

- Questionnaire based
- Facilitated exercise
- Requires an assessment re different venues (work, home, etc)
- Repeated over an agreed period (4-6 weeks)

Staff Assessment

- Subjective assessment supported by observations recorded in the ESAT case management system
- Scale based (1-8 or as defined)
- Completed independently by all staff interacting with client
- Repeated over an agreed period (4-6 weeks)

Staff Consensus (weekly case meeting)

1. Staff results presented by the case manager or counselor.
2. Staff consensus developed through discussion.
3. Staff and Self assessments are comparison.
4. Way ahead formulated:-Focus on specific skills?-Performance Improvement Agreement or Contract?-Deconstruct?

(Lindsay & Brinkhurst 2011)

Using tasked-based approaches to delivery will influence the type of assessment tool required. The new Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) focuses on delivering adult learner curriculum through task-based approaches to prepare learners for employment. This program uses a variety of assessment methods starting with diagnostic assessments, then self-assessments, and then task tracking sheets. The final resource utilized is called *Embedded Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes Reference Guide for Ontario* (ESKARGO) (LBS Practitioner Training, 2013). The ESKARGO uses a checklist of skills and understandings found in tasks related to a specific competency, task group and level. ESKARGO also uses an Attitudes Rubric to assist students in realizing how attitude plays a role in successfully performing a task. Analysis of the program indicates that this would be useful in a program that is teaching employability skills.

ESKARGO - Example of checklist

Competency F: Engage with Others

Skills and Knowledge Required for Successful Task Performance

- Applies the following selected skills, knowledge and attitudes when working with one other person
- Applies the following selected skills, knowledge and attitudes when working with two or more people

Interpersonal Skills

- Builds good rapport



- Exchanges information to get acquainted and to establish a personal connection
- Communicates effectively
 - Demonstrates interest and attentive listening through body language and facial expression
 - Lets people finish the point they are making without interruption
 - Listens for underlying messages from others:
 - What does the person really mean?
 - What do they really want you to hear or to know?
 - Checks for meaning; asks questions to check for correct understanding
 - Asks for more details when necessary; asks questions for clarification
 - Shares own thoughts and ideas
 - Leave silences so other people can enter the dialogue or work out their own position
 - Phrases suggestions as questions (e.g., instead of “I think we should...” asks, “What about doing...?”)
- Demonstrates respect for others
 - Understands that people are different, have different strengths and abilities, different perspectives, different ways of doing things
 - Acknowledges, appreciates and values diversity
 - Considers the feelings, views and values of others
 - Demonstrates tolerance, patience and flexibility
- Understands the need for different roles and responsibilities in working together
 - Understands the big picture – the overall objective – the expectations and scope of the project or task at hand
 - Understands own role; seeks clarification of role if necessary
 - Accepts one’s own share of responsibilities
 - Understands and recognizes the roles of others; seeks clarification of roles if necessary
- Cooperates and collaborates with others to complete a project or task
 - Negotiates to establish consensus
 - Acknowledges and uses the skills, strengths, ideas and opinions of other team members
 - Contributes to decision-making by stating own ideas and points of view
 - Accepts decisions made by the group
 - Maintains honest and respectful communication
 - Gives and receives feedback and criticism in constructive ways
 - Considers feedback and advice given by other team members
 - Helps out others when necessary
 - Reviews work with others and agrees on ways of improving collaborative work
- Works to resolve conflict
 - Recognizes areas of agreement and disagreement
 - Understands and accepts the role of conflict in group work; i.e., a sometimes normal and necessary part of the process
 - Recognizes and acknowledges when conflict has a negative impact, for example through:
 - dissatisfaction with others
 - competition amongst members



- disagreement over procedures
- Identifies options for resolving disagreements and conflict, and/or sanctions
- Contributes to finding a mutually agreeable solution

(CESBA, 2012)

Levels of assessment and benchmarks

It is important to determine if assessment is going to be measured by a single benchmark that an individual must pass to complete the program. Alternatively the assessment may utilize multiple performance benchmarks that monitor learning and comprehension. In many training programs outside of employability skills it is common to have a single benchmark of acceptable performance, which is either attained or not achieved. Research indicates that both are used almost equally in the delivery of employability skills (DFES, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor 1991; Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, 2012; Correctional Service Canada, 2010). Consideration should be given to both, or a blended approach.

