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(Original Research Project)¹



Business Research Report:
Who Cares About Soft Skills? Faculty and
The Workforce, That's Who!

7 December 2016



Abstract

There are three groups within the workforce that are impacted by the proficiency or lack therein of soft skills. These three groups are: 1) students in the community college; 2) the faculty that teach the community college students; and, 3) the workforce that employs community college graduates. To emphasize the direct and indirect impact that soft skills has on the bottom line of organizations, Mark Feffer (HR Magazine, Apr2016, p. 60) noted the following: “This brings up an often-neglected point: Concerns about soft skills don’t end when a candidate is hired. HR needs to support employees who are coming up short. ‘Sometimes hard skills rule, but then you have to realize that you’ve got to help those people develop their soft skills,’ Crain observes. ‘Companies often make the hire and forget about the development. HR is overwhelmed. They don’t have enough time to work on development, especially of soft talents. Managers have to be involved in coaching, but they don’t have time, either.’ That creates a domino effect whereby continuing deficiencies wreak havoc on the company.” Therefore, this Business Research Report will detail the findings of how the lack of soft skills is a detriment to organization fiscal efficiency.

¹ Fall 2016, Submitted for Consideration 7 December 2016

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TOP 10 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

STEMNET

SKILL	DEFINITION	WHY IT'S IMPORTANT	HOW TO DEVELOP IT
1. Communication	The ability to convey information and ideas to others in a clear and concise manner.	Essential for teamwork and collaboration in the workplace.	Practice writing and speaking clearly, and listening actively.
2. Problem Solving	The ability to identify a problem, analyze it, and find a solution.	Crucial for overcoming challenges and improving efficiency.	Encourage critical thinking and creative problem-solving.
3. Teamwork	The ability to work effectively with others to achieve common goals.	Increases productivity and fosters a positive work environment.	Participate in group projects and learn from others.
4. Customer Service	The ability to provide excellent service to clients and customers.	Builds loyalty and enhances the organization's reputation.	Practice empathy and active listening.
5. Time Management	The ability to use time effectively to complete tasks and meet deadlines.	Prevents stress and ensures high-quality work output.	Use planners, prioritize tasks, and avoid procrastination.
6. Adaptability	The ability to adjust to new situations and changes in the workplace.	Essential for staying relevant in a rapidly changing market.	Embrace change and seek out new learning opportunities.
7. Critical Thinking	The ability to analyze information objectively and make logical decisions.	Helps in identifying risks and making informed choices.	Ask questions, evaluate evidence, and consider multiple perspectives.
8. Creativity	The ability to generate new ideas and solutions.	Drives innovation and provides a competitive edge.	Encourage brainstorming and experimentation.
9. Self-Motivation	The ability to drive oneself to complete tasks without external pressure.	Ensures consistent performance and initiative.	Set personal goals and maintain a positive attitude.
10. Conflict Resolution	The ability to resolve disputes and manage disagreements.	Prevents workplace conflict and maintains harmony.	Practice active listening and negotiation skills.

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Introduction to the Business Research Report

Based on an article by Mark Feffer (HR Magazine, Apr2016), soft skills are an actual ‘bottom-line impact’ factor in organizations. Two excerpts from his article give validity to this issue:

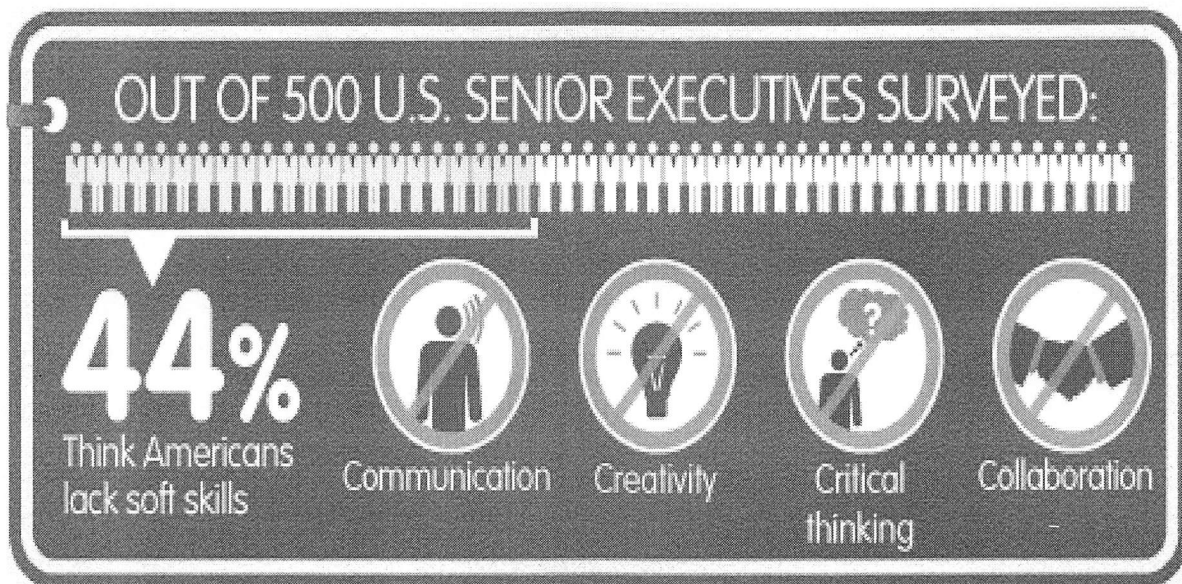
Page 56: Annie Healy, recruiting manager for The Motley Fool, tells the story of an IT employee who was struggling to keep up with new technology the company was implementing. At other organizations, someone lacking the technical proficiency needed to do his job might have been let go. But at the Fool, as employees call the investment media business in Alexandria, Va., there is a strong emphasis on so-called soft skills: hard-to-quantify behavioral and interpersonal abilities, such as the willingness to learn and to work well in a team—traits this employee had. So the natural response for HR was to talk with the staffer about other roles that might be a better fit. After identifying one, “we put him on a plan to see if he could transition,” Healy says. Though the onus was on the worker to learn the new job, he had the help of several team members, as well as a coach. In the end, he took on a customer-facing position more suited to his strengths, and the company was able to retain an employee who knew the business and to fill an opening without having to incur the time and expense of an external search. Today, many employers are faced with something like a perfect storm. Soft skills—which are needed to effectively communicate, problem-solve, collaborate and organize—are becoming more important for success as the workplace evolves socially and technologically. The rub is that recruiters and employment experts report a “soft skills gap,” especially among young workers more accustomed to texting than talking, that forces organizations to hire many candidates who fall short on interpersonal abilities.

Page 60: This brings up an often-neglected point: Concerns about soft skills don’t end when a candidate is hired. HR needs to support employees who are coming up short. “Sometimes hard skills rule, but then you have to realize that you’ve got to help those people develop their soft skills,” Crain observes. “Companies often make the hire and forget about the development. HR is overwhelmed. They don’t have enough time to work on development, especially of soft talents. Managers have to be involved in coaching, but they don’t have time, either.” That creates a domino effect whereby continuing deficiencies wreak havoc on the company.

What this article, *Going Soft on Talent*, suggests is that soft skills by any other name—work ethics, employability skills, people skills, and so forth—remains a critical impact factor for many—if not all—organizations nationally and internationally. Citations abound in the professional literature, from employers in conversations, and in college classrooms—that the soft skills of present and future employees must be addressed for organizations to positively impact these deficiencies—and their respective bottom lines in organizations. A few examples among the many current discussions on the topic at hand will magnify these perceived and/or real deficiencies (which have actual dollar cost consequences in organizations that experience these issues) :

1) Adecco Staffing USA noted that 44 percent of executives said a lack of soft skills was the biggest proficiency gap they saw in the U.S. workforce (see Figure 1 & Figure 2); 2) at the International Association of Administrative Professionals, OfficeTeam and HR.com, 67 percent of HR managers said they'd hire a candidate with strong soft skills even if his or her technical abilities were lacking, while just 9 percent would hire someone with strong technical credentials but weak soft skills; 3) "The gap is there," says Kyle Lagunas, principal analyst at Lighthouse Research & Advisory, a talent management consulting firm in Austin, Texas. "Most colleges aren't building out the skills students need to become value-added employees." That, he says, forces HR to face this question: Should we acquire or develop the talents we need for the organization to succeed?; 4) Research from the Hay Group revealed that managers who incorporate a range of soft talents into their leadership approach can increase their team's performance by as much as 30 percent. The reason? It "makes people feel valued and rewarded, gives them a clearer sense of high standards, and helps [them] feel more motivated," says Rick Lash, director for leadership and talent at Korn Ferry/Hay Group in Toronto; and, to reiterate, 5) Workforce Solutions Group at St. Louis Community College found that more than 60 percent of employers said applicants lack "communication and interpersonal skills" — an increase of about 10 percentage points in just two years. Many managers also said that today's applicants can't think critically and creatively, solve problems or write well (*St. Louis Community College, 2013*).

