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ENGL 203

Core Competencies Draft

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

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.

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). 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*. Included with each was a brief definition for each, which will be included in order to aid understanding of the study and soft skills themselves.

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

Table 1. Perceived Level of Importance of Each Soft Skill Attribute in Today's Workplace (N = 57)

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

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Each Soft Skill Attribute Relative to Perceived Level of Importance (N = 57)

Soft Skill Attribute	M	SD
Integrity	4.93	0.26
Communication	4.91	0.28
Courtesy	4.81	0.48
Responsibility	4.63	0.64
Interpersonal skills	4.46	0.75
Positive attitude	4.35	0.66
Professionalism	4.35	0.69
Flexibility	4.18	0.82
Teamwork skills	4.12	0.88
Work ethic	4.12	0.77

Robles found that through the 57 surveyed experts, that they consistently ranked Integrity, Communication, and Courtesy as extremely important, with skills such as Flexibility, Teamwork Skills, and Work Ethic were deemed to be closer to very important to the business executives. Included in Table 1 and 2 are the results *Robles* published in Business Communication Quarterly in 2012, which gives a comprehensive rundown of the opinions of executives' importance of soft skills listed above.

Robles is not the only one claiming that these soft skills go untaught to students throughout various colleges and undergraduate programs. Moore and Morton, 2017 also agree that in the field of written communication, soft skills need more emphasis in order to increase the career readiness for many students. The issue of soft skills in written communication can be traced back to the 1990's as the field was changing and adapting with the increased use of technology, which was first realized by Mayer, 1992 and Clancy and Ballad, 1995 who called for an emphasis on soft skills in many Australian colleges and universities. Through various sources and findings, Moore and

Morton decided to interview a series of professionals to find the issues in job readiness that many students are having. Interviewees are quoted with saying:

[ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST] The fact sheet material is the harder document to write. This is where I say [to them] the language has got to be suitable for this broader audience who are not necessarily very strongly scientific…So the style of writing needs to be spot on. It takes a lot of refinement for them.

[ENGINEER] You may have to take ten different test results done over say, a week, and then be able to concisely identify the key points of that work. And the customer [such as the senior management of an automotive company] has to know what they do with that. [The graduates] won't have had that experience in their studies.

[LAWYER] Some [graduates] come to us with a very discursive style. They think writing a long answer equates with a valuable answer rather than being short and concise.
The results from the interviewees are that many recent graduates lack the soft skills to generally adapt to the workplace to work autonomously or without intervention from higher-ups. Moore and Morton concluded that they support a movement allowing for an initiative to help university graduates gain skills needed in the workplace.

To conclude, this information about the lack of soft skills introduced to students need to be incorporated into the common core of skills and tasks thrown at students in undergraduate technical communication and professional writing. Professionals and experts agree, many students come out of college unprepared and require learning even 6 months after joining the workforce (Moore and Morton, 2017). As students, should we be greater prepared to change and adapt to new situations?

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