



Ten soft skills for communities



GENERIC SKILLS

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING OUR COMMUNITIES' VITALITY

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RESEARCH FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY SKILLS



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This skills framework is intended for field workers, stakeholders and facilitators who work in official-language minority communities in Canada.

It was designed to support the practices of those who wish to strengthen community engagement and social integration of the individuals they serve.

The ten skills below were selected from an existing framework: *Nos compétences fortes*, by Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes (ICÉA).

We chose to work from *Nos compétences fortes* as this framework was designed after extensive research in the field of generic skills; Moreover, it has been put to the test since its creation in 1995, and recognized for its coherence and relevance.

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Ability to trust others

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to trust others reflects the ability of individuals to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with their human environment.

This skill refers to the ability of individuals to trust the various people around them. It assumes that individuals are capable not only of recognizing the people they can trust, but also of determining the level of trust they can put in them.

From this perspective, the ability to trust others is not blind at all. It stems in part from the ability of individuals to see primarily the good in the people around them, but it is also based on sensitive observations related to past experiences, familiar action contexts, special circumstances and knowing the people in question.

Definition specifically related to the community context

Trusting individuals acknowledge the role of others in the community and are willing to help them when needed. They can interact with other people and welcome them with an open mind. They accept others with their characteristics and recognize their areas of interest and their needs.

Trust in others allows individuals to share points of view, listen and respect divergent views. With this mindset, individuals are able to express their opinions clearly and openly, while appreciating others' perspectives. They provide help and ask for it when they need to. They bring suggestions forward and accept those of others.

Individuals who trust others recognize behaviours and strategies that foster harmonious interpersonal and intercultural relationships.

Self-confidence

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

Self-confidence reflects the ability of individuals to believe in their abilities and to base their actions on this sense of internal security.

This skill refers to a sense of internal security that allows individuals to recognize the value of what they believe, say and do. Self-confidence thereby requires a good knowledge of one's potential and abilities. The more individuals are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, the stronger and truer their self-confidence will be.

Being self-confident is more about seeing what we can do, when and how, than about believing or saying that we can do anything.

Self-confidence allows individuals to accept difficult challenges, not out of pride, but because they know that they can do it. Likewise, these people will not be afraid to expose their work to criticism, because they are aware of its value and are proud of the results achieved. Finally, they will not be afraid either to talk in the presence of people who do not agree with them.

Definition specifically related to the community context

Within a community, self-confidence allows to identify, accept and name one's emotions, feelings, values, references and abilities. Self-recognition and self-acceptance foster a sense of identity within a community. Individuals who feel they belong to a community are more likely to take their place among others.

They are aware of the influence others exert on their own values and choices, and are also able to confront them with others'. The group then becomes a space for validating their individual characteristics, beliefs, choices, attitudes and behaviour.

Self-confident people recognize that they have roots in a particular culture which is different from other cultures. Consequently, they are able to define their own abilities, as well as the person they want to, and can become within their own cultural group.

In addition, self-confidence allows individuals to be open to the outside world, diversify their areas of interests and develop their curiosity, for their own benefit and that of other cultural groups in the community. Self-confident individuals can define even more firmly their individual and cultural identity within the greater group that forms the community.

Team spirit

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

Team spirit reflects the ability of individuals to participate in achieving a common goal, to collaborate with others and to favour the success of the group over their individual success.

In a group, team spirit implies that there is a relationship among its members. This relationship unites them and gives them the impression of forming one body, one team. The stronger the relationship, the more the group members will work toward the common good of the team.

In individuals, team spirit refers directly to their ability to work with others, to help others, and to recognize the value of their actions, advice and feedback.

Even individuals working alone can have team spirit. They will show it by doing their part of the work and by acting in such a way as to help other people work. This is how they will take a collaborative attitude.

Definition specifically related to the community context

In a community context, individuals who show team spirit are able to connect with others in order to achieve a common goal of collaboration, while emphasizing group success. They perceive situations that are conducive to cooperation through teamwork, and can assess the related challenges or issues.

Within a group, they assert themselves while taking others into account. They understand their role in the context of a joint project. They recognize, determine and accept their responsibilities in a collective task. They contribute positively. They can clearly express their points of view and their reactions, while welcoming those of others. They ask for advice so all opinions are taken into account in achieving shared objectives. They shoulder their part of the work that needs to be done.

They recognize behaviours and strategies that foster teamwork and the establishment of harmonious interpersonal relationships. They are tolerant, flexible and open-minded when interacting in various group situations, accept other people with their distinct characteristics and acknowledge the expertise they have that may be useful to the group.