5.1.3 Participant Buy-in

Audience

Before examining student buy-in it is important to first identify the audience to which the program is being delivered. When examining this, a gap was uncovered in the existing research. It was easy to find who the programs were targeted towards and being delivered to. However, the research did not present who, on an individual basis was looking to improve their employability skills. This was because most programs were not the direct choice of the person taking the program. Most programs were developed by governing bodies trying to improve a population's employability skills through another process. Examples being:

- With young people being a major target for skills development with this focus, many programs in the high school education system include at least some level of relevant curriculum.
- Novice workers are another population who receive training through their education system (vocational school, university, and college curriculum), although it is noted that validation of this training is not always available.
- Incarcerated individuals are a population identified as needing improved employability skills so the NESP program was developed.
- Employers look to increase their employees' soft skills so they put them through a training program.

What is not found are individuals who consciously identify the need to upgrade their soft skills and then seek appropriate programs. This might show that individuals who need soft skills development are not often aware that they need it, or that they are not motivated to develop these skills. Whatever the case may be it will be important to consider that this might need to be marketed beyond just individuals but to other audiences (i.e. employers, schools, etc.).

When looking at the research and programs available it is clear that employability skills are already being delivered to youth through schooling. Therefore, this is not a logical target audience. Instead, the audience for this program will likely be adults. Out of this adult population the target audience would be those individuals who are unemployed or underemployed, and lacking soft skills.



5.1.4 Getting Participant Buy-In

In programs such as the one informed by this study, there may be difficulties getting participants to buy-in. Often individuals believe they already grasp these concepts or do not need such training. Many individuals today only care about technical competence as they believe that is the key factor in obtaining employment. In a survey conducted about vocational education training 58% of students surveyed only cared to learn skills directly relevant to the industry they wanted to work in (Australian National Training Authority, 2004). Keeping this in mind the content delivered should explicitly explain its relevance to the workplace. Content delivered should have clear practical applications. The more relevant the materials, the more buy-in likely from the participants. As mentioned earlier in the report, the FutureWorx program teaches technical skills as a catalyst to initiate growth in employability skills (Lindsay & Brinkhurst, 2011). By integrating some technical skills it there could be an increased buy-in.

A lack of competency in soft skills may be seen differently as a lack in technical skills. Confronting someone with these inadequacies might cause participants to become more defensive and closed-off. In this vein, typically individuals find it difficult to accept any flaws in their soft skills. Consequently, it will be important to manage how this conversation is approached or positioned. FutureWorx states that they target employability skills and not personal flaws (Lindsay & Brinkhurst, 2011). This is a good outlook to share with the participants and instructors. Instructors will need to be honest and direct but make sure they are approaching behaviours constructively to prevent the participants from feeling attacked.

Since this program is targeted towards adults, using adult learning principals will be paramount. Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning (Brookfield, Stephen D. 1988) outlines six principles of effective practice for facilitating adult learning: (1) voluntary participation; (2) mutual respect; (3) collaborative spirit; (4) action and reflection; (5) critical reflection; and (6) self-direction. Further, it will be crucial to work these principals into the program to help increase participant engagement and buy-in.

5.2 Model at a Glance

To best depict the flow and structure of the proposed framework, the following two diagrams are presented.

Diagram 1 offers a visual representation of project flow, moving from issue identification through to the expected outcomes. Diagram 2 presents the framework in two stages, stage one being program delivery and stage two focusing on work integrated learning. A modular approach is offered to strengthen program delivery with a total of five modules following the initial program introduction. Stage two includes areas of focus and outcomes with assessment methods.



Employability Skills Project Development





Employability Skills Framework

Delivery Components

Stage 1: In Class or Online Delivery	
⇒	4-6 Modules
⇒	24-35 hours of instruction
⇒	Focus on soft skills instead of key understandings
⇒	Certification*
*Certification found to be of little value to employers	

Stage 2: Work Integrated Learning	
⇒	Experiential learning opportunity applying knowledge from stage 1
⇒	Supervisors oversee student growth
⇒	No established time limit
⇒	Additional certification

