



Ten soft skills for work



GENERIC SKILLS
TOOLS FOR PROMOTING OUR COMMUNITIES' VITALITY

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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 employability development and training professionals in minority communities.

It also aims at reaching people at work, or looking for work, providing them a way to reflect upon the attitudes and skills employers look for in their communities.

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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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 work context

Self-confident workers know how to deal with people. They manage problems and situations honestly and ethically. They like to share ideas with colleagues, to receive feedback and they do not see criticism about projects they are involved in as personal attacks. Conversely, they can articulate their point of view when they disagree with someone.

Workers who are confident in their skills and have good self-knowledge are able to recognize tasks that match their abilities and to question what may hinder their ability to act.

They readily ask for help when they believe a task exceeds their abilities, without having doubts about their competency. They have learned to trust themselves and take risks to cope with challenges. They find it easy to make decisions.

These individuals recognize that efforts they need to invest in achieving their goals bring them satisfaction and they are proud to show their work to others. They are sufficiently confident to work in uncertain situations. They have growing appreciation for the quality of their work and learnings, as well as for efforts put in by other people. The development of self-assessment abilities helps these individuals to measure their progress and determine improvements that are still required. These workers understand the importance of fulfilling their potential and recognize their own power to do so, which in turn allows them to become more autonomous.

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 work context

Workers who demonstrate team spirit can collaborate with others to fulfill collective tasks. Thus, they are able to determine tasks that can be accomplished more efficiently through cooperation. Among other factors, teamwork relies on the will to collaborate with colleagues or other people involved in a common project, to be part of a team and to work together.

Individuals who demonstrate team spirit are concerned with the task at hand, as well as interpersonal relationships. They draw on team members' skills, ideas and points of view, while freely sharing their own experiences and knowledge when they can contribute to meeting team objectives. They support and encourage team members' contribution and they show them respect by talking about them positively.

These workers know how to give and receive feedback constructively while respecting others. This implies that they understand and respect each person's role and contribution. They welcome and support ideas from other team members and value diverse points of view. Efficient teamwork relies on respectful professional relationships among colleagues. Thus, the team will fulfill common tasks and achieve collective results, even though all members may not feel compatible in terms of personality.

New technologies greatly impact work organization, more and more workers having to collaborate virtually. Digital technologies allow collaboration without physical proximity. This phenomenon raises the importance of developing team spirit to ensure full participation, commitment and motivation among virtual groups, which are growing in numbers.

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 work context

In a workplace setting, the ability to learn from one's experiences consists in knowing and recognizing one's own strengths and needs in order to foster personal and professional development. It implies that individuals reflect on their actions to better understand them and improve their performance and contribution to a workplace. To this end, learning workers are open to evolution in their workplace and take appropriate measures to continually improve their practices.

Among workers, this ability translates into a will and desire to actively search for learning opportunities in the workplace. In doing so, they expand and enhance their abilities and fields of expertise throughout their professional lives. These workers always try to gain more knowledge, for instance by seeking to grasp how a given method should be applied and why it should be done in a particular way.

They ask questions to make sure they understand exactly the needs of a client or colleague, and use detailed information they have uncovered in their field of expertise. They personally examine problems to understand what went wrong, and get to the bottom of things to resolve these problems. They are also aware of progress made with regard to given industries, competitors, products, etc.

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 work context

Effective communication takes various forms in the work setting. Good communicators can interact with their colleagues, both orally and in writing. They are good listeners and ask questions to understand the meaning and value of other people's point of view. They are also willing to share information through various information and communication technologies (verbally, emails, etc.). They use appropriate scientific, technological and social knowledge and skills to explain or clarify ideas. They are able to sufficiently understand a client or colleague to foresee their reactions and prepare accordingly. They can also articulate written communications, as well oral presentations.

Communication at work involves the ability to recognize implicit and explicit protocols and rules that govern professional interactions in the workplace. These protocols can serve to frame communications between hierarchical levels or to connect with specific sectors. Rules and conventions may also outline the type of acceptable language in some circumstances, while prohibiting others.

Communication at work requires the use of systems and procedures to transmit and receive messages between colleagues, to achieve organizational results. In the workplace, these communication protocols, rules, conventions, procedures and systems could greatly impact communication practices aimed at improving efficiency. Moreover, each workplace has its own language in terms of communication, technical terminology and culture. Therefore, it is important for workers to be aware of these aspects and to comply with them.

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 work context

In the workplace, the ability to persevere translates into individuals’ great willingness to achieve targeted results. Persevering at work implies being able to fulfill a long-term task, often by putting in additional efforts, without giving up when faced with any obstacle or difficulty.

This skill is demonstrated in individuals who adopt new strategies to overcome a problem and are committed to their work. Workers who persevere also remain enthusiastic and motivated even when faced with difficult tasks. These individuals seek information about the origin of an obstacle to understand how to deal with it or to find an alternative solution.

At work, these individuals may be perceived as demonstrating superior professionalism in order to obtain better results, which could generate growing appreciation and trust from their clients, employers and peers.

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 work context

At work, the ability to solve problems is observed in people who are able to analyze a problem and solve it. These individuals deal with a complex and confusing situation by breaking it down into various elements. Problem-solving involves identifying important issues; reflecting on the sequence of causes for a problem; soliciting diverse points of view and evaluating them objectively, and lastly, considering solutions.

These workers use science, technology and mathematics to acquire and share knowledge. They are creative and innovative in seeking solutions. They test their solutions and make the best choice to remedy a situation, anticipate the impact of this choice, evaluate and confirm their solution's effectiveness, and improve it. In addition, they must be able to articulate the problem and to explain how it was resolved.