Individuals who demonstrate sound team spirit recognize that the group is an entity. In that sense, they are aware of group dynamics. They participate in achieving collective projects, comply with team functioning modalities and group rules. They cooperate with group members, in formal or informal situations. They meet group expectations by getting actively engaged and complying with deadlines. They know how to leverage cooperative work and appreciate its benefits for themselves and for others.

Ability to learn from one's experiences

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to learn from one's experiences reflects the ability of individuals to improve continually, and to draw lessons from their successes and failures.

This skill refers to two personality traits in individuals: their willingness to learn and their ability to draw lessons from experience.

These personality traits are found among individuals who take a reflexive attitude toward their choices and actions. By trying to understand what was effective and what was not, they are able to learn from their own experiences. They draw lessons that are useful in new action contexts. They thereby avoid repeating mistakes of the past. Also, they have tools to change their ways of doing things and improve their practices.

Definition specifically related to the community context

In community life, the ability to learn from one's experiences allows people to identify and use learning sources and opportunities in the community. As a result, they draw lessons from their various life experiences and adapt them to new situations.

In addition, this skill allows individuals to diversify their areas of interest and to develop their curiosity, for themselves and for the benefit of others and the community.

Individuals who learn from their experiences are aware of their personal characteristics, their sense of belonging to the community and the influence others have on their behaviours, attitudes and values. This skill allows individuals to be both inspired by their own experiences, and able to distance themselves from these experiences.

These individuals assert their own choices, express themselves and demonstrate their skills without fear of being judged by others. They accept feedback and constructive criticism from community members. They are also more comfortable in demonstrating and sharing with community members what they have learned from their past experiences and what they are learning from their current experiences.

Ability to communicate

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to communicate reflects the ability of individuals to express themselves in plain language, to formulate effective and understandable messages, regardless of whom they are addressing.

This skill refers to the ability of individuals to express themselves in plain language and to make themselves understood both orally and in writing.

That said, the ability to communicate goes beyond mastering a code (oral or written), beyond simple information transmission. The ability to communicate implies a willingness to share, defend and argue one's ideas. This willingness, in turn, implies an ability to organize available information, filter it and grasp the essentials.

In a way, the ability to communicate is based on actively listening to others, being willing to understand their concerns, and even being sensitive to their worldview. Finally, communication would not be effective if it is not understood.

Definition specifically related to the community context

Individuals who communicate effectively within their community express themselves clearly, structure their thoughts adequately, while adapting their language and their message according to whom they are addressing.

The ability to communicate also entails listening and ensuring that others understood correctly. This skill implies reacting accurately and appropriately while relating with other people or other groups. This skill also involves respecting the opinions of community members, even when they are different. People who communicate effectively:

- Make sure their interlocutor really understood the message
- Do not judge immediately what the interlocutor is saying; rather, they insist to obtain more information
- Recognize situations where a person's non-verbal behaviour (eye contact, body language) does not correspond to what is being expressed
- Do not hesitate to speak up and share their opinion

In a community context, individuals who communicate easily consider their language as an essential tool for structuring and expressing their thoughts, and as a cultural vehicle. Good communicators use their language to interact effectively with other people and other groups in their community.

Perseverance

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

Perseverance reflects the ability of individuals to make, voluntarily and deliberately, every effort required to perform lengthy tasks or activities.

This skill refers to the action of “persevering” with the completion of a task, to carry it out despite the fact that it requires sustained efforts. This ability is seen in the various aspects of individuals’ lives, depending on the obstacles they encounter.

Perseverance is most often associated with character traits such as steadfastness, patience, persistence and tenacity. It also suggests that individuals will be able to stay cool and regular in their efforts, that they will not give up and will rather keep up their courage when faced with obstacles.

Finally, perseverance assumes that individuals are able to motivate themselves or to identify adequate sources of motivation helping them to complete tasks.

Definition specifically related to the community context

Persevering individuals finish projects they initiated, do not get discouraged easily and are determined. They frequently sacrifice things they like to do in order to fulfill important tasks they had already started and that seem important to them and to the community.

Persevering individuals follow their action plan until achieving the desired objectives or until they are no longer relevant. They maintain a constant course of conduct, demonstrating patience, tenacity and motivation, even in the face of possible failures along the way. They look for ways of overcoming obstacles.

Persevering individuals constantly make choices about their life and their actions, in order to assert and reinforce their identity. They know that they may serve as a model of perseverance for other members of their cultural group and community.

Ability to solve problems

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to solve problems reflects the ability of individuals to address the issues that they and the people around them are facing, and to implement solutions adapted to everyone's needs.

This skill refers to the ability of individuals to quickly identify any problem limiting or hindering their efforts. These individuals will immediately take action, seeking to identify the causes of the problem, understand its effects and find the best possible solution.

Furthermore, individuals' ability to solve problems implies that they are able to respond quickly where problems arise.