Program Overview

Stage 1: In class or online		Area of Focus and Outcomes	Teaching and Assessment Methods
Stage 1: In class or online	Module 0	Program introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish classroom expectations Introduce a shared vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open discussion
	Module 1	Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructive criticism Speaking clearly and directly Appropriate workplace conversations Resolving conflict Listening and understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class discussion Role plays Demonstrations
	Module 2	Teamwork <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with a diverse team (age, sexuality, gender, race, etc.) Identifying individual strengths in a team How to lead and how to support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role plays Demonstrations Group work Peer assessment
	Module 3	Personal Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance and punctuality Ethics Social media, computer, and phone use in the workplace Professional vs. personal self Demonstrating initiative Hygiene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class discussion Case studies Brainstorming
	Module 4	Problem Solving and Critical Thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and predicting problems Strategies for approaching problems Being resourceful and innovative Implementing solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational chart Case studies Brainstorming
	Module 5	Continuous Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being open to change Setting goals Addressing personal weaknesses Learning from mistakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portfolio Self-evaluations
Individuals who lack key understandings (reading, writing, mathematics, computer use, work safety) will be referred to outside programs.			
Stage 2: Work Integrated Learning		Area of Focus and Outcomes	Assessment Methods
Stage 2: Work Integrated Learning		Experiential Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Teamwork Personal Management Problem Solving and Critical Thinking Continuous Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self assessments Jouralling Portfolio Supervisor Assessment

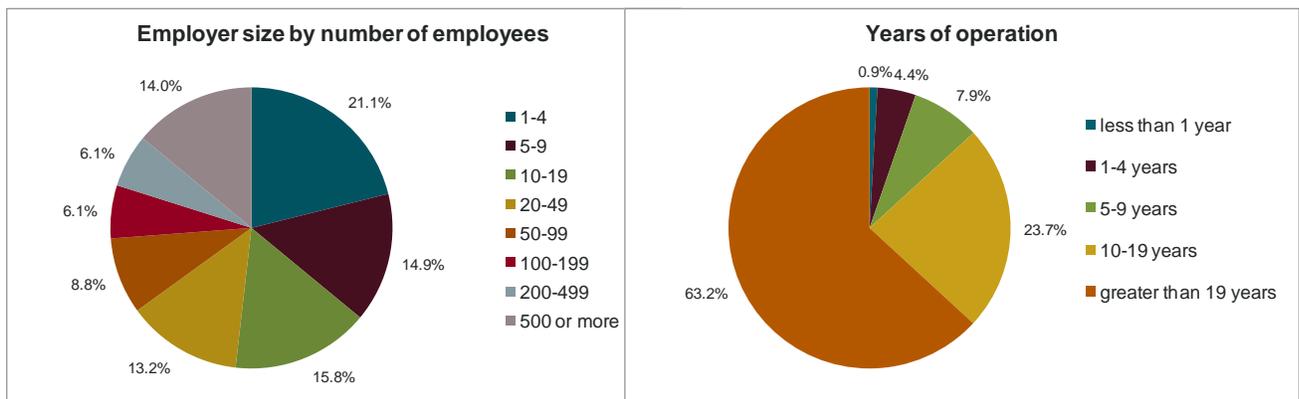


6 Research Validation – Employer Survey Results

6.1 Introduction

On February 6th, 2014 an online survey was distributed by the SMWDB through its networks to elicit feedback from employers on the importance of employability skills and the potential for a related certification or accreditation program. The survey was open until the end of February 2014 and was completed by 118 respondents. The employee size of these organizations ranged from small, with 1-4 employees, to mid-sized (10-49 employees) to very large (500 or more employees). The survey samples employer size by number of employees is shown in the figure below. The number of years each surveyed business has been in operation is also shown below. Overwhelmingly, the businesses surveyed have been in operation for over 10 years.

FIGURE 1 SURVEYED EMPLOYER CHARACTERISTICS



6.2 Survey Results

Defining soft skills

Employers were asked to validate the definition of “soft skills” to be used for the purposes of this study. In the survey, “soft skills” or “employability skills” were defined as “personality characteristics and traits that could include leadership, dependability, motivation, communication skills, team work, confidence, versatility, reliability, efficiency, among others.”

Of the 118 respondents, 105 (89%) agreed or strongly agreed with this definition. Several respondents also commented that “people skills or social skills” are further terms used by employers to define “soft skills”.

Importance of demonstrating soft skills in hiring

Respondents were then asked “how important is it for candidates to validate their capability in the area of soft skills through evidence (demonstrated experience, proof of training or certification)?”