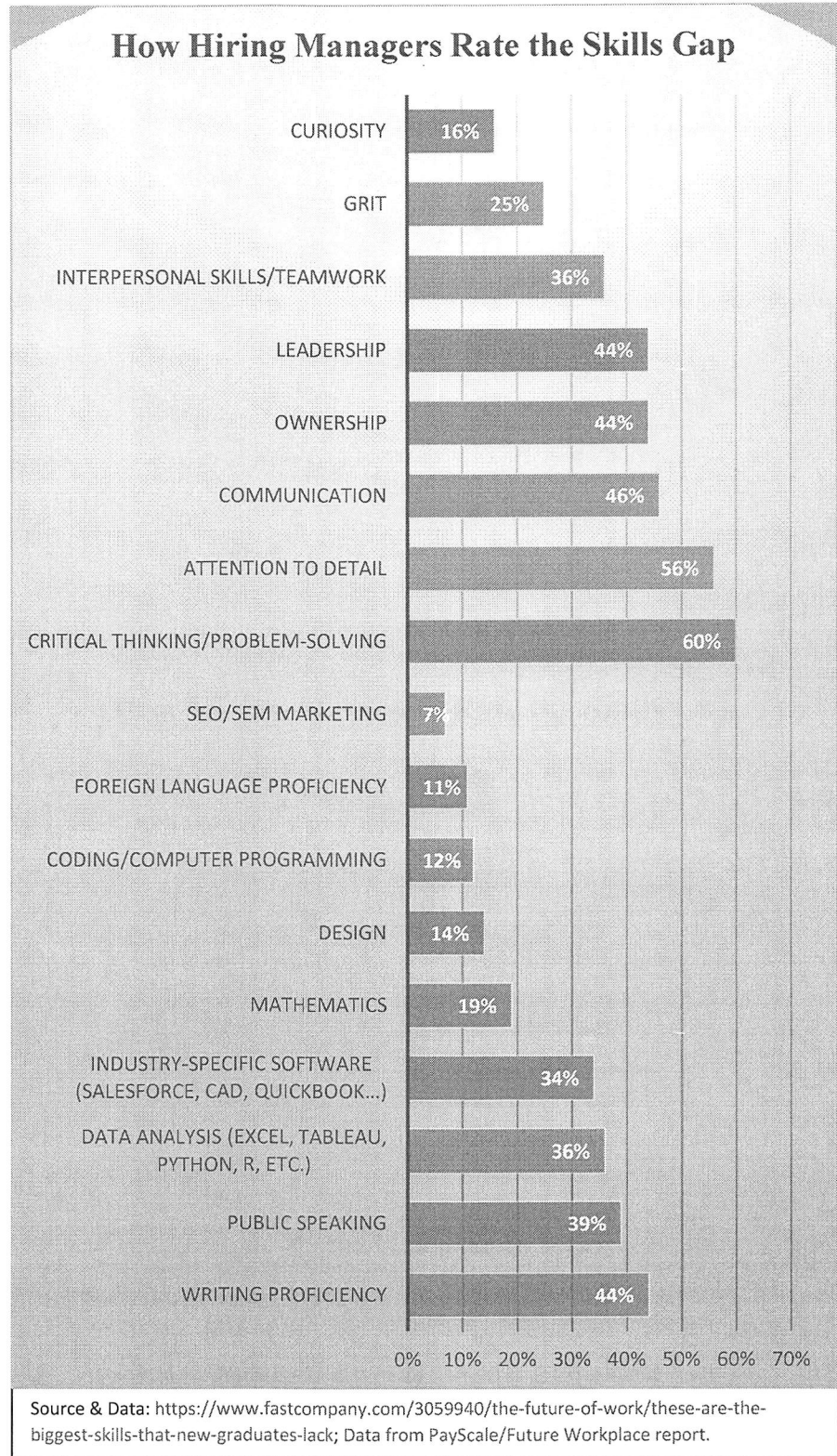
Figure 1: Adecco Staffing USA Lack of Soft Skills



Source: <https://www.adeccousa.com/employers/resources/skills-gap-in-the-american-workforce/>

Figure 2: The percentage of hiring managers who reported the lack of specific skills.

As noted in Figure 2, hiring managers believe that there is a lack of specific skills in the pool of employees for the workforce. Thus, this Business Research Report has used original design surveys and an in-depth literature and research review of materials to address the necessity for organizations to better understand the need for a process to be established that addresses these real and/or perceived deficiencies in the soft skills domain of employees, recent graduates, and in colleges and universities. Refer to Table 1 for a review of the soft skills that have been identified for application within training programs,



professional development, and classrooms (Table 1 originally provided in the Business Research Proposal.)

Table 1: Top 10 Soft Skills in Demand

Soft Skill Identifier	Soft Skills Descriptor (Soft Skills/Employability Skills/Work Ethics/People Skills/Interpersonal Skills)
Communication Skills	It's more than just speaking the language. Communication skills involve active listening, presentation as well as excellent writing capabilities. One highly sought-after communication skill is the ability to explain technical concepts to partners, customers and coworkers that aren't tech savvy. [oral, speaking capability, written communications if all facets, presenting, listening]
Computer and Technical Literacy	Almost all jobs nowadays require basic competency in computer software, but many job seekers fail to provide this section because they think it's implied. If computer skills are relevant to your field, insert a "Technical Skills" or "Systems Proficiencies" section to your resume.
Interpersonal Skills	The ability to work in teams, relate to people and manage conflict is a valuable asset in the workplace. This skill is important to get ahead--and as you advance in your career, the aptitude to work with others becomes even more crucial. Personal accomplishments are important on your resume, but showing that you can work well with others is important too. [nice, personable, sense of humor, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, has self-control, patient, sociability, warmth, social skills: cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative; businesslike, well-dressed, appearance, poised]
Adaptability	Don't underestimate the ability to adapt to changes and manage multiple tasks. In today's technology driven and rapidly evolving business environment, the ability to pick up on new technologies and adjust to changing business surroundings is important. Display your relevancy in the workforce by referencing an example of how you adapted to a sudden change at work in your resume. [adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachable]
Research Skills	With Google at the tip of your fingers, it's easy to find answers to common issues. However, hiring managers seek employees that are skilled at assessing situations, are able to seek multiple perspectives and gather more in depth information.
Project Management Skills:	Organization, planning and effectively implementing projects and tasks for yourself and others is a highly effective skill to have. In the past, this was a job in itself. Nowadays, many companies aren't hiring project managers because they expect all of their employees to possess certain characteristics of this skill. [Note: The use of Project Managers in an organization is specific to individual organizations and is a separate study apart from this present study.]
Problem-Solving Skills	The ability to use creativity, reasoning, past experience, information and available resources to resolve issues is attractive because it saves everyone at the organization valuable time. Highlight this skill by listing an example of when your organization had a sticky situation and you effectively addressed it.
Process Improvement Expertise:	The number one goal every company has in common is to save money. Optimizing business procedures can save a company time and money. Quantify results in your resume by listing the before and after facts of projects that you took on.
Strong Work Ethic	Employers are looking for employees that take initiative, are reliable and can do the job right the first time. Managers don't have the time or resources to babysit, so this is a skill that is expected from all employees. Don't make the hiring manager second-guess by sending a resume with typos, errors and over-exaggerated work experience. [hard working, willing to work, loyal, initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance; honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what's right; accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense]
Emotional Intelligence	Although you will most likely never see this in a job description, EI is a highly sought after skill that relates to your social skills, social awareness and self-management abilities. Emotional intelligence is usually something that is revealed through actual interactions with the hiring manager, but you can hint that you have it with a strategic resume that addresses areas where your experience and skills are lacking relative to the job requirements. [optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident; manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful]

Sources: 1) Downloaded from <https://www.livecareer.com/career-tips/career-advice/soft-skills-in-demand> from LiveCareer. 13 October 2016; 2) Robles, M. (2012). Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453-465.

Note: While the list and descriptors in Table 1 suggest a list of the top 10 soft skills by name, research may expand on this list by name, descriptor, and/or application. While the list may vary, the overarching application of these soft skills cannot be overemphasized, as it has also been consistently reported that inadequate soft skills impacts the bottom-line in organizations, either by direct or indirect costs. Thus, this proposal has solid basis in fiscal considerations.

Methods, Materials, and Manpower Considerations ('The M&M&Ms')

Business Research Report Methods, Materials, and Manpower (Composite Discussion)

A major tenet of this study is that faculty, employers and students may not be aligned with each other's perceptions and/or realities about soft skills. According to fastcompany.org, "Fast Company Managers and employees don't always see eye to eye. *Fast Company* uncovered a wide gap in the way each group thinks about business culture and their radically different ideas about work-life balance. But there's another disconnect brewing, and this one is between managers and the newest members of the workforce: college graduates. A new report from PayScale, a provider of on-demand compensation data and software, in partnership with Future Workplace, an executive development firm, reveals that while 87% of recent graduates feel well prepared to hit the ground running after earning their diplomas, only half of hiring managers agree with them. This isn't totally surprising, as *Fast Company* reported that the class of 2016 is overwhelmingly optimistic about their prospects for getting a job within their field of study. Unfortunately, recent studies reveal that underemployment was the reality for more than half (51%) of those who graduated in the past two years." (see Figure 3)

Also as noted in Figure 4, writing skills are the number one hard skill that employers want college graduates to have. However, critical thinking/problem-solving are the number one soft skill that students lack (see Table 2). With the data that is available at the time this report was compiled, it is evident that these specific hard skills and soft skills are those which have been identified as most lacking in many studies, and in fact, are also identified in Table 2 (using primary sources in the survey collection methodology). For example, writing ability is rated by students ($N = 391$) as: Below Average = 1.8%; Average = 52.9%; Above Average = 45.3%; in contrast to the student ratings, faculty see it slightly differently. Faculty ($N = 138$), rate students as: Below Average = 36.2%; Average = 60.9%; Above Average = 2.9%. Another way to see this is that students rate their writing ability as only 1.8% in the Below Average category, whereas faculty rate the Below Average category at 36.2%. That is a difference of 34.4% in the Below Average category for the most sought after hard skill by employers – writing ability. If you look at the Average differences, faculty give students a high mark of 60.9%, to students 52.9%--meaning, students and faculty rate writing ability at about the same relative 'average' scale. However, the item that gives great concern to the bottom line of organizations is that students rate their writing