Definition specifically related to the community context

First and foremost, the ability to solve problems relies on the capacity to identify significant elements of a problematic situation in the community.

People who demonstrate this skill can easily define a problem, inventory possible solutions and evaluate them with their peers, taking into account resources that are available to solve the problem. They identify similarities with comparable situations that previously occurred in the community and were resolved.

Furthermore, individuals who are able to solve problems generate, inventory and test possible solutions. Then, they examine the relevance of each solution and choose the one that seems most appropriate for everyone. In a community, these individuals put into practice and assess the efficiency of the selected solution.

At the evaluation phase, along with their group, they review each of the steps taken to solve the problem. They ask questions to gain a better understanding, re-examine some of the steps when needed, highlight successful aspects and analyze difficulties encountered along the way.

Ability to adapt

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to adapt reflects how easily individuals accept and incorporate the changes that occur in various aspects of their lives.

This skill refers to the acceptance of change, how change is received and experienced by individuals. The greater is an individual's ability to adapt, the more this individual will face the unknown positively and voluntarily.

In the specific area of the workplace, the ability to adapt revolves around the qualities that allow individuals to change their plans or their ways of doing things, to accept new collaborators, to integrate new work duties, to learn about new technologies and to use them productively.

Definition specifically related to the community context

The ability to adapt reflects an individual's capacity to accept, appreciate and integrate changes, quickly and positively. When exploring a situation, individuals who are able to adapt have learned to be open to various sources of inspiration and to experiment with new combinations of ideas, strategies or techniques. They can imagine multiple ways of thinking or doing, and adopt several perspectives and points of view. They are able to juggle with an array of ideas, notions and formulas. They identify objectives and stakes related to a new situation and make room for multiple ways of dealing with it and to their intuitions, often through trial and error. They are able to picture different scenarios and to project their diverse implementation modalities, while accepting the risk of the unknown. They frequently transform limitations into resources in order to test different ways of doing things.

Individuals who are able to adapt are very aware of their personal resources and they enjoy drawing on them to fulfill tasks within collective projects that take place in their community. In this context, they adapt their behaviour to the requirements of a given situation, in terms of the personalities of individuals who are involved and the nature of tasks related to the group project.

People who develop this skill can adapt easily and continuously to 21st century communities, which are more and more culturally diversified, without compromising their own cultural identity.

Interpersonal skills

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

Interpersonal skills reflect the ability of individuals to interact successfully with heterogeneous groups, and to show compassion and empathy toward others.

This skill refers to the quality of relationships that individuals are able to build with others. This skill is seen in the ability to connect with others, to cooperate with them and even to feel their emotions.

Interpersonal skills allow individuals to manage diversity in a pluralistic context. They are thus able to approach people they do not know, establish a support network of contacts, or even join existing networks.

Definition specifically related to the community context

Interpersonal skills involve a person's empathy and awareness of others. Showing empathy and taking others into account allows individuals to share their experiences and engage in joint actions. Effective interpersonal relationships are based on the ability of individuals to:

- Show empathy; be willing to help others
- Apologize and receive apologies
- Ask for help
- Observe, listen and understand others
- Take care of others
- Show confidence without hostility or arrogance
- Facilitate conflict resolution
- Act collaboratively
- Interact comfortably with people in formal and informal circumstances
- Demonstrate tolerance and flexibility

Effective and satisfying interpersonal relationships rely on a balance of good self-control and awareness of the social and cultural environment in one's community. In that sense, citizens who are said to be "socially intelligent" can quickly evaluate their emotions as well as the disposition of people who surround them, and adapt their way of interacting accordingly. This skill has always been crucial for individuals who need to collaborate and build trusting relationships with others. It is even more important in communities where one is called upon to collaborate with several groups of diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, in a multicultural context, interpersonal skills are essential for citizens of all communities.

Sense of responsibility

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The sense of responsibility reflects the ability of individuals to assume responsibilities and accept the consequences of their actions.

This skill is seen particularly in individuals who assume their obligations and weigh their actions. We say that they are reliable, and that we can trust them because they fulfil their duties, respect their commitments and accept the consequences of their actions.

Furthermore, the sense of responsibility assumes that individuals do not hesitate to get involved in projects and that they avoid relying on others, even making decisions for them. Finally, the sense of responsibility requires individuals to step back from the decisions made and to avoid taking unwarranted risks, especially for others.

Definition specifically related to the community context

In community life, the sense of responsibility reflects in the ability of individuals to commit to their actions and hold true to their word regarding these commitments. These people inspire trust through their commitments, their actions and their ability to accept consequences.

They act while respecting others and they conform to deadlines and schedules assigned to them, while avoiding unnecessary risks. When they decide to do something, they do it and accept the consequences of their decisions. They feel that they are part of the community and act for the collective well-being, with due respect for the environment and the common good.