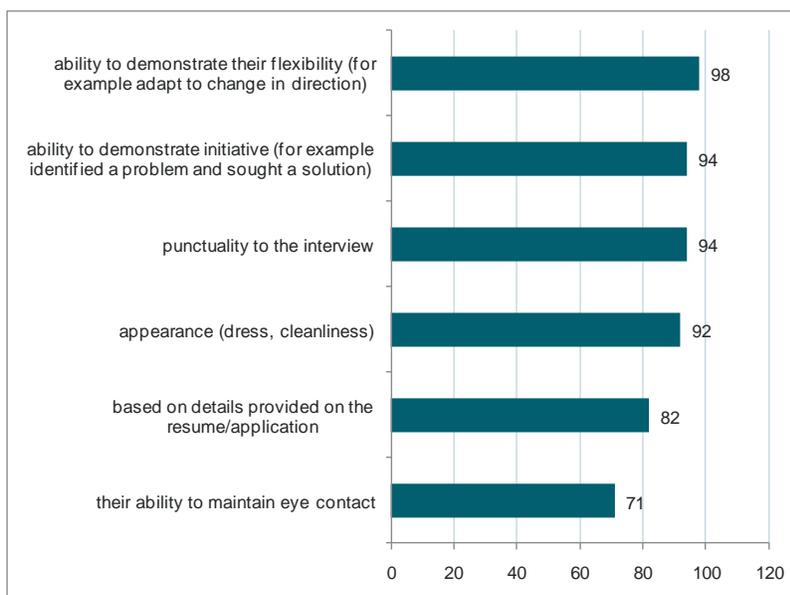


Of the 117 respondents, 99 (85%) indicated it is important or very important for candidates to validate their capability in the area of soft skills. Employers also commented, “soft skills are often determined by asking behaviour based interview questions”. Demonstrated experience was also commonly cited by respondents as the primary method of determining candidate soft skills.

Measuring soft skills

Next employers were asked, “When you interview a potential employee how do you measure his/her soft skills?” A list was provided to respondents, with the option for employers to select all of the criteria they would use to measure soft skills. 111 employers responded with the results presented in the figure below. Of the 111 respondents, the majority selected all of the provided factors, with “ability to demonstrate their flexibility” emerging as the top response with 88%.

FIGURE 2 MEASURING SOFT SKILLS - EMPLOYER SURVEY RESULTS



Respondents also offered a series of comments to augment the list provided. These comments centered on four themes. Of these additional factors, the most commonly cited included:

- Candidate references
- Ability to communicate concepts and ideas in a logical and clear fashion
- Ability to recount meaningful examples of when candidate was forced to deal with on the job adversity
- On-the-job trial periods

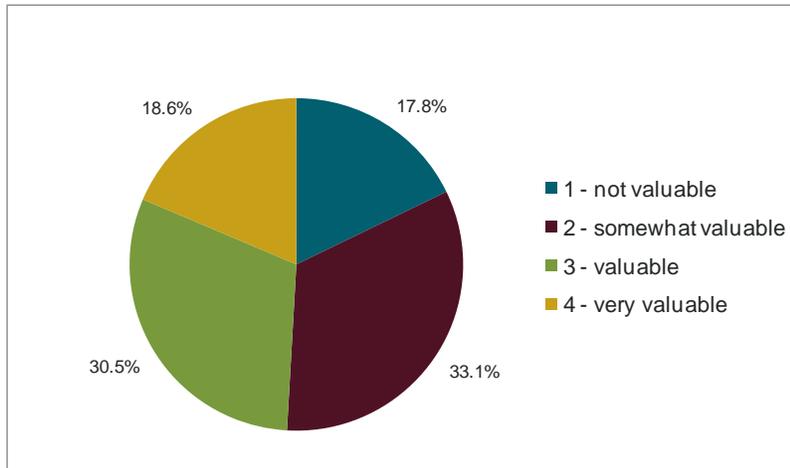
Value of “soft skills” certification or accreditation

With the intent of understanding the potential value of soft skills certification or accreditation, employers were asked, “how valuable is it that “soft skills” be recognized through certification or accreditation?” As part of this question, employers were asked to consider the influence that this type of certification/ accreditation would have on a decision to hire a job candidate. 118 employers responded to this question and on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being “not valuable”, and 4 being “very valuable”, the results were split across each of the response categories as shown in the figure below.



Only 21 (18.6%) of the total 118 employers indicated soft skills certification/accreditation would have no value. On the other hand, nearly half of the respondents (49%) indicated this would be either “valuable” or “very valuable”. Finally, 39 (33.1%) of employers suggested this would be “somewhat valuable”.

FIGURE 3 VALUE OF “SOFT SKILLS” CERTIFICATION OR ACCREDITATION - EMPLOYER SURVEY RESULTS

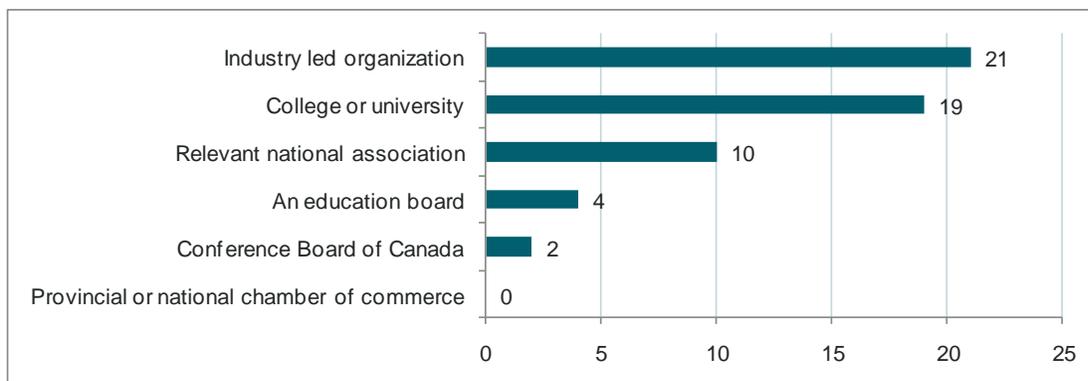


Several respondents suggested this type of certification or accreditation would be difficult to administer and “soft skills” are difficult to teach in a class room setting.

Preferred organization/body to handle soft skill credentialing

Those employers that considered soft skill certification or accreditation “valuable” or “very valuable” were asked to identify the preferred organization/body to handle soft skill credentialing. 56 employers responded with the results presented in the figure below. The two most preferred types of organizations to handle soft skill credentialing include “industry led organizations” and “college or university”.

FIGURE 4 PREFERRED ORGANIZATION/BODY TO HANDLE SOFT SKILL CREDENTIALING - EMPLOYER SURVEY RESULTS



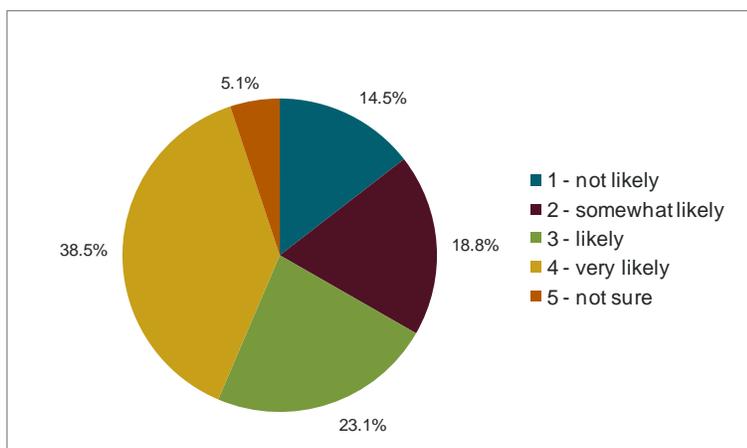
Respondents also noted that community-based agencies that deliver adult literacy would be well positioned to offer this type of training and credentialing.



Likelihood of sending employees for 'no cost' soft skills training

Respondents were then asked, "If there was a training opportunity available in your local area for no cost 'soft skills development' how likely would it be for you to send your employees needing to enhance their 'soft skills'?" Employers were given a range of response categories from "not likely" to "very likely" with the results shown in the figure below. A total of 117 employers answered this question with 72 (62%) respondents selecting "likely" or "very likely". A further 22 employers (19%) said they were "somewhat likely". Finally, 23 employers (20%) indicated they would be "not likely" or "not sure" if they would send their employees for this type of training.

FIGURE 5 LIKELIHOOD OF SENDING EMPLOYEES FOR 'NO COST' SOFT SKILLS TRAINING - EMPLOYER SURVEY RESULTS



Soft skills training program as a determinate to hiring

Next employers were asked, "Would you be more likely to consider hiring a job candidate that has participated in a 'soft skills training program' considering that 'hard skills' are met?" 112 employers answered this question. Of these respondents 67 (60%) indicated "yes" they would be more likely. Only 7 employers (6%) said "no", but a further 38 employers (33%) said they were "not sure" if they would be more likely to consider hiring a job candidate who has participated in a 'soft skills training program'.