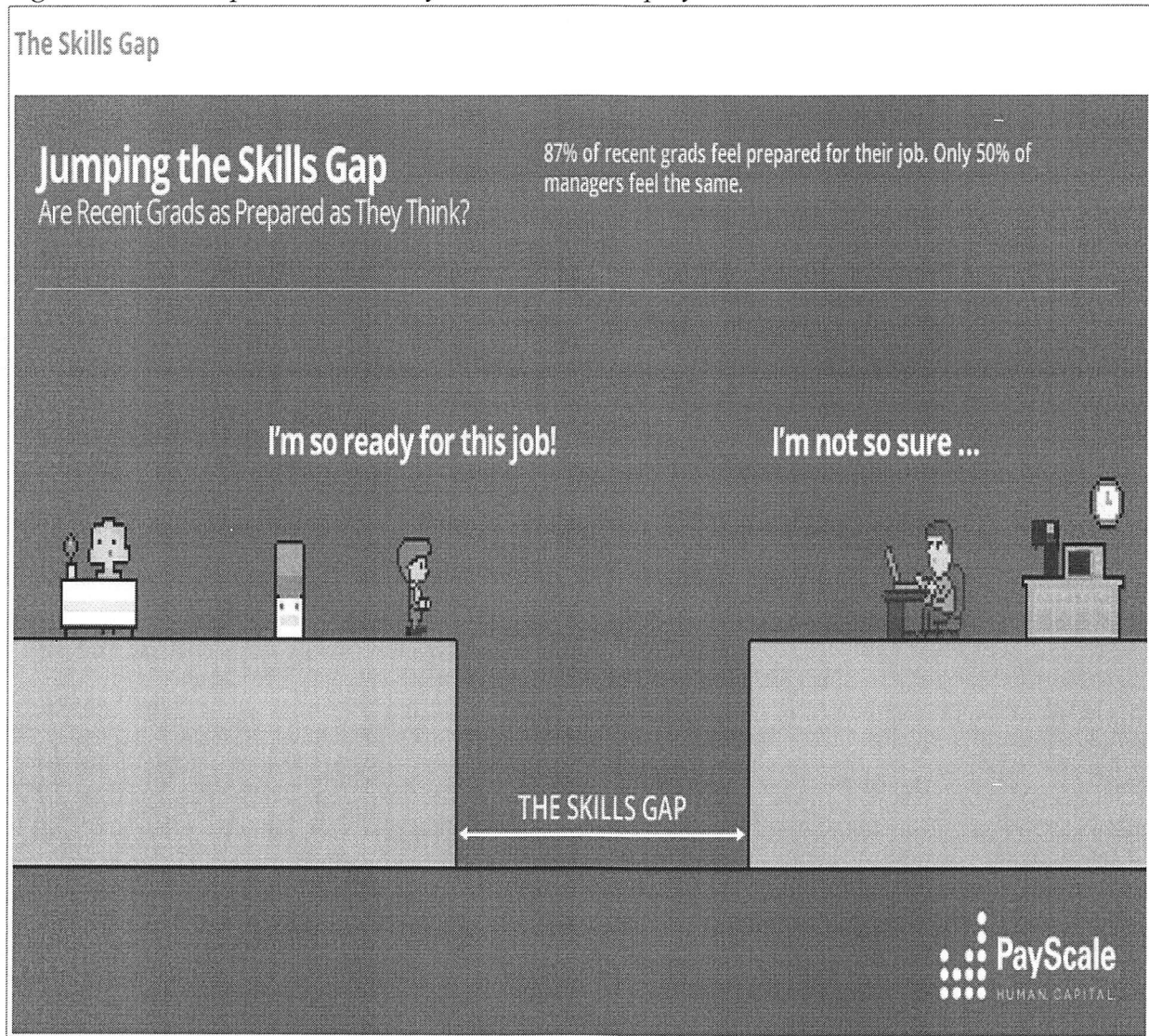
ability as Above Average at the rate of 45.3%, while faculty rate writing ability at Above Average at an *alarming* 2.9%. That is a huge difference of 40.4% less than students claim. What this means is that faculty believe writing ability in students is far worse than students realize, perceive, or report, and way short of how students perceive themselves ready for the workforce. Therefore, something must be done to correct these deficiencies as they cost organizations in terms or real dollars (as previously noted in this study).

What might be the role of community colleges in this process to improve soft skills? Due to the dichotomy that 87 percent of students perceive that they are prepared in hard/soft skills, with only about half of hiring managers agreeing, there is a defining line of demarcation in the soft skills gap. Consequently, Robles (2012, p.453) suggested the following application for soft skills development as early as possible in the tenure of students: "While technical skills are a part of many excellent educational curricula, soft skills need further emphasis in the community college curricula so that students learn the importance of soft skills early in their academic/technical programs before they embark on a business or other career." Many examples might be cited, but using the actual data from the survey, and noting that organizations require quality from its employees, how do students and recent graduates perceive their ability to 'produce quality work?' Students rated themselves in the Below Average category at only 0.8%. Another way to view this is to understand that this sample of 391 students from the Community College student population resulted in *only* 3 participants identifying themselves as below average for producing quality work. This means, then, that 388 students considered their work (reports, research papers, projects, etc.) to be in the category of average-to-above average, with 55.5% (over half) noting that they produce quality work—a value of great significance in the vast majority of organizations that are in the business of earning profits and those who operate in the community service domain.

In contrast, faculty overwhelming noted that this same group of respondents operated in the 'producing quality work' area at below average-to-average at 25.4% and 70.3%, respectively. In other words, this discrepancy in hard/soft skills alone is of great cause for concern. In fact, if faculty—who assess the quality of work submitted or performed by students as average—what does this say to organizations that will soon hire these students/graduates? If the rating from faculty in this survey suggested that only 4.3% of their students produce quality work in the above average rating, how do organizations that seek the best from their employees view this soft skill? Thus, this report provides a baseline from which organizations may review their current hiring practices,

including what might be done to address these deficiencies in terms of training or professional development costs.

Figure 3: Skills Gap as Perceived by Students and Employers

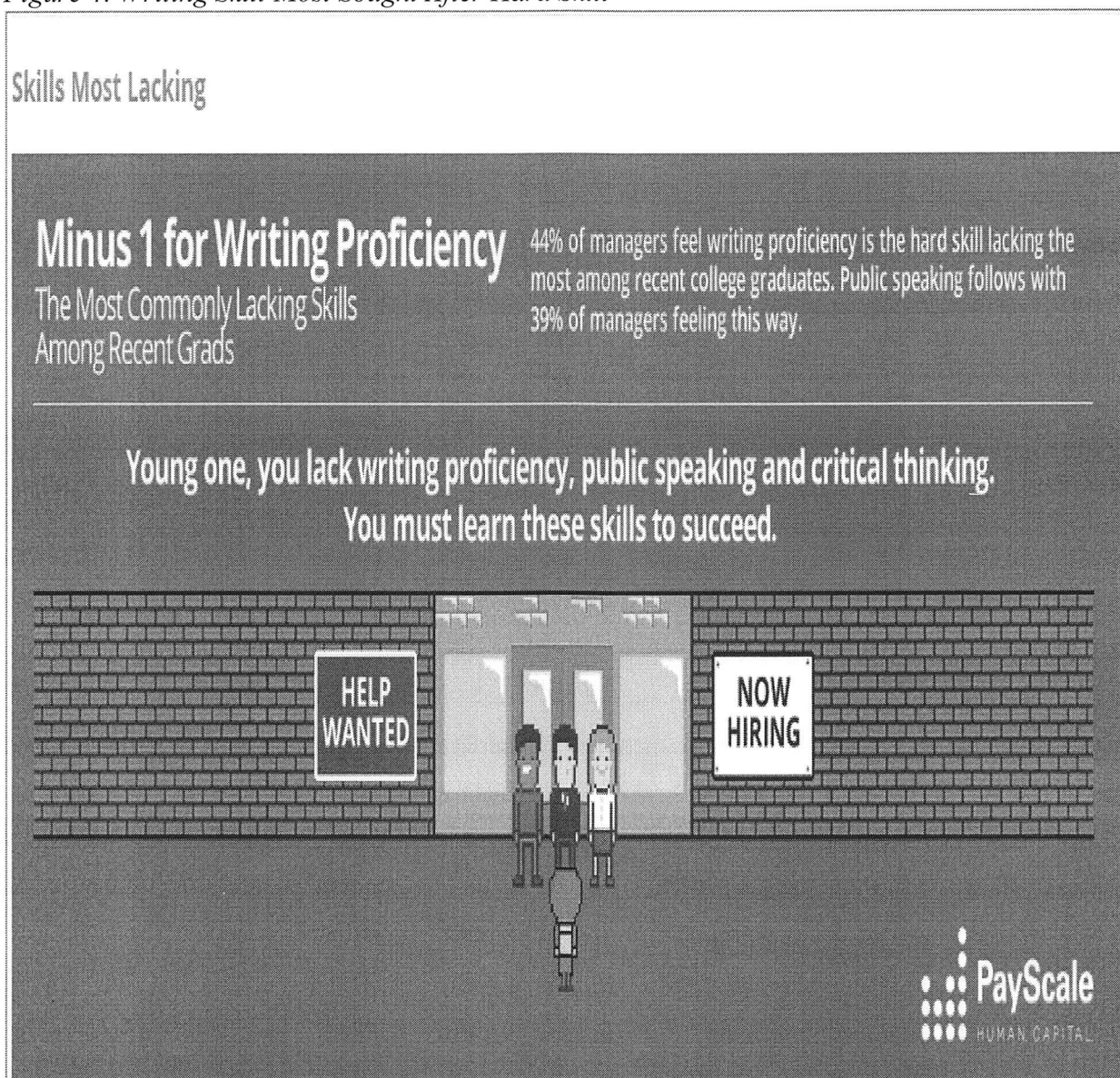


Source: <http://www.payscale.com/data-packages/job-skills>; **2016 Workforce-Skills Preparedness Report**

As noted in the PayScale report: “It goes without saying that professionals must possess certain requisite skills in order to lead a successful career, and possessing these skills makes employees and prospective employees more valuable in the professional world. It's also true that most people expect a college education to equip them with these skills, thereby setting them up for lucrative and fulfilling employment.” Consequently, this concept is apropos that intensive, interactive-partnerships between educational institutions and the workforce are long overdue to address these

issues. These partnerships have a cyclic effect, in that what the workforce “feeds” into the colleges and schools are then returned to the workforce as prepared community college graduates. This cyclic-effect is noted in Figure 5. This cyclic process depends heavily on open, two-way sharing of technologies, training, soft skills, and so forth, that must then be ingrained in the students in their respective Programs of Study. Without this exchange of information, the community colleges will be unaware of the extent that the information can be used to enhance soft skills in every aspect of preparing students for the workforce.

