

Education researchers at Pearson are conducting a series of summaries around Pearson's Personal and Social Capabilities (PSC), the "soft" skills that are crucial for employability. This review focuses on teaching and assessing the skill of self-management in K-12 and college classrooms. While we found that self-management is clearly valued by employers, students may not be graduating with the level of skills needed to succeed on the job. What follows is a summary of the most significant findings.

Summary Highlights

Self-management skills are too important for college, career, and life success to leave them to chance.

Key Findings

- Employers say job applicants should have self-management skills.
- People with better self-management skills perform better in the workforce and are less likely to be unemployed.
- Self-management skills can be explicitly taught.
- Self-management skills predict real-world interpersonal, emotional, and financial outcomes.
- Training students on self-management skills can improve academic outcomes and college retention.
- There are several improvements to how self-management should be taught.

Key Recommendations

- Incorporate self-management into K-12 standards – so it's taught.
- K-12 educators need professional development, administrative support, and technology for teaching self-management.
- Higher-education institutions need to include self-management skills in institutional learning outcomes, to provide training for faculty, and to fund grants that encourage teaching of self-management skills.
- Employers need to establish relationships with K-12 schools and institutions of higher education so they can provide information about the types of self-management skills required in the workplace.

What Does Good Self-Management Look Like?

Self-management is broadly defined as the ability to intentionally and strategically manage one's emotions, behavior, effort, and environment in the pursuit of goals. The terminology used to refer to self-management or its component skills (e.g., self-control, self-discipline, self-regulation, self-regulated learning, effortful control, and willpower) varies across disciplines. Through careful evaluation of discipline-specific terms and definitions across several different fields, Pearson has defined self-management as consisting of six core skills:

1. **Planning:** Sets realistic yet challenging goals and plans activities ahead of time; manages time according to plans.
2. **Organization:** Keeps work artifacts in an organized fashion to improve efficiency.
3. **Persistence:** Applies appropriate levels of effort to tasks, in spite of obstacles or difficulty.
4. **Progress monitoring:** Accurately tracks and assesses one's knowledge, skills or progress; chooses appropriate strategies to evaluate and improve knowledge, skills, and progress.
5. **Control:** Effectively regulates behaviors and emotions, typically to support goal pursuit.
6. **Attention to detail:** Pays attention to detail and has careful and precise work habits.

Is There a Skills Gap?

Self-management is clearly relevant for occupational success. Children with better self-management skills have lower rates of unemployment and higher incomes as adults. Employers also note the importance of self-management. In the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2014 Career Readiness Competencies survey, 97.5 percent of employers rated professionalism and work ethic as either essential or absolutely essential when considering job candidates. NACE's definition of professionalism and work ethic includes many self-management skills such as time and workload management, punctuality, and personal accountability.

Despite the documented importance of self-management skills, recent graduates may be lacking in these areas. A survey conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that employers perceived new college graduates as lacking in self-knowledge and self-direction. Only 28 percent and 23 percent (respectively) of respondents rated college graduates as very well prepared in these areas, which corresponds to the self-management skills of progress monitoring and persistence. Additionally, in the UK Commission for Employment and Skills Employer Skills Survey in 2015, employers rated the ability to manage their own time and to prioritize tasks as the "soft" skill most lacking among applicants. Emotional control was another self-management skill found lacking in the UK labor market.

What Support Do Educators Need?

Like any skill, self-management must be taught explicitly. Educators can no longer assume that students will naturally develop self-management skills as they mature. Rather, instructors should engage in some amount of direct instruction, teaching students what good self-management looks like in terms of desirable behaviors and useful strategies for managing their time, workload, behavior, and emotions. Students must also have opportunities to practice their self-management skills with instructor support and to receive feedback on their performance. Teaching and technology grants may help spur more widespread adoption of innovative teaching practices that support the development of self-management skills.

Notably, the workplace differs from K-12 and higher-education settings in the type and level of

self-management skills required. As students transition to the workplace, they often take on more responsibility for managing their behavior and performance. Whereas teachers typically play a large role in ensuring students stay on track, within the workplace there are fewer supports to help employees manage their time and workload effectively. As such, stronger alignment between K-12, higher education, and employer stakeholders will help students fully develop the self-management skills they need before transitioning to the workforce. Employers can sit on advisory boards or work with educational institutions to develop programs for teaching the specific self-management skills required in the workplace. These programs may be particularly effective when integrated into “Capstone” or other transition-oriented courses for older students preparing to enter the workforce.

Employers can also use recruitment, hiring, and compensation strategies to reward candidates who demonstrate strong self-management skills. For current employees, businesses can develop formal self-management training programs that are made widely available or support their employees in seeking out external professional development in these areas. Overall, these practices will help incentivize the development of self-management skills.