

articulāte

The Top 3 Soft Skills Your Employees Need in the New World of Work

How soft skills unlock business growth—
and how to hire and train for them



03 Introduction

06 Chapter 1:

THE TOP 3 SOFT SKILLS FOR THE NEW
WORLD OF WORK

Communication
Problem-solving
Adaptability

11 Chapter 2:

STARTING WITH SOFT SKILLS

Hiring for soft skills
Building soft skills into onboarding

15 Chapter 3:

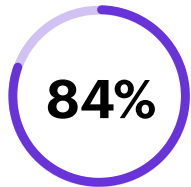
TRAINING FOR SOFT SKILLS

Assessing soft skills aptitude
Practicing soft skills

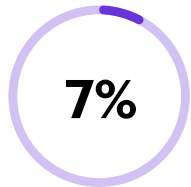
18 Conclusion

Table of Contents





84% of employees say it is important to them to get training on soft skills.



7% of employees say they don't need training in soft skills.

Source: [SHRM](#)

Picture this: A frustrated customer calls your support line, and it's clear they're angry. But instead of responding defensively, your star specialist, Amar, listens. He navigates the conversation empathetically and—through his compassion—successfully arrives at a solution that pleases the customer and builds loyalty from frustration.

Amar is demonstrating the power of soft skills—in this case, communication and problem-solving—in real time. Soft skills aren't job-specific, yet they're some of the most desirable skills an employee can have. No matter the business or industry, soft skills translate to success. Business leaders motivate people, tackle organizational change, and innovate new business solutions using soft skills.

Soft skills have always been important to employee growth. But in the new world of work, where companies are rapidly digitizing their operations, and many are moving to remote or hybrid settings, soft skills are not only valuable—they're essential. Critical. Must-haves.





In a 2021 review of more than 80 million job postings across 22 industry sectors, education nonprofit America Succeeds found that [soft skills were the most desired qualifications for 91% of management jobs, 86% of business operations jobs, and 81% of engineering jobs.](#)

This makes sense. Consider a manager in a job that has recently gone remote. To navigate the shift from in-person to virtual work, this employee is going to need strong soft skills—such as the ability to communicate effectively in a virtual setting, problem-solve for new operational challenges, and adapt to new processes. This pattern can be found at every level of organizational change from onboarding a new vendor to overhauling entire business operations.

Moreover, these soft skills are not just for leadership; they're critical for every employee up and down an organization's hierarchy. According to SHRM's 2022 Workplace Learning & Development Trends report, [more than eight in 10 employees \(84%\) say it is important to them to get training on soft skills, and just 7% of employees say they don't need training in soft skills.](#)

The Top 3 Soft Skills Employees Need in the New World of Work



Communication



Problem-Solving



Adaptability

What is a soft skill?

“As automation and AI continue to reshape entire industries, companies, and jobs, strong soft skills—the one thing that machines can’t replace—are becoming absolutely vital.”

Source: [LinkedIn](#)

“Soft skills” is the most common term used to describe a set of attitudes and behaviors that help people interact effectively at work. According to Eric Frazer, author of “The Psychology of Top Talent” and an assistant professor of psychology at Yale University School of Medicine, soft skills are [“about a person’s sense of self, and how they relate with other people.”](#)

Soft skills are also commonly referred to as “people skills” or “transferable skills” because they [can be used regardless of a person’s job](#)—another reason they are in high demand when hiring. These skills are also important to managers looking to promote or expand the responsibilities of talented employees, since people with developed soft skills tend to be more adaptable and flexible in any work environment.

In this e-book, you’ll learn how soft skills can help unlock business growth, including:

01

Why soft skills are necessary in every industry, everywhere. And why **communication**, **problem-solving**, and **adaptability** are the top skills needed in the new world of work.

02

How digital hiring tools, such as interactive interview guides and onboarding experiences, can optimize growth by efficiently screening for soft skills.

03

How organizations can close skill gaps by investing in scalable soft skills training to upskill and reskill talented employees effectively.

04

Why building remote work skills requires remote work tools, and how online workplace learning is an ideal way to teach the soft skills that can boost business outcomes.