Figure 4: Writing Skill Most Sought After Hard Skill



Source: <http://www.payscale.com/data-packages/job-skills>; 2016 Workforce-Skills Preparedness Report

Table 2: Comparison of Students and Faculty in Selected 15 Soft Skills

Strategic-Impact-Triad (SIT) Perceptions: Students Compared to Faculty									
ITEM	STUDENTS			FACULTY			Stu Mean	Fac Mean	Mean Diff.
	Below Avg	Avg	Above Avg	Below Avg	Avg	Above Avg			
Attendance	1.8% (7)	35.3% (138)	62.9% (246)	13.0% (18)	67.4% (93)	19.6% (27)	2.61	2.07	0.55
Writing Ability	1.8% (7)	52.9% (207)	45.3% (177)	36.2% (50)	60.90% (84)	2.9% (4)	2.43	1.67	0.77
Team Player	2.3% (9)	45.0% (176)	52.7% (206)	15.9% (22)	72.5% (100)	11.6% (16)	2.50	1.96	0.55
Motivation to Succeed in College	1.0% (4)	28.6% (112)	70.3% (275)	18.1% (25)	62.3% (86)	19.6% (27)	2.69	2.01	0.68
Oral Presentations	13.3% (52)	62.7% (245)	24.0% (94)	26.8% (37)	66.7% (92)	6.6% (9)	2.11	1.80	0.31
Producing Quality Work	0.8% (3)	43.7% (171)	55.5% (217)	25.4% (35)	70.3% (97)	4.3% (6)	2.55	1.79	0.76
Computer Skills	5.1% (20)	46.5% (182)	48.3% (189)	21.0% (29)	60.9% (84)	18.1% (25)	2.43	1.97	0.46
Success in High School	10.7% (42)	50.1% (196)	39.1% (153)	17.4% (24)	73.9% (102)	8.7% (12)	2.28	1.91	0.37
Respect for Others	0.8% (3)	21.5% (84)	77.7% (304)	13.0% (18)	63.0% (87)	23.9% (33)	2.77	2.11	0.66
Enjoy Learning New Things	0.5% (2)	26.3% (103)	73.1% (286)	15.2% (21)	64.5% (89)	20.3% (28)	2.73	2.05	0.68
Reading Ability	2.3% (9)	40.4% (158)	57.3% (224)	28.3% (39)	63.8% (88)	8.0% (11)	2.55	1.80	0.75
Time Management	12.0% (47)	54.0% (211)	34.0% (133)	44.9% (62)	47.8% (66)	7.2% (10)	2.22	1.62	0.60
Math Skills	18.4% (72)	59.3% (232)	22.3% (87)	40.6% (56)	55.8% (77)	3.6% (5)	2.04	1.63	0.41
Leadership	5.9% (23)	51.7% (202)	42.5% (166)	29.0% (40)	64.5% (89)	6.5% (9)	2.37	1.78	0.59
Work Ethic	1.5% (6)	30.4% (119)	68.0% (266)	32.6% (45)	57.2% (79)	10.1% (14)	2.66	1.78	0.89

N = 548; * *Not all respondents answered all items presented.* NOTE: The rating scale is Below Avg (1), Avg (2), and Above Avg (3). The Student Means of the ratings compared to the Faculty Mean ratings, consistently show that students rate themselves higher in every category, with a low of 0.31 for Oral Presentations, and a high of 0.89 for Work Ethic. Translated this means that students and faculty agree that students need improvement in Oral Presentations; by contrast, students by a margin of 0.89 perceived themselves to be in great shape in terms of a solid work ethic, where faculty tend to disagree almost an entire percentage point in the rating scale.

Figure 5: Cyclic Process to Improve Hard and Soft Skills in the Community College

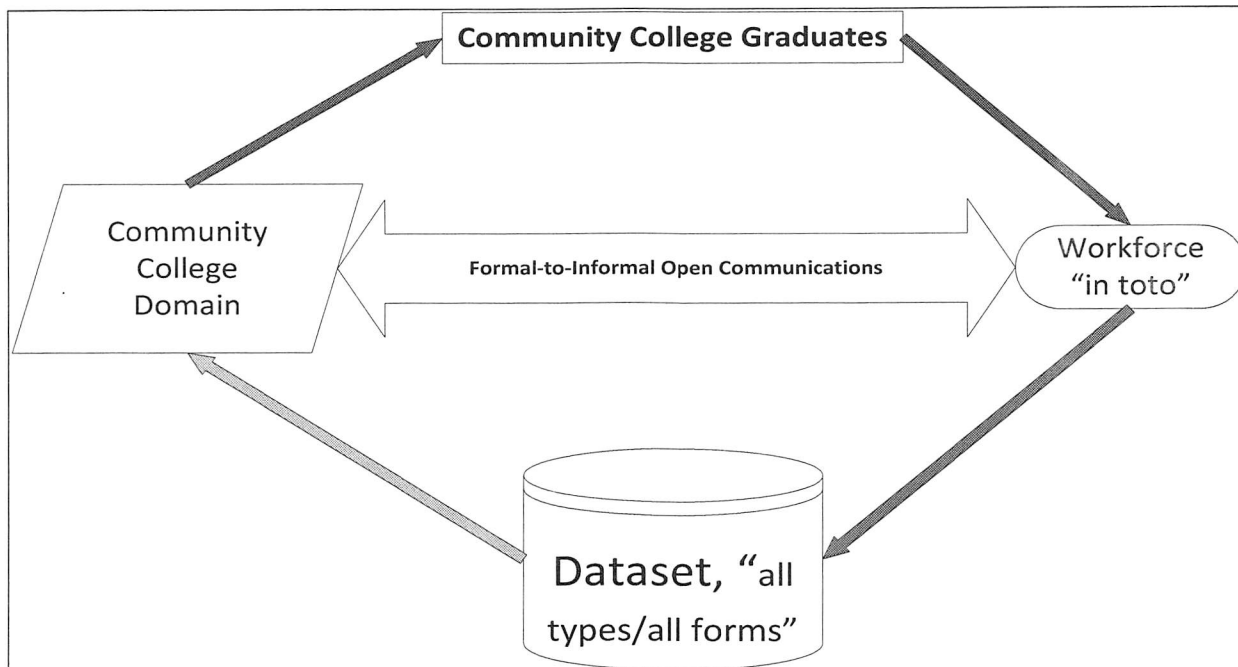
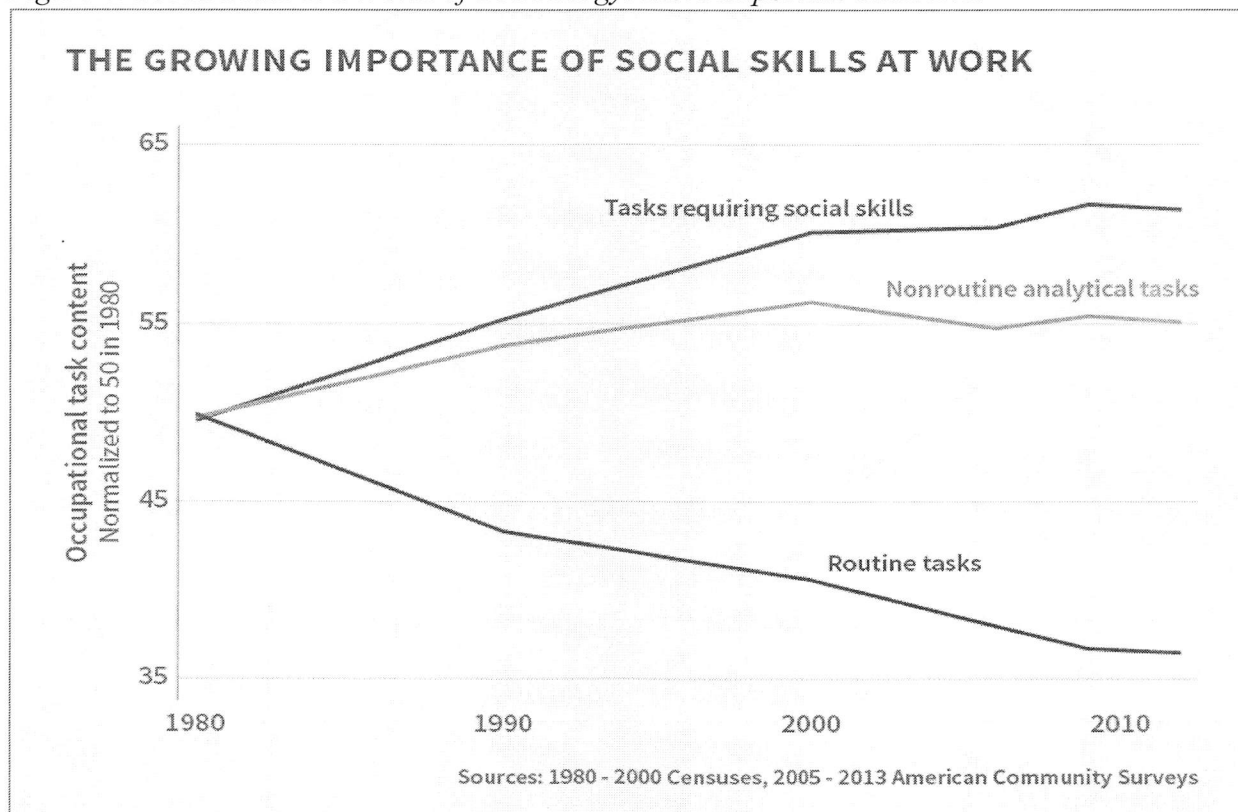


Figure 6: Social Skills in a World of Technology: More Important Than Ever



Source: Picker, L. (Nov2015). The growing importance of social skills in the labor market. *NBER* (National Bureau of Economic Research), Nov2015, p.2-2.