In today's workplace, technology is overwhelming and it increasingly replaces workers to fulfill cognitive tasks. However, it is not always useful in understanding and solving complex and multidimensional problems. These problems involve several dimensions, whether human, interpersonal, technical, scientific or mathematical. There will always be high demand for competent workers who can solve multidimensional problems, to compensate for the limits of technology. Analytical thinking cannot be codified. The ability to make sense of difficult situations and to envision effective solutions is and will remain linked to workers' generic skills.

Ability to work under pressure

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to work under pressure reflects the ability of individuals to handle and manage the stress caused by the urgency of a situation or peer pressure.

This skill refers to the control that an individual is able to exercise in response to peer pressure or workplace tensions.

This control mainly takes the form of a resistance to stress relying on work organization and time management skills that allow individuals to avoid being overwhelmed by heavy workloads, tight deadlines or huge tasks.

Individuals who have the ability to work under pressure make the right choices to ensure their actions are productive. They act in the most effective way in stressful situations, without exceeding their physical limitations nor neglecting their emotional state or their psychological health.

Definition specifically related to the work context

Workers who are able to work under pressure can manage their workload, fulfill multiple tasks or projects and achieve expected results, while using time and resources effectively. This skill draws on the ability of individuals to experience stress at work without this situation affecting their performance or their colleagues. Employees who are unable to manage normal stress levels may have negative effects on their own performance and that of their work team.

Workplaces expose individuals to more and more information and data that need to be processed, in all kinds of formats and from multiple sources. As a result, a new phenomenon has emerged, called "cognitive overload". In this context, workers need to be able to distinguish and filter information that is most important and relevant to their tasks, if they want to effectively manage this information overload, which places added pressure on them. Current workers and those from the next generation will need to learn how to deal with cognitive overload by using specific management techniques.

It is neither desirable nor possible to totally eliminate stress in the workplace. A better approach may be to ensure that employees are well trained in managing stress and working under pressure. Among other things, individuals must learn to reorganize their work schedule to cope with emergencies or priorities. Further, they must be able to mobilize resources that are required to fulfill urgent and complex tasks, to refuse a project for which they do not have time and to delegate some duties when they need to concentrate on one project.

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 work context

Workers who demonstrate an ability to adapt respond positively to changes, planned or not, in the workplace. They are open and know how to deal with uncertainty. They take responsibility for the learnings needed to adapt to these changes. They can modify their plans when urgent problems emerge, even though it may cause a temporary reorganization of their work.

The ability to adapt implies that individuals perceive changes in the workplace, for instance by keeping abreast of new technologies. They respond favorably by modifying their attitude and behaviour. They are open to new or different ways of thinking and working, individually or as part of a team. They are able to work effectively with their supervisor or team, even when implementing a different procedure. These individuals perceive the arrival of new colleagues as a stimulating opportunity to explore fresh ideas and perspectives, as well alternative ways of doing things.

For current employees, the ability to adapt is increasingly important considering multiple changes that occur in their workplace. People who are able to adapt are willing to work in a dynamic and fluctuating setting, anticipate the need for change and take practical steps to be prepared. They can think out of the box and get off the beaten paths to deal with shifting situations.

Traditional white and blue collar jobs are declining. On the one hand, they are replaced by highly specialized positions and on the other hand, by service sector jobs. Both types of jobs require great adaptability in the face of volatile and changing environments. Indeed, these sectors are constantly mutating and workplaces are filled with unexpected circumstances, where individuals are required to quickly adapt their practices. Tasks associated with these workplaces also require increasing skills in terms of alternative thinking.

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 work context

In the workplace, interpersonal skills draw on the ability to build relationships within a team of individuals who have complementary skills, with a view to achieving expected results through collaboration and cooperation. It involves the ability to establish interpersonal relationships based on trusting and understanding others. These relationships involve each person's values, expectations and emotions. They also guide people's behaviour, while taking into account everyone's needs and the frequently implicit social rules of the work context.

Workers who demonstrate "social intelligence" are able to show empathy and quickly, directly and significantly connect with others in the workplace. "Socially intelligent" workers possess the following skills: receiving and giving feedback constructively and respectfully; perceiving and understanding non-verbal communication; managing and resolving conflicts; and adapting their style of interaction to the work context.

The importance of interpersonal skills is growing in workplaces that are becoming more and more complex and diversified in terms of culture, and where the organization of work relies increasingly on teamwork and collaboration. In this regard, robotics and new technologies will never replace a workers' social intelligence, such as their ability to assess and manage everyone's emotions and base collaborations on sound professional relationships. Employees who demonstrate interpersonal skills will always have an advantage over technology.

In workplaces, collaboration and teamwork regularly unfolds virtually. Thus, workers need to develop new strategies to create and maintain effective virtual interactions. This requirement does pose new challenges in terms of interpersonal skills.

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 work context

In the workplace, the sense of responsibility reflects the ability of individuals to be aware of their obligations and who fulfill their tasks, accepting responsibility for their own actions and decisions. These individuals are trustworthy and know how to meet deadlines, expectations, priorities and objectives that are established. They are punctual and assume the results of their work, including any mistakes they may have made. They are willing to work individually and regularly check the quality of their work. They accept new learning challenges and take responsibility for improving their knowledge.

Workers who show a sense of responsibility are committed to their tasks and do not rely solely on others. They adopt an ethical and honest approach in terms of activities, resources and other people in the workplace. In that sense, they are able to accept responsibility for their mistakes and take action to avoid repeating these errors. They know how to communicate openly about difficulties or obstacles they may have encountered. They develop a culture of trust toward their colleagues.

Responsible workers can make decisions that are profitable for the organization, while maintaining a sound balance between their work and personal life. Responsible employees care about the employer's well-being as much as their own. In doing so, they gain their employer's and colleagues' trust and respect.