CHAPTER 1:

The top 3 soft skills for the new world of work

Soft skills have long been considered important for both employee and employer success, but the pandemic quickly made some skills even more critical—think: **communication, problem-solving, and adaptability**. Shifts to remote or hybrid work and other disruptive changes accelerated the need for these soft skills in organizations across every industry. More than two years later, it's clear that these skills have provided immense value in the workplace—and that the need for their mastery will remain.

What's more, automation and digital disruption continue to ramp up across sectors.

In this highly changeable environment, it's important for organizations—more specifically their, people managers—to demonstrate emotional intelligence and embrace employee vulnerability. Those that don't risk losing top talent to more empathetic competitors. According to LinkedIn, [companies that struggle with manager soft skills have employees who are nearly 50% more likely to apply for a new job](#). And since [replacing a talented, knowledgeable employee can cost up to 2x the person's annual salary](#), prioritizing retention strategies is a wise investment.



“Imagine an organization where leaders approach questions and concerns and mistakes with empathy and understanding,”

says Kristina Johnson, chief people officer for San Francisco-based identity and asset management company Okta, Inc. “Then consider a workplace that’s aggressive and blame-focused, where employees are afraid to make mistakes and too embarrassed to ask questions. As you can imagine, employees will stick around at one of those organizations much longer than the other.”

Source: [SHRM](#)



These three soft skills are key to fostering productivity, and they translate easily across industries, roles, and situations:



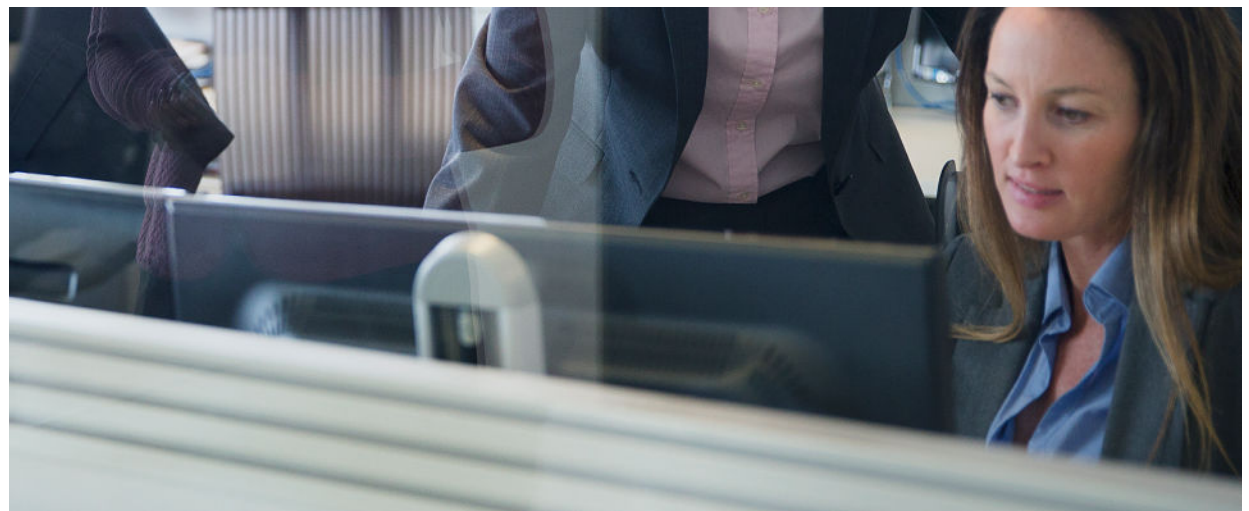
Communication skills are critical to instilling confidence in leadership and keeping an enterprise running smoothly amidst disruptions.



Problem-solving skills are necessary for navigating the complex business challenges of today, and preparing for those of tomorrow.



Adaptability skills are indispensable for thriving in an environment of semi-constant change and ambiguity.



1. Communication

Whether closing a sale, leading a team, getting buy-in from leadership, or sharing an idea, effective communication skills are essential for success. For example, a company's communications with customers may be just as important as the product when building a trusted brand. Excellent customer service requires thoughtful and empathetic dialogue.

In a 2021 review of more than 80 million job postings across 22 industry sectors, education nonprofit America Succeeds found [communication ranked as the number one requested skill, featured in 22,770,549 U.S. job postings.](#)

Spotlight: Sales Teams

“Sales reps who hit their team’s sales goals quarter after quarter have a few things in common—soft skills. These are the abilities a salesperson has to build relationships, encourage productive conversation, and provide an exceptional customer experience.”