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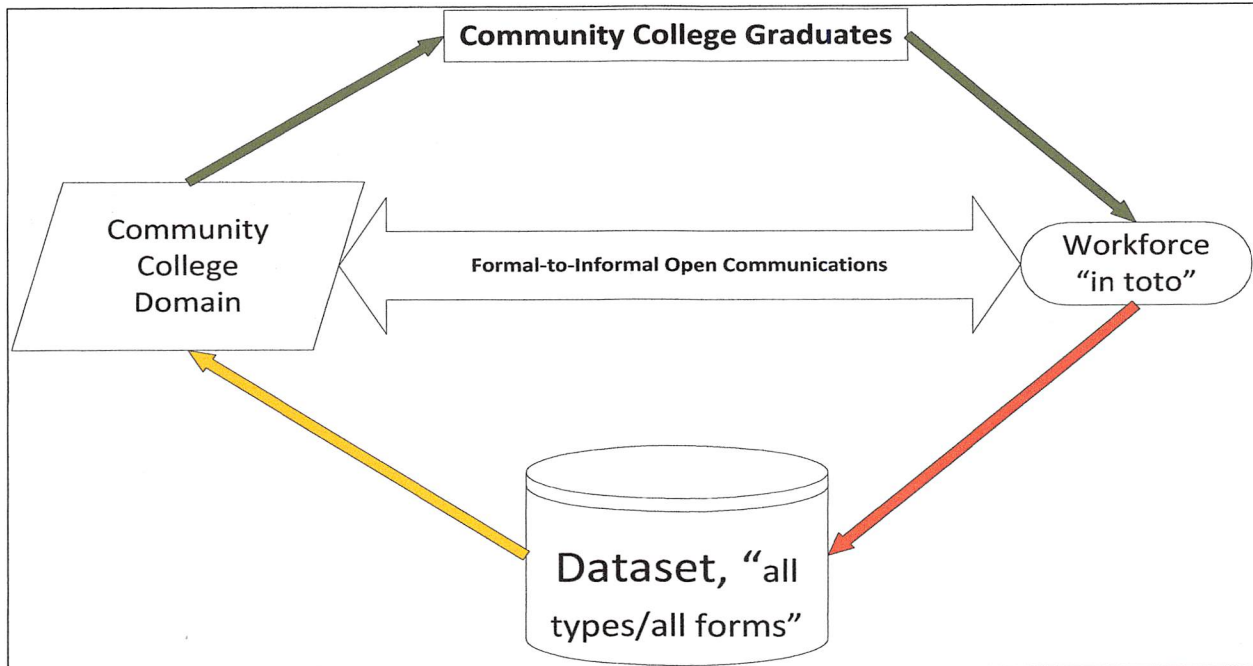
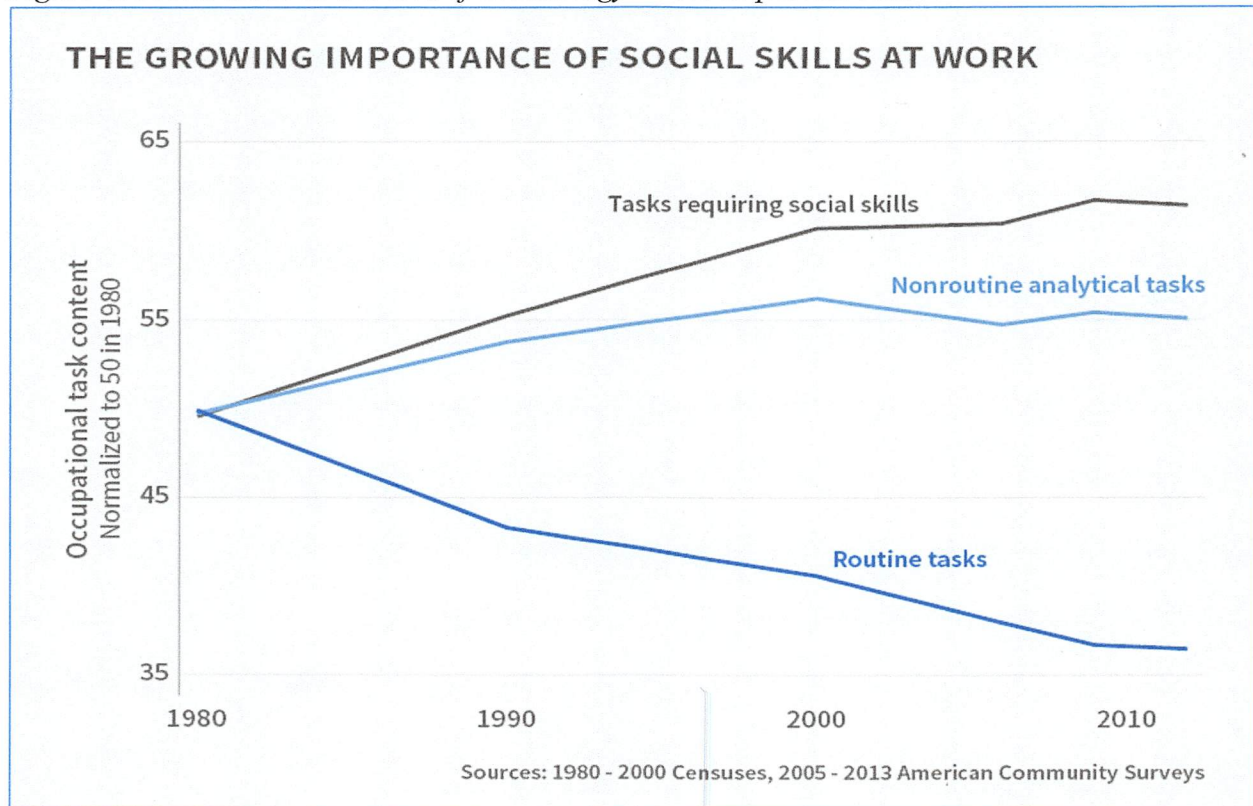


Figure 6: Social Skills in a World of Technology: More Important Than Ever



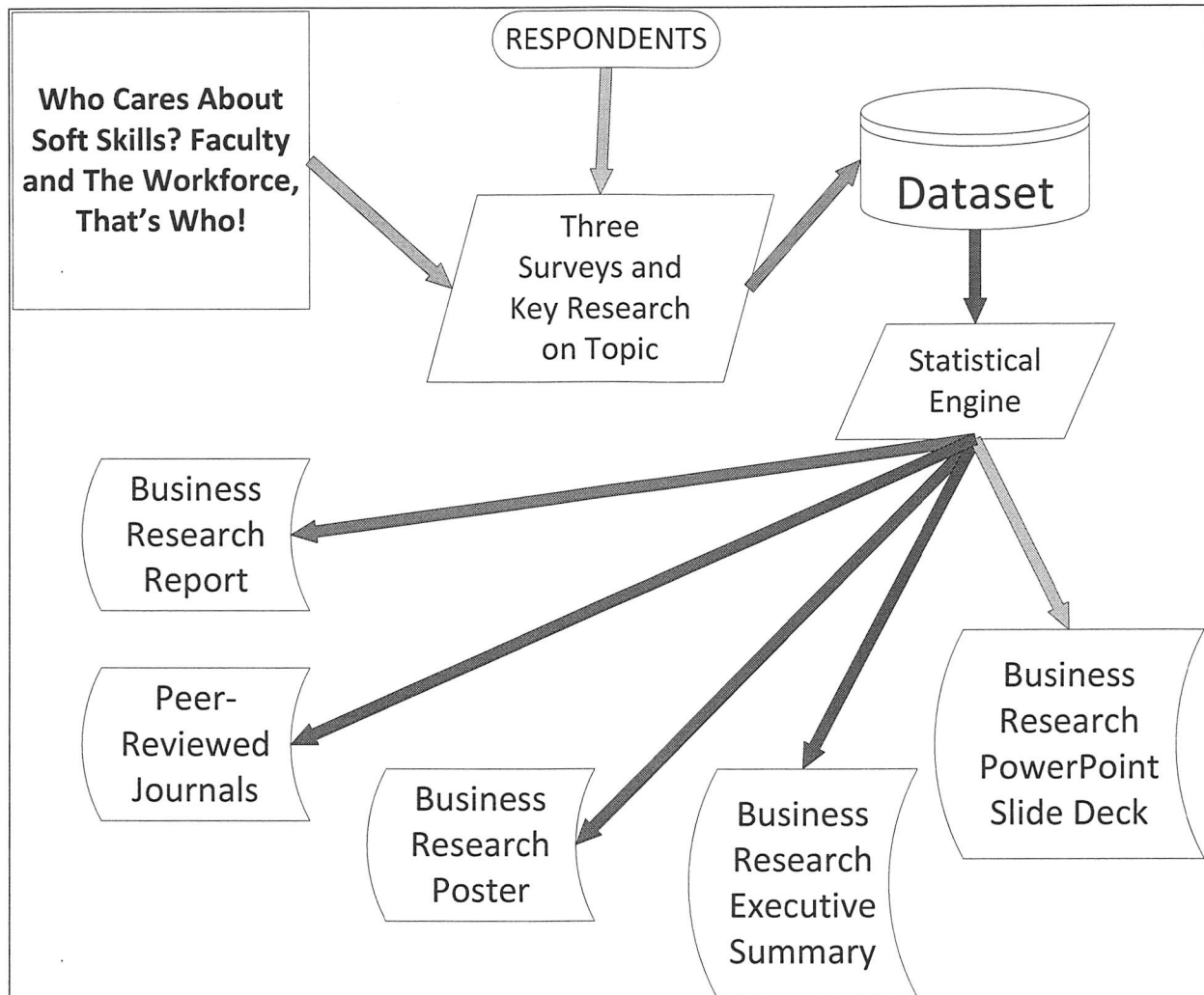
Source: Picker, L. (Nov2015). The growing importance of social skills in the labor market. *NBER* (National Bureau of Economic Research), Nov2015, p.2-2.

As suggested in Figure 6, the necessity of social skills, which are the parent of soft skills, are more important than at any time in the history of technological development. For example, Picker (2015), noted the following: “Social skills are important in the modern labor market because computers are still very poor at simulating human interaction.” Human interaction, therefore, includes elements of the soft skills such as how individuals treat customers, their writing ability and communication skills, etc. Noting the importance of these social skills as well as specific soft skills (and hard skills), organizations need to assess these deficiencies and use planning and training as effectively as possible to improve the employee’s ability to apply soft skills as judiciously as possible throughout the organization—to maximize positive fiscal outcomes.

The report presented here used a mixed-mode of survey methodology to collect primary source data for this analysis. Moreover, the data collected were tempered with the literature and studies that impacted the dataset for clarity, central tendencies, and reporting. The participants were fewer than anticipated ($N = 548$); however, a revised set of surveys have been redesigned to better quantify the participants responses to improve the knowledge-base for future applications within the organization, including cost factors as a result of apparent/suggested soft skill deficiencies (see Appendix A – C for the updated Survey Instruments).

Consequently, this research report has been compiled and is ready for submission to the Board of Directors, as well as the Chancellor’s Office of the Alabama Community College System for implementation, questions, and further research. As noted in Figure 8, reporting methods have been established and are ready for dissemination to specified recipients as directed. Please note that the printed materials will be available as noted in Table 3 and Figure 8. To reiterate, the findings of this report have identified perceived and real inadequate soft skills that employers believe community college graduates presently require. As a result, this Business Research Report offers a guide of these deficiencies and to identify organizational support for professional development to upgrade these skills. This may include present employees and new personnel to bring these ‘people skills’ up to standard within the organization. Thus, this is a critically important research/financial-based report. It should also be noted that the revised survey process includes not only data collection of community college students, but is now expanded to current employees to determine the variances between these groups as a method to use this knowledge to better plan for upgrading soft skills as required across the organization as needed.

