

Personal and Social Capabilities

At Pearson we have identified four areas that make up employability, based on formal and informal research with employers, educators, and learners. Individuals need to develop skills in each area, but the stage they are at in their life – whether that’s starting, developing, or changing career – will impact which areas to focus on most. *Personal and Social Capabilities* is one of those areas.



What the skills are

These are general and transferable skills that contribute to how someone works, both individually and with others, sometimes known as ‘soft skills’, or ‘21st century skills’. Everybody needs these skills, regardless of one’s specific occupation.

We reviewed many existing frameworks, and research related to employability skills and labor market intelligence. The resulting framework identifies six common skillsets people need to succeed in any employment setting:

- 1 Critical thinking & Creativity
- 2 Communication
- 3 Collaboration
- 4 Self-management
- 5 Social responsibility
- 6 Leadership

How to teach

It is easy to assume that students will naturally develop these skills (for example, if you have students work in groups they will learn to collaborate), but this isn’t the case. Rather, a key strategy is:

- 1 **Explicit instruction:** Teach students what these skills look like in terms of desirable behaviors and useful strategies.
- 2 **Authentic learning and assessment:** Students practice within the context of a learning activity that represents how they will use the skills in the real world. For example, a simulation game that presents learners with computer network problems can assess the critical thinking skills that a student might realistically use in a future career. Or composing an ePortfolio with writing samples and public speaking recordings offers an authentic assessment of communication skills.
- 3 **Feedback:** Effective feedback is immediate, clearly related to the skill, lets the learner know how proficient they are currently, and how they can improve.

Why they matter

- 1 These skills are highly sought after and valued by employers. In a recent survey, employers told us that 9/10 of the most important skills for employees to have are soft skills, and that among existing employees, these soft skills are lacking.¹
- 2 The skills most likely to be in demand in the future, as technology automates processes, are the skills that make us human.²
- 3 Both academic success and workforce performance have consistently been predicted by competence in these skills.³
- 4 Individuals with these skills have a better quality of life. For example, strong communication skills are associated with improved interpersonal relationships and health outcomes.⁴

Assessment

Authentically assessing these skills is a common challenge. The skills are complex and nuanced, and not well suited to commonly used assessment formats, like multiple choice.

Good methods include:

- **Situational judgment tests** present individuals with a hypothetical, realistic scenario that requires a specific skill, and ask them about possible responses.
- **Behavioral observation** of particular skills. Giving a speech requires communication and participating in a group planning activity requires collaboration. Rubrics are most often used to score these types of assessments.
- **Simulations and immersive environments** where real-time performance data can capture specific behaviors that demonstrate certain skills. For example, revisiting unsolved problems multiple times suggests greater levels of persistence.
- **Project portfolios** can demonstrate a number of skills beyond communication through writing. Completing a research study elicits critical thinking, and reflecting on a service learning project demonstrates social responsibility. These portfolios would typically be scored using a rubric.

Would you like to talk to us about employability? Email efficacy@pearson.com

1 Pearson Global Employer Research, 2019
 2 Pearson, Oxford University, Nesta, (2017). Future of Skills
 3,4 <https://www.pearson.com/corporate/efficacy-and-research/skills-for-today.html>