In a similar vein, employers were asked, "If all other criteria of the candidates were equal, would completion of a 'soft skills training program' encourage you to hire one candidate over another?" 115 employers answered this question resulting in a similar pattern of responses to the previous question. Again, 68 or 60% of employers indicated "yes" completion of the training program would be a determining hiring consideration. The remaining 40% of employers were split in their response of "no" (15 or 13%) and "not sure" (32 or 28%).

Employers provided several comments in response to these questions worth considering before implementing such a program. One employer said, "This type of training would be a point in a candidate's favour, but these skills would still be evaluated in an interview because "taking a course doesn't ensure they've absorbed and developed the skills".

Another employer said, "... it may be possible to demonstrate soft skills in a learning environment if they're forced to, but that doesn't make a leader a true leader. I find soft skills to be aligned with



confidence. I'd rather see candidates joining things like Toast Masters, Volunteer Boards, Sports Teams, etc. Just the act of participating shows motivation, team work, etc.”

Finally, several employers suggested the training program would be helpful, but simply attending the program would not be enough. Moreover, the weight associated with this type of training would be a distant second to an employer reference and related comments concerning one's soft skills.

6.3 Summary of employer survey results

- Most employers agree with the definition of soft skills as “personality characteristics and traits that could include leadership, dependability, motivation, communication skills, team work, confidence, versatility, reliability, efficiency, among others.”
- Soft skills are a critical element informing hiring decisions
- Half of all employers indicated soft skills certification/accreditation would be “valuable” or “very valuable”, with the two most preferred types of organizations to handle soft skill credentialing including “industry led organizations” and “college or university”.
- Majority of employers would send their employees for “no cost soft skills training”
- Majority of employers indicated “yes” they would be more likely consider hiring a job candidate that has participated in a ‘soft skills training program’ considering that ‘hard skills’ are met.
- A notable portion of employers are sceptical about the prospect of effectively training soft skills, with these employers questioning the value of a soft skills certification/accreditation initiative.



7 Report Conclusions

There is general consensus that “soft skills” or “employability skills” as defined by “personality characteristics and traits that could include leadership, dependability, motivation, communication skills, team work, confidence, versatility, reliability, efficiency, among others” are lacking in today’s workforce. This study supports a proposed curriculum framework to deliver an employability skills program. This program should be broken into two components: an **in-class** component and a **work-integrated learning placement**. These components are outlined below along with the recommended framework for the program. At its most fundamental level, this program would **explicitly address, teaching and measuring employability skills concepts, and would put them in the context of the workplace**. As a final point, the employer survey served to validate this reports overarching findings while providing meaningful context for the next phase of this initiative.

In class

- The program will begin with the in-class component consisting of about 6 modules to allow participants to gain some basic skills, ease into the concept of employability, learn a common language etc.
- The in-class component should be between 24-35 hours to notice change in the participants.
- When participants complete this section they will receive a certificate of completion. This certificate marks a point where the individual may not be ready for full employment but is ready to take the next step.

Work Integrated Learning

- The second component should be workplace integrated delivery where in-class knowledge is put into practice and measured.
- Supervisors will accurately see how learners navigate complex day-to-day operations in a real setting; noticing where they need guidance and provide reinforcement.
- Give employers the chance to speak frankly to employee. The employee and employer can contact instructor for advice and guidance through difficulties.

Instructional Delivery

- Instructor must use a range of teaching methodologies.
- Task-based approaches and similar methods will be more relevant
- The instructor will play a crucial role in the facilitation of employability skills
- The instructor will need to assume multiple roles, such as mentor, coach, facilitator, modeller and evaluator.

Assessment

- Assessing soft skills is not like assessing most abilities and understandings. Conventional methods of assessment (tests, written assignments, etc.) cannot be used effectively.
- Instead assessment should rely on:
 - Holistic judgements by the teachers
 - Portfolios created by the participants
 - Assessment based on work experience



- Assessment using purpose-developed instruments

Target Audience

Target Audience anticipated for the Employability Skills Training:

- Unemployed or underemployed Adults
- Adults with job retention concerns
- Individuals who do not have a post-secondary credential
- Participants engaged in initiatives funded through Employment Ontario such as the Youth Employment Fund and Literacy and Basic Skills



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