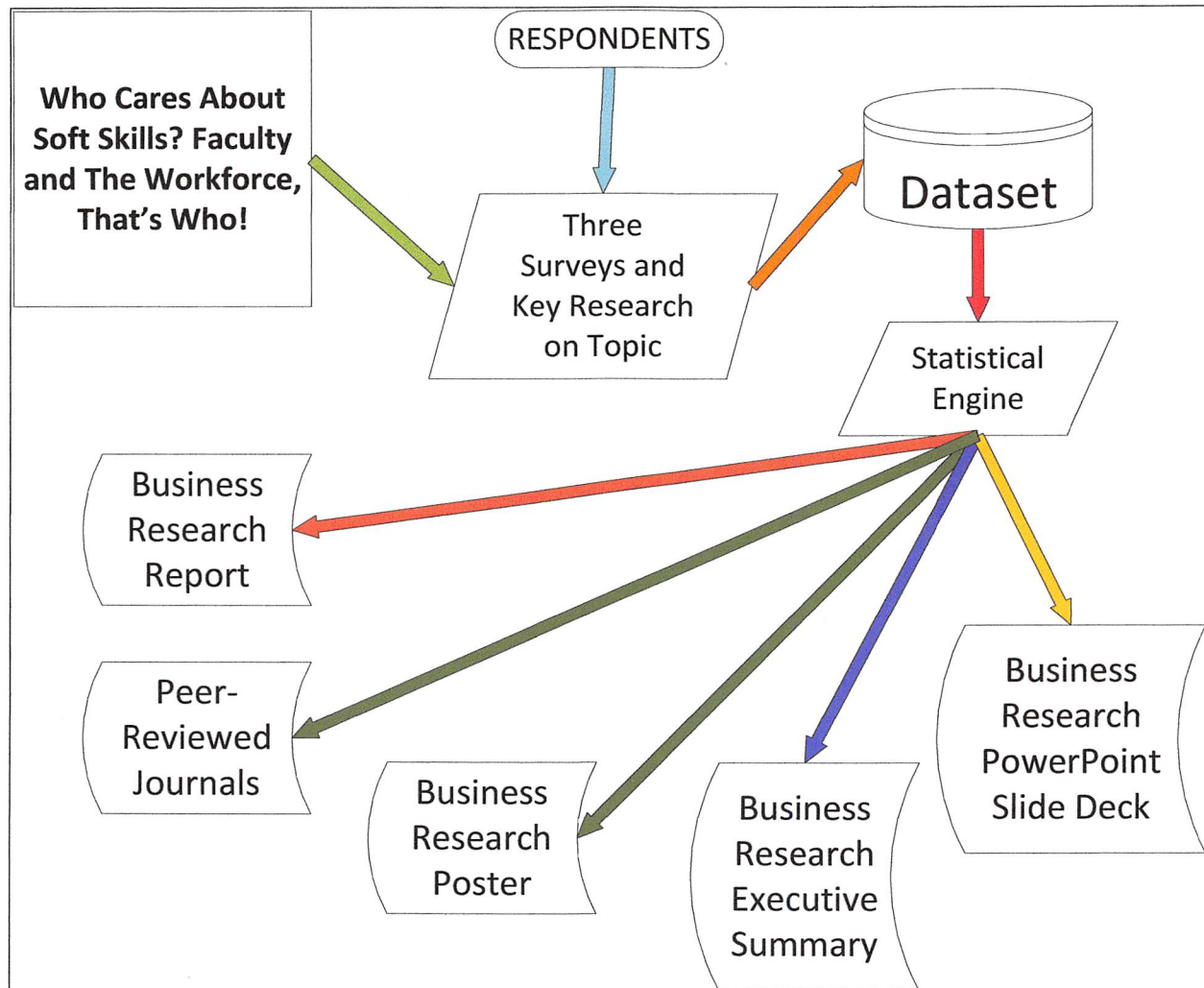
Figure 7: Graphical Representation of the Proposal/Report Outcomes



Report Status

Provided in Table 3, and Figure 8, the report has been completed, with plans to further research this critical business function. However, the report is ready for release with the notation that printing of the materials for 'Professional Publication and Release' as delayed due to various factors. Once these materials are available, I feel confident that the Board of Directors, The Chancellor, and all stakeholders will be highly pleased with the content, quality, and impact of this report. The data indicates that "Who Cares About Soft Skills?" is a mitigating skill set when left 'to chance' in community college graduates, as well as the workforce omission of providing feedback to these colleges in how these soft skills are addressed in Student Learning Outcomes.

Figure 7: Graphical Representation of the Proposal/Report Outcomes



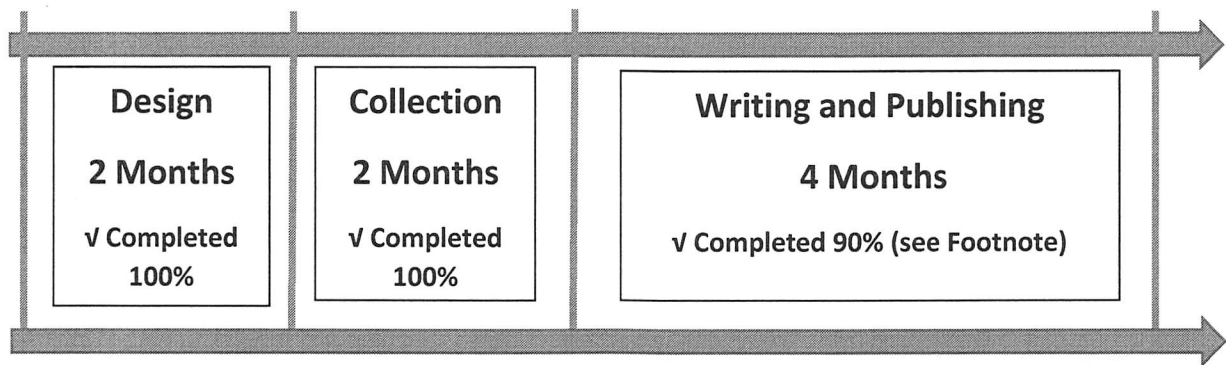
Report Status

Provided in Table 3, and Figure 8, the report has been completed, with plans to further research this critical business function. However, the report is ready for release with the notation that printing of the materials for 'Professional Publication and Release' as delayed due to various factors. Once these materials are available, I feel confident that the Board of Directors, The Chancellor, and all stakeholders will be highly pleased with the content, quality, and impact of this report. The data indicates that "Who Cares About Soft Skills?" is a mitigating skill set when left 'to chance' in community college graduates, as well as the workforce omission of providing feedback to these colleges in how these soft skills are addressed in Student Learning Outcomes.

Table 3: Material and Manpower Total Cost of Operations (TCO): Project Completion

Item	Description	Cost	% Cost of Budget	% Completion
SurveyMonkey	Data Capture Software Applications	\$300.00/ 1 Year	0.77%	100%
Kinko Printing Services	Forms, Reports, Graphical Representations/Materials	\$2,500.00	6.44%	90% ²
Principal Investigator	Prorated Salary of PI (8 Months with salary/benefits) [Full Time on Project]	\$24,000.00	61.86%	100%
Administrative Assistant	Susan B. Anthony (8 Months with salary/benefits) [Part Time on Project]	\$12,000.00	30.93%	100%
Totals:		\$38,800.00	100.00%	100%

Figure 8: Progress Timeline & Outcomes



For the expectation that this report, and its associated sources and data identified, are viable for continued investigation, Table 4 has been included in this report as well as provided in the in the Proposal. While the Business Research Proposal was unable to state the precise details of this study and its expected outcomes, it can now be quantified unequivocally that between and within the three populations of this study, variances do exist based on a lengthy review of the previous and current studies that have been conducted and validated by the data collected in the survey process (see Table 4: Note...additional items/sources have been added to the list in Table 4). Moreover, a recent follow-up discussion with employers and faculty in the community college have strongly suggested that soft skills, are in fact, vital to organizational success.

² Due to the specialized nature of the printed materials and the Holiday Season printing requirements of Kinko Printing Services ('Best Quality' option for published and presentation materials), this portion of the project is 90% complete, with a delivery date 21 days hence.

Table 4: ‘Sampling Methodology’ of ‘Lit Review’ Data Collection/Information Resources

Source/Citation	Select Passage/Abstract
Weise, M. (2016). We Need a Better Way to Visualize People’s Skills. Harvard Business Review, September 20, 2016, p.1. Retrieved 2 November 2016 from https://hbr.org/2016/09/we-need-a-better-way-to-visualize-peoples-skills .	By 2020, the US economy is expected to create 55 million job openings: 24 million of these will be entirely new positions. And 48 percent of the new jobs, according to Georgetown’s Center on Education and the Workforce, will emphasize a mix of hard and soft intellectual skills, like active listening, leadership, communication, analytics, and administration competencies.
Burning Glass Technologies (2015). “The Human Factor”, Retrieved 2 November 2016, from http://burning-glass.com/wp-content/uploads/Human_Factor_Baseline_Skills_FINAL.pdf .	Writing, communication skills, and organizational skills are scarce everywhere. These skills are in demand across nearly every occupation— and in nearly every occupation they’re being requested far more than you’d expect based on standard job profiles. Even fields like IT and Engineering want people who can write.
Levasseur, R. (2011). People Skills: Optimizing Team Development and Performance. <i>Interfaces</i> , 41(2), 204-208.	Task Work and Teamwork. Blake and Mouton (1964) were among the first to identify the importance of task work and teamwork to group success. They defined the ideal management style as a combination of a “high concern for production” and a “high concern for people” (p. 142). This ideal style, characterized as highly collaborative, is a team-oriented style. The connection to Tuckman’s final performing stage of group development seems clear. Hence, the message for a group leader who wishes to develop a high-performing team is to approach the group development process with the attitude that a continuous focus on both task work and teamwork is essential to the development of a high-performing team.
Mersino, A. (2013). <i>Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers: The People Skills You Need to Achieve Outstanding Results</i> , 2 nd Ed., American Management Association: New York, NY.	Research indicates that emotional intelligence (EI) accounts for an astonishing 70-80 percent of management success. Technical expertise just isn’t enough anymore: project managers need strong interpersonal skills and the ability to recognize emotional cues in order to lead their teams to success.
Suzanne, A., & Benjamin, G. (2016, September). Teaching soft skills to business students. <i>Business and Professional Communication Quarterly</i> , 79(3), 360-370.	Recent reports have suggested that many employees in the workforce today lack essential soft skills . This research analyzes the effectiveness of multiple classroom assignments for teaching soft skills in a Business Communication course. Five distinct pedagogical strategies were used in an effort to teach soft skills , including a self-analysis, an interview, a guest lecturer, a journal article, and a soft skills video. Results offer insights into students’ perceptions of the most helpful pedagogical approaches for teaching soft skills .
Dabka, D. (2015). Soft skills as a predictor of perceived internship effectiveness and permanent placement opportunity. <i>IUP Journal of Soft Skills</i> , 9(4), 26-42.	The study aims at examining the association between soft skills of management interns and its impact on the effectiveness perception of industry mentors. Sixty industry mentors, who had one first year management intern under their supervision, were administered a 39- item soft skills questionnaire, based on the framework proposed by Robles (2012). The intern was assessed on 11 soft skills. Each mentor rated the degree to which the intern possessed the specific soft skill on a five-point rating scale. The mentors also indicated their satisfaction with the intern’s quality of work and the degree to which the mentor may consider the intern for final placement. A Pearson’s correlation coefficient indicated that internship effectiveness perception of the mentor was positively associated with all the aspects of soft skills. The possibility of a permanent placement offering was also positively associated with all the aspects of soft skills. A multiple regression analysis indicated that interpersonal skills, courtesy, and positive attitude were positive predictors of internship effectiveness, explaining a variance of 55%. Similarly, professionalism, teamwork, and interpersonal skills emerged as the positive predictors of a chance of being considered for a permanent placement, explaining a variance of 58%.
Robles, M. (2012). Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today’s Workplace. <i>Business Communication Quarterly</i> , 75(4), 453-465.	Hard skills are the technical expertise and knowledge needed for a job. Soft skills are interpersonal qualities, also known as people skills , and personal attributes that one possesses. Business executives consider soft skills a very important attribute in job applicants. Employers want new employees to have strong soft skills , as well as hard skills . This study identified the top 10 soft skills as perceived the most important by business executives: integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills , positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic.

