

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. Self-management skills help set the stage for occupational success and effective work habits; however, students may not be graduating with adequate levels of these skills to succeed in the workplace. What follows is a summary of the most significant findings.

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.

Why Is Self-Management Important?

Self-management is identified as an important skill that can lead to success in college and the workforce and that supports physical and psychological health. Research suggests that a focus on developing self-management skills is important for several reasons:

- Self-management predicts academic success, even after controlling for other relevant factors such as IQ, standardized test scores, and high school GPA.
- Employers identify several aspects of self-management as important for future employees. These aspects include time and workload management, work ethic, and attention to detail.
- Higher levels of self-management in childhood are associated with lower rates of unemployment, higher income, and more financial security across the lifespan.

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 correspond 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 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.

How Can Employers Support Skill Development?

Like most skills, self-management can be developed through direct instruction. Instead of expecting employees to learn these skills on their own, employers should explicitly teach what good self-management looks like in terms of desirable behaviors and useful strategies. Employees should then have the opportunity to practice these skill in authentic contexts (e.g., monitoring progress on a real work assignment, setting goals for the quarter) and receive feedback on their performance.

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 utilize 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.