Source: [HubSpot](#)

Communication is a salesperson's most important skill. Online learning can play a critical role in helping sales teams to sharpen their abilities to bring needs to light, handle objections, and build meaningful customer relationships. Offering sales teams interactive, scenario-based communication skills training can help develop their standard approach to prospects and customer interactions and teach new skills like nonverbal communication.



2. Problem-solving

As our world gets more complex, workers with the ability to discern problems and innovate solutions are in ever higher demand. For example, an organization facing supply chain issues may require an operations team able to untangle a web of interdependencies quickly to arrive at a tenable business solution.

In a 2022 report on the future of work, global recruiting company Monster found that [problem-solving was the #3 most important soft skill employers want—and the #2 biggest gap.](#) ([Communication was the #2 most important soft skill and #1 biggest gap.](#))

Spotlight: Business Operations Teams

“Great problem solvers are made, not born. That’s what we’ve found after decades of problem solving with leaders across business, nonprofit, and policy sectors. These leaders learn to adopt a particularly open and curious mindset, and adhere to a systematic process for cracking even the most inscrutable problems. They’re terrific problem solvers under any conditions. And when conditions of uncertainty are at their peak, they’re at their brilliant best.”

Source: [McKinsey](#)

Problem-solving might seem difficult to teach—the diplomacy and listening abilities needed can seem innate. But as McKinsey notes, [“great problem solvers are made, not born.”](#) Training for problem-solving skills can include explanations of different approaches to tackling complex challenges, so employees can see that there isn’t one way alone to move forward. And interactive, scenario-based online learning can help business operations leaders see multiple points of view on a single issue and learn how to come to a resolution effectively.



3. Adaptability

After the massive disruptions of the past few years, it's clear why adaptability is an essential skill for workers today. Global crises have required businesses and their employees to pivot on a dime. Many organizations face continually changing business climates and industry standards. And new target markets, industry verticals, and digital tools for collaborative work demand employee adaptability. For this reason, many companies are prioritizing a culture of continuous learning, where developing skills (and learning new ones) is part of everyone's job description.

"In a world that is going to continue to throw new situations for leaders to navigate, the need for adaptability in the workplace—to learn and unlearn—is critical to future success."

Source: [EY.com](https://www.ey.com)

Spotlight: Manufacturing



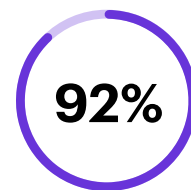
"Ultimately the 'learn-it-all' will always do better than the 'know-it-all.'"

Source: [Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft](#)

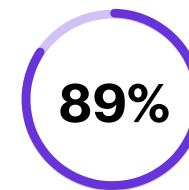
Adaptability is an indispensable skill for manufacturing professionals contending with rapid advances in automation, 3D printing, and a host of other new technologies. Manufacturing leaders and engineers need to learn these new skills—but they also need to develop a lifelong love of learning and a hunger to tackle new tasks if they are to match the pace of change. On-demand online learning offers manufacturing professionals the opportunity to build adaptability and self-motivation skills in bite-size chunks when it fits into their busy schedules.

CHAPTER 2: Starting with soft skills

Building soft skills into hiring and onboarding helps ensure you're bringing in candidates and new hires who already have soft skills or show the potential to develop their soft skills instincts. The more you integrate soft skills into hiring and onboarding, the more likely you'll make a good hire. In fact, according to LinkedIn's 2019 Global Talent Trends report, 89% of recruiters surveyed said [when a hire doesn't work out, it's typically because of a lack of soft skills](#).



92% of talent professionals say that soft skills matter as much or more than hard skills when they hire.



89% of talent professionals feel that "bad hires" typically have poor soft skills.

Source: [LinkedIn](#)

Hiring for soft skills

For human resources (HR) leaders and hiring managers, screening for soft skills may seem daunting. How do you assess a candidate's problem-solving or adaptability skills from a resume and a standard interview? Luckily, talent professionals that understand how critical these skills are have pioneered a number of innovative ways to assess these "intangibles" in the hiring process.

A recent [Harvard Business Review](#) global survey of 1,000 business leaders found that [companies that successfully fill their digital talent needs "go beyond the conventional practices of recruiting from the best schools and poaching from competitors, and instead hire people who can develop the skills they need and then incentivize them to do so."](#)

Source: [Harvard Business Review](#)



So, how do HR pros bake soft skills into their hiring practices? Jennifer Shappley, senior director of talent acquisition for LinkedIn, says [updating interview tactics is a must](#). Organizations should consider using online assessments that include games and quizzes to analyze how candidates respond to questions and scenarios more geared toward interpersonal behavior. Shappley also recommends [creating a formalized processes with a consistent set of behavioral and situational interview questions that help identify soft skills](#).

Similarly, Eric Frazer, author of "The Psychology of Top Talent," and assistant professor of psychology at Yale University School of Medicine, suggests tailoring interview questions to assess a soft skill set. As Frazer recently told the [BBC](#):

“When you ask someone, ‘give me an example of a time you were really resilient in your professional life,’ or, ‘tell me a story that highlights your moon-shot mentality,’ you’re asking them to demonstrate those mindsets,” he says. As for the interviewee, “let’s say you’re asked, ‘what’s your approach toward continuous learning?’” he continues. That’s a moment to show the interviewer you’re willing and excited about learning, and have the skills to do it. “The best response would be to say, ‘well, I went to this conference last year; I attend this webinar once a month; I just finished reading this book; I subscribe to this industry periodical.”

With consistency, HR leaders and hiring managers tasked with interviewing candidates can uncover the necessary skill sets and maintain an equitable and effective interview process. With easy-to-access online training, organizations can create dynamic interview guides and interactive practice scenarios to help ensure that those on the front lines of hiring have the knowledge they need to successfully screen candidates’ soft skills and their ability to develop them.

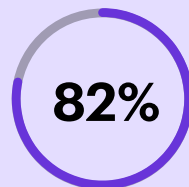
Building soft skills into onboarding



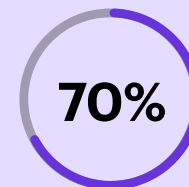
All eyes are on HR and learning and development (L&D) when it comes to effective workplace onboarding programs. As LinkedIn's 2022 Global Talent Trends report notes, "given that many companies are 1) on a remote or hybrid footing, 2) hiring at a breakneck pace, and 3) navigating course corrections with their culture, [getting onboarding right is essential](#)."

Source: [LinkedIn](#)

According to the Brandon Hall Group, [organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by 82% and productivity by over 70%](#). And onboarding programs that help establish the skills that will help employees grow their careers—including, soft skills like *communication, problem-solving, and adaptability*—are even more valuable. Gallup reports that [employees who strongly agree they have a clear plan for their professional development are 3.5 times more likely to strongly agree that their onboarding process was exceptional](#).



Organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by 82%



Organizations with a strong onboarding process improve productivity by over 70%

“The most effective [training] programs leverage advanced learning tools to enable success on-demand rather than relying solely on classroom learning. These companies are 300% more satisfied than their lower-performing peers with the technology they’re using to support their onboarding programs, which correlates with significant gains achieved in time-to-proficiency and new hire retention.”

Source: [Brandon Hall Group](#)

So for HR and L&D professionals tasked with getting new hires off to a good start, what makes a soft skills onboarding program? [“Add experiences that bring your culture to life,”](#) Gallup advises. [“New hires need to see and feel how your culture plays out and how they fit into it.](#) For example, your onboarding journey might highlight case studies about world-class customer service to teach new hires how they’re expected to embody your customer values.” To do this efficiently, organizations should look to online training opportunities.

Online workplace learning helps HR and L&D teams deliver onboarding content in a consistent way—an important consideration when you want to get people up to speed with the company’s values and standard procedures right from the start. And freeing up classrooms and trainers saves loads of time, money, and resources. It also helps you onboard a large number of new employees more efficiently.



CHAPTER 3:

Training for soft skills

People tend to think of soft skills as innate qualities that people either possess or don't. And certainly, for some individuals, soft skills are instinctual—the person who is naturally at ease leading a presentation in a crowded boardroom, for example, or the one who approaches each new corporate tech stack with curiosity instead of despair.

But this doesn't mean that soft skills can't be learned with effective training and support. As the BBC reports, [“it is possible for every worker to develop and hone these characteristics as well as learn how to show them off. And that, say experts, is something we should all be doing.”](#)

When you invest in developing employees' soft skills, you not only invest in your company but also support each team member's personal growth, engagement, and productivity. And as Dr. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, chief innovation officer at ManpowerGroup, notes, [a great deal of evidence suggests that soft skills can be boosted via focused training interventions.](#)



Assessing soft skills aptitude

So, how do L&D leaders effectively train for soft skills like *communication*, *problem-solving*, and *adaptability*? Start with an assessment—what skills does your workforce naturally have, and what skills do they need to practice? A soft skills assessment, or evaluation, can help talent professionals match their organization’s needs to the right training.

With the right learning creator platform, it’s easy for L&D teams to build interactive online assessments, such as:



Knowledge checks

Knowledge checks are an easy way to quiz learners. Choose from multiple response, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and matching assessments to see what learners already know—or don’t. Consider problem-solving checks to assess how employees are approaching complex problems in their workstreams.



Sorting activities

Let’s say you want to discuss the do’s and don’ts of communication. Sorting activities let learners drag-and-drop phrases into different categories to practice clear, concise, compassionate communication. For example, “do offer support,” but “don’t try to change a person’s emotions” are phrases that demonstrate empathetic communication.



Branching scenarios

Branching scenarios give learners real-life examples complete with dialogue, responses, and feedback that vary based on how a learner answers. Decision-making interactions, such as scenarios, are ideal for gauging how well learners can adapt to change or other challenging situations as they arise.

Practicing soft skills

As the saying goes, practice makes perfect. After completing a soft skills assessment, it's time to build training that allows employees a safe space to practice the skills they need to improve.

With a learning creator platform, HR and L&D leaders are equipped with the tools they need to create interactive online workplace learning—an important consideration, as interactivity promotes engagement and keeps learners' attention high. [One study found that adding a fun element like gamification to training boosts informal workplace learning outcomes.](#) For example, engineers can read a scenario in which they are presented with a specific problem, respond to questions, and then get directed through a specific path with feedback and responses on their *problem-solving* skills based on their individual answers. This training strategy provides immediate feedback and reinforcement of critical soft skills.

Remote and hybrid workers benefit from the ability to take online courses anywhere, anytime, on any device, to practice skills at a pace suited to their individual learning needs. And all learners benefit from access to on-demand online practice scenarios that create space to improve soft skills and gain confidence without the pressure of a “live” performance.

Learn how online workplace learning helps improve your bottom line, organizational agility, and employee growth in the white paper, *Why Online Workplace Learning Is Essential to Business Success.*

[Download Now](#)



CONCLUSION

“If someone isn’t adaptable and flexible and open to frequent changes in priorities, that’s a dealbreaker. In today’s new paradigm, flexibility, strong communication skills and the ability to adapt as working conditions evolve are the most important qualities a candidate can have.”

Source: [Annie Lin, VP of people, Lever](#)

Ultimately, soft skills training isn’t just a way to strengthen skills right now—it’s an investment in an organization’s future. Addressing soft skills today will help set up employees for success in the face of inevitable future disruptions.

It’s also important that soft skills assessment and training not be approached with a “one-and-done” mentality. Once courses are underway, [evaluate the impact of soft skills training and connect it to your company’s key](#)

[metrics](#), such as performance reviews and goal-setting, suggests Di Ann Sanchez, founder of DAS HR Consulting. Then iterate as needed to keep employees’ skills fresh and relevant for tomorrow’s business challenges.

“Done right, this can be a huge benefit for the company and the employee, especially for retention,” Sanchez says. “Even if the employee doesn’t like it at the time because it makes them uncomfortable, they can see you’re making an investment in their future.”





Train smarter, not harder: Build remote work skills —with remote work tools

To excel at soft skills training, create engaging, effective online learning for your organization with [Articulate 360](#), the industry-leading learning creator platform. One all-inclusive subscription provides all the tools, templates, and resources you need to create on-demand courses learners love. Browse our comprehensive library of pre-built courses ready to jump-start your soft skills training needs.

[Sign up for a free trial to start creating today.](#)

“Articulate’s products and services have allowed us to completely re-imagine the way we develop and deploy online training at scale.”

- [Tyler Nowlen](#), senior instructional designer, Zillow