Source/Citation	Select Passage/Abstract
Thomas, W., & Fagin, T. (2015). <i>Hard and soft skills in preparing GIS professionals: Comparing perceptions of employers and educators. Transactions in GIS. 19(5), 641-652.</i>	Organizations that hire GIS professionals look for entry-level employees with specialized technical skills but also other competencies such as effective communication and a capacity to think critically and creatively. Indeed, the success of GIS projects and initiatives often depends on individuals who possess a combination of specialized GIS skills and more general competencies that influence their ability to collaborate and manage resources. This article presents findings from a survey of GIS employers and educators concerning the importance of hard and soft skills among entry-level GIS professionals. A key finding is the high level of consistency in ratings assigned by employers and educators concerning hard skills such as data editing and GIS analysis and soft skills including problem solving and adaptability. However, the groups were less similar in ratings assigned to data capture skills , project management, and written/verbal skills . GIS qualifications were also compared, revealing a greater emphasis on internships among educators and higher ratings assigned to academic GIS certificates among employers.
Charoensap-Kelly, P., Broussard, L., Lindsly, M., & Troy, M. (2016). Evaluation of a soft skills training program. <i>Business and Professional Communication Quarterly, 79(2), 154-179.</i>	This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a soft skills employee training program. We examined willingness to learn and delivery methods (face-to-face vs. online) and their associations with the training outcomes in terms of learning and behavioral change. Results showed that neither participants' willingness to learn nor delivery methods affected comprehension. However, both variables had significant effects on the reported behavioral change. This training is effective in teaching employees how to "flex" their personal styles and to improve their relationships with each other. Implications for business and professional communication training and directions for future research are discussed in detail.
Montiero de Carvalho, M., & Junior, R. (2015). Impact of risk management on project performance: The importance of soft skills. <i>International Journal of Production Research. 53(2), 321-340.</i>	This study aims to elucidate the relationship between risk management and project success, considering the contingent effect of project complexity. This approach also combines aspects of soft and hard skills . This methodological approach involves a literature review to underpin the conceptual framework and a survey for empirical validation, using structural equation modelling. The hypotheses were tested based on a field study involving 263 projects distributed among eight industries. The fieldwork involved interviews with project managers and risk managers and an analysis of internal company documents about the projects' performance. The structural model presented herein provides a means for correlating the hard and soft sides of risk management with project success, understanding the moderating effect of project complexity. The soft side of risk management appears most prominently and explains 10.7% of the effect on project success. Moreover, the soft side supports the hard side, since we found a significant correlation that explains 25.3% of the effect on the hard side.
Venkatesan, I. (2015). MBA: The soft and hard skills that matter. <i>IUP Journal of Soft Skills, 9(1), 7-14.</i>	It is no secret that employers when they recruit people for administrative positions usually look for candidates with an MBA degree, which has come to be seen as the leading postgraduate business degree. Naturally, an MBA degree holder is expected to possess the necessary knowledge and skills to manage businesses. However, as the demands change, so do the skills expected of the MBA degree holders. This paper examines what the employers expect of a recent business school graduate considered for a position in their companies and what is required of the aspirants and business schools to live up to such expectations.
Adams, J. (2014). Practical Advice for Developing, Designing and Delivering Effective Soft Skills Programs. <i>IUP Journal of Soft Skills, 8(2), 7-20.</i>	Although most business and community leaders understand and appreciate the value and importance of continuous learning and professional soft skill development, scarcity of critical resources like time and money, unfortunately, often get in the way. This paper offers practical research-based advice for developing, designing, and delivering effective soft skills learning programs aimed at maximizing the impact of e-learning when facing these common workplace and academic challenges. Some of the concepts covered include the importance of: (a) developing programs based on full awareness of underlying assumptions in content creation for soft skills development and how this can impact learning outcomes; (b) designing program strategies that empower learners to take ownership of their own learning soft-skills development; and (c) delivering programs that embrace constructive principles for rewards and accountability that

<i>Source/Citation</i>	<i>Select Passage/Abstract</i>
	enable soft skills development. The paper will be most relevant for today's coaches, mentors, educators and professionals particularly interested in leadership and management training and development.
Survey Collection Instrument: Soft Skills, Work Ethics, Employability Skills, People Skills in the Community College: Employer Survey— <i>Revised</i>	N = To Be Determined
Survey Collection Instrument: Soft Skills, Work Ethics, Employability Skills, People Skills in the Community College: Faculty Survey— <i>Revised</i>	N = To Be Determined
Survey Collection Instrument: Soft Skills, Work Ethics, Employability Skills, People Skills in the Community College: Student Survey— <i>Revised</i>	N = To Be Determined
National Soft Skills Association (2016). The Real Skills Gap. Retrieved 2 November 2016 from http://www.nationalskills.org/research-publications/ .	Research conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center has concluded that 85% of job success comes from having well-developed soft and people skills, and only 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge (hard skills). This research finds its beginning with the work of Charles Riborg Mann from a Study of Engineering Education in 1918. There is a span of almost 100 years since Mann published his findings. But, what have we done with this information learned so long ago?
Heckman, J., & Kautz, T. (2012). Hard evidence on soft skills. National Bureau of Economic Research, Intro(2 pgs) – p. 52. Retrieved 2 November 2016 from http://www.nber.org/papers/w18121.pdf .	This paper summarizes recent evidence on what achievement tests measure; how achievement tests relate to other measures of "cognitive ability" like IQ and grades; the important skills that achievement tests miss or 'miss-measure', and how much these skills matter in life. Achievement tests miss, or perhaps more accurately, do not adequately capture, soft skills—personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences—that are valued in the labor market, in school, and in many other domains. The larger message of this paper is that soft skills predict success in life, that they causally produce that success, and that programs that enhance soft skills have an important place in an effective portfolio of public policies.
Lippman, et. al. (2015). Soft skills that open doors. Presented to Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 20 January 2015. Retrieved 2 November 2016, from file:///C:/Users/DrK/Downloads/child-trends-research-on-soft-skills.pdf .	Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that improves the lives and prospects of children and youth by conducting high-quality research and sharing the resulting knowledge with practitioners and policymakers.
Tulgan, B. (2015). Unlocking the power of soft skills. <i>Professional Safety</i> , 60(12), 24-25.	Show me an organization with a strong, positive corporate culture and I will show you an organization that is clear about which soft-skill behaviors are high priority and sings about those high-priority behaviors from the rooftops. This company does not just focus on young talent, of course, but an emphasis on key soft-skill behaviors makes everyone in the organization much better, even the youngest, least experienced employees. To make it easy to understand, think of the U.S. Marine Corps or Disney. Both organizations, in different lines of work, employ numerous young people and both famously imbue a huge number of soft-skill behaviors in their workforce. Many other examples exist.
Tores, N. (2015). Research: Technology is only making social skills more important. Retrieved 2 November 2016 from https://hbr.org/2015/08/research-technology-is-only-making-social-skills-more-important .	A new <u>NBER working paper</u> suggests it'll be those that require strong social skills — which it defines as the ability to work with others — something that has proven to be much more difficult to automate. "The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market," shows that nearly all job growth since 1980 has been in occupations that are relatively social skill-intensive — and it argues that high-skilled, hard-to-automate jobs will increasingly demand social adeptness.
Picker, L. (Nov2015). The growing importance of social skills in the labor market. <i>NBER</i> (National Bureau of Economic Research), Nov2015, p.2-2.	Automation has played an important role in the recent evolution of the U.S. labor market, transforming the relative demand for workers with various skills and in different occupations. In The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market (NBER Working Paper No. 21473), <u>David J. Deming</u> demonstrates that high-paying, difficult-to-automate jobs increasingly require social skills.

<i>Source/Citation</i>	<i>Select Passage/Abstract</i>
Scott, K. (2008). Dissertation: Strategic Factors of Institutional Practice Impacting Student Success in the Community College as Perceived by Students and Faculty: Academic Preparation, Work Ethics, and Institutional Support; UMI Number: 3317344.	The three studies noted (Kuh et al., 2006; Robbins et al., 2004; Smith, 2005) were used to design The Strategic-Impact-Triad (SIT) Model which compiled the list of variables into three categorical factors: 1) academic preparation, 2) work ethics, and 3) institutional support. The Strategic-Impact-Triad Model was assessed within the framework of institutional or management practice. To measure the impact the SIT Model factors had on student success, survey data was collected from community college faculty and students. The data were used to assess how students and faculty perceived academic preparation, work ethics, and institutional support as inseparable factors specifically influencing student success within the framework of institutional practice.
PayScale. (2016). 2016 Workforce-Skills Preparedness Report. Retrieved 21 November 2016, from http://www.payscale.com/data-packages/job-skills .	It goes without saying that professionals must possess certain requisite skills in order to lead a successful career, and possessing these skills makes employees and prospective employees more valuable in the professional world. It's also true that most people expect a college education to equip them with these skills, thereby setting them up for lucrative and fulfilling employment.
Adecco. (2016). Watch the skills gap: See how U.S. Executives see the skills gap impacting the American workforce. Retrieved 21 November 2016, from https://www.adeccousa.com/employers/resources/skills-gap-in-the-american-workforce/ .	With the unemployment rate still persistently high and the number of people looking for jobs picking up, you might think that finding your next quality hire will be easy. However, according to our recent poll of more than 500 senior executives, you might want to think again. That's because there is a severe skills gap in the American workforce...Forty-four percent of the executives we surveyed think Americans are lacking soft skills – communication, creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, etc. Thus, while candidates may look good “on paper,” they don't know how to effectively work within a team or in an office.

Note: There are substantial resources from research publications and datasets that will be consulted for this proposal and resulting Business Research Report and other findings and publications.

Discussion & Conclusion

Important Information Pertinent to the Business Research Report (Proposal & Report)

Prior to summarizing the findings of this Business Research Report, I would like to *reiterate/include the following information from the original Business Research Proposal*, including an update from an interview during the process of developing this report:

For example, at one meeting in which a community college faculty/workforce director was present, he noted the following from a recent meeting (Source: Alabama Community College Association Conference, 20-22 November 2016; Presentation Session of Dr. Ken Scott & Dr. Syed Raza): “I met with Company Y a few weeks ago. They informed me that many of their employees are somewhat fine in the areas of both hard and soft skills. But, the Company Y executive told me that he was having to run three shifts just to make production quota because enough of the employees and recent graduates would not show up on time, or even show up or call in. Because of this, the executive of Company Y said the costs of operations were up and those costs would need to be passed on, in some part, to customers because of what several irresponsible employees were doing. It's all about their lack of soft skills...punctuality, caring about their job, work ethic, and so forth.” To reinforce what this workforce individual relayed, again—to reiterate a point in

the Proposal/Paper: This is not to declare that all graduates are in dire need of developing soft skills; rather, the data collected and the interviews conducted indicate that soft skills are important to organizational success, customer relationships, and fiscal importance. Thus, what has been noted in this report provide considerations and applications of improvement to investigate various ways within and throughout an organization to promote improved soft skills.

The anticipated results of this study will provide leadership in each respective organization a means to statistically and visually understand the similarities and differences between the samples from the populations previous noted. The analysis, in terms of soft skill deficiencies and what monetary impact that this may have within and across the organization, is discussed in this Business Research Report. Another way to state this can be found in the study conducted by Burning Glass Technologies (2015, p.4): "Writing, communication skills, and organizational skills are scarce everywhere. These skills are in demand across nearly every occupation— and in nearly every occupation they're being requested far more than you'd expect based on standard job profiles. Even fields like IT and Engineering want people who can write."

According to Business Performance Pty Ltd³, there are costs associated with poor workforce communication (one of the critical items on the soft skills list). These include, but are not limited to: a) increased employee turnover; b) increased absenteeism; c) poor customer service; d) ineffective change management; e) failed project delivery; f) greater incidence of injuries; g) higher litigation costs; and, h) lower shareholder returns. For example, "Two in three projects begun meet with project failure. The cost of project cost blowouts, budget overruns and project cancellations to business and governments is massive. Poor communication is cited as the main cause of failure for IT projects by 28% of respondents in a survey conducted by a national association of IT professionals."⁴ Therefore, the anticipated results will enable organizational leaders to make better informed decisions as to the level of soft skills reported, and how this data might support professional development decisions and training, tactically and strategically. This can be summarized as follows, from a study by Weise (2016, Abstract): "By 2020, the US economy is expected to create 55 million job openings: 24 million of these will be entirely new positions. And 48 percent of the new jobs, according to Georgetown's Center on Education and the

³ <http://www.businessperform.com/workplace-communication/poor-communication-costs.html>

⁴ "Survey: Poor Communication Causes Most IT Project Failures" (2007). Computerworld Inc., http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9012758/Survey_Poor_communication_causes_most_IT_proj

Workforce, will emphasize a mix of hard and soft intellectual skills, like active listening, leadership, communication, analytics, and administration competencies.”

Additionally, the expected outcomes of this proposal will also address leadership roles in the applications arena of soft skills, as noted by Mersino (2013, Abstract): “Research indicates that emotional intelligence (EI) accounts for an astonishing 70-80 percent of management success. Technical expertise just isn't enough anymore: project managers need strong interpersonal skills and the ability to recognize emotional cues in order to lead their teams to success.” Stated in terms of ‘the bottom line’: soft skills, by any other name, have a direct and indirect impact on costs factors associated with the process of organizations ‘doing business.’ Thus, this research proposal/paper is imperative to better understand the variables that impact HR in terms of people skills.

The proposal/paper submitted herein will investigate perceptions, experiences, and skills related to the future employee pool in terms of soft skills (people skills, work ethics, and employability skills). The resulting Business Research Report will descriptive statistics on the findings in a manner that will support the decision making of the Board of Directors and organizational leadership so that the costs of deficient soft skills might be addressed. Inclusive in this study/proposal, will be data that will also suggest whether there are indicators that point to specific soft skills that are less in need of remediation, thus reducing costs for training or professional development, inclusive of direct and indirect costs to the operations of the organization.

Moreover, this proposal—if funded—will result in information that can be used to establish partnerships between respective workforce organizations, collegiate programs of study, and students. The purpose in these types of partnerships is to initiate and promote ‘soft skills best practices development’ that can be effected as early in a student’s program as possible—to maximize the best potential outcome for a student’s soft skills acumen prior to entering the workforce.

A good example of what this project strives to accomplish as an outcome to enable enhanced decision-making is found in the words of Bruce Tulgan (2015, December; p. 24): “Show me an organization with a strong, positive corporate culture and I will show you an organization that is clear about which soft-skill behaviors are high priority and sings about those high-priority behaviors from the rooftops. This company does not just focus on young talent, of course, but an

emphasis on key soft-skill behaviors makes everyone in the organization much better, even the youngest, least experienced employees. To make it easy to understand, think of the U.S. Marine Corps or Disney. Both organizations, in different lines of work, employ numerous young people and both famously imbue a huge number of soft-skill behaviors in their workforce. Many other examples exist.”

Therefore, this proposal bids consideration by the Board of Directors for full and complete funding. The resulting reports to be made available will enable the Board members to gain a succinct and immediate understanding of the financial and human resource issues associated with soft skills deficiencies. The Business Research Report will also be published in various formats for the Board and Management, and has an option for requesting additional publications in various forms, types, and with modifications of the statistical and general presentation content.

Final Comments & Recommendations

First, I want to thank the Board of Directors for the funding for this project, and am confident that the ROI will be fully returned with interest. That interest will be found in better prepared graduates and enhanced soft skills of both applicants and working employees. Furthermore, this study/report will be the catalyst for further research on this topic, and to improve the understanding of how these soft skills can be improved in college classes and in the workplace. And by doing so in each respective location, it is anticipated that costs for these deficiencies can be reduced in both the short-and-long terms of organizational operations.

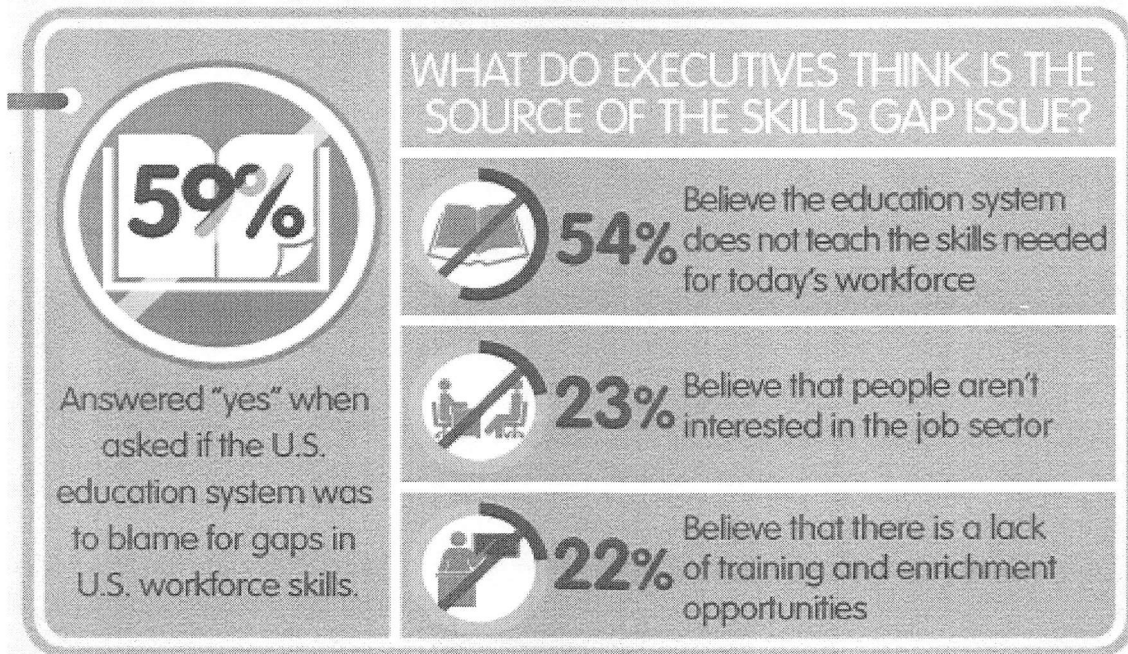
Secondly, the following two recommendations are offered as a result of this investigation:

Recommendation I: After a considerable review of the literature, research published by both business and research organizations, and a collection methodology of an original dataset from faculty, students, and employers, it is evident and suggested that one area in particular needs immediate attention. This area is the dire need to develop measures and outcomes that are based on partnerships with a wide-array of business and industry organizations. It is these partnerships that can drive the implementation of both hard-and-soft skills implementations in those institutions where students and—even the citizenry—need to hear from the organizations that employ individuals. Why? Because if soft skills are deficient, and hiring organizations can impact this deficiency—from the community to the educational institutions—then, there is a much greater chance of success, or at the very least, to impact positively what is lacking in students before they become employed or conduct job searches and interviews(see Figure 9);

Recommendation II: Form a committee that is comprised of various and voluntary individuals who will conduct an internal review of deficiencies in both soft skills and technical skills. This committee should inform all stakeholders that the function of this committee is not to perform ‘Reduction-in-Force’ activities, but to offer employees opportunities to improve in their skills, if it is determined that soft skills, and/or technical skills are deficient. By using this internal

review and outcomes assessment process, it will promote improvement in the skills gap, even if those gains are incremental. Every improvement should offer improvements in organizational objectives being met in positive steps, thereby, improving the bottom line of the organizational fiscal outcomes (see Figure 10);

Figure 9: The Impact of Partnerships Between Education and the Workforce



Source: <https://www.adecousa.com/employers/resources/skills-gap-in-the-american-workforce/>

Figure 10: The Impact of Lack of Hard/Soft Skills in Cost and Investments in U.S. Companies



Source: <https://www.adecousa.com/employers/resources/skills-gap-in-the-american-workforce/>

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Appendices for Proposal

Appendix A:

Soft Skills/Work Ethics/Employability Skills/People Skills in the Community College: Employer Survey;
Revised.

Appendix B:

Soft Skills/Work Ethics/Employability Skills/People Skills in the Community College: Faculty Survey;
Revised.

Appendix C:

Soft Skills/Work Ethics/Employability Skills/People Skills in the Community College: Student Survey.
Revised.