Soft Skills and Core Competencies: Should Soft Skills be Taught More Often?

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What is a Core Competency?

A Core Competency is defined as a skill used in the workplace or academia that can be used to achieve or accomplish a certain goal. In the case of all of the students in ENGL 203 these particular skills are relating to the field of Technical and Professional Writing. This paper will be focusing on the Core Competencies relating to the field of working in larger corporations (business related), using expert opinions and primary sources to find the most important skills and abilities that Professional Writing students should know before entering the workforce. Understanding the Core Competencies needed to succeed in the workplace is important for students to understand and learn so they can be better equipped to effectively do their jobs, along with have marketable skills over other potential applicants.

Examples

Communication – oral, speaking capability, written, presenting, listening
Courtesy – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful
Flexibility – adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachability

Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills

To more effectively cover specific competencies this paper will divide them into two separate categories: soft skills, and hard skills. Soft skills are defined as parts of a larger skill, defined by Omnia to be comprised of seven essential smaller skills that many define to be incredibly important in the workplace. Omnia states that the most essential soft skills are: Leadership Skills, Teamwork, Communication Skills, Problem Solving Skills, Work Ethic, Flexibility/Adaptability, and Interpersonal Skills.

Soft skills aren't usually explicitly taught or may not even be directly recognized by students, but experts (Wellington, 2005) agree that often colleges and other forms of education do not correctly teach or emphasize these soft skills to their students. The claim that soft skills are gaining in importance in the work environment is a valid claim, as technology improves, and innovation occurs many traditional skills or hard skills eventually will become obsolete or may change, meaning that workers with soft skills will be more likely to adapt and work to change with the innovation compared to those with an emphasis on hard skills (Parsons, 2008).

What are the Most Important Soft Skills?

A study done by Robles in 2012, had students interview and survey different professionals and experts in the business communication field in order to determine the most important skills to have in the professional workplace. The experts were given a list of soft skills to rate on a scale of one to five with five being extremely important and one being not important. Robles and his students, before giving the survey to experts, sent out a questionnaire to a different set of experts to ask what they thought were important soft skills and what defined them, after receiving a large amount of responses Robles and his students eventually compiled a list of soft skills to narrow down the choices for the final survey. The soft skills given to the experts were: Communication, Courtesy, Flexibility, Integrity, Interpersonal Skills, Professionalism, Positive Attitude, Responsibility, Teamwork Skills, and Work Ethic.

Soft Skill Attribute	Not Important 1		Not Very Important 2		Somewhat Important 3		Very Important 4		Extremely Important 5	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Integrity							4	7.0	53	93.0
Communication							5	8.8	52	91.2
Courtesy					2	3.5	7	12.3	48	84.2
Responsibility					5	8.8	11	19.3	41	71.9
Interpersonal skills					9	15.8	13	22.8	35	61.4
Professionalism					7	12.3	23	40.4	27	47.4
Positive attitude					6	10.5	25	43.9	26	45.6
Teamwork skills			1	1.8	16	28.1	15	26.3	25	43.9
Flexibility			1	1.8	12	21.1	20	35.1	24	42.1
Work ethic					14	24.6	22	38.6	21	36.8

Defined List of Soft Skills

According to 49 polled business executives, they described Soft Skills to be these traits with the following definitions: (Robles, 2012)

Communication – oral, speaking capability, written, presenting, listening

Courtesy – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful

Flexibility – adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachability

Integrity – honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what's right

Interpersonal Skills – nice, personable, sense of humor, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, has self-control, patient, sociability, warmth, social skills

Positive Attitude – optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident

Professionalism – businesslike, well-dressed, appearance, poised

Responsibility – accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense

Teamwork – cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative

Work Ethic – hard working, willing to work, loyal, initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance