



Building a Pan-Canadian Soft Skills Framework

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THE ISSUES

- ▶ **DEMOGRAPHICS – WE NEED MORE PEOPLE WORKING, BUT:**
 - ▶ Too many people do not participate or do not meet their full potential
 - ▶ Employers are saying too many new hires do not meet expectations
- ▶ **CHANGING WORKPLACE – AUTOMATION/AI**
 - ▶ Many jobs will disappear
 - ▶ The future workplace will emphasize soft or ‘human’ skills
- ▶ **MANY EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS ARE NOT MEETING FUNDER EXPECTATIONS**
 - ▶ Too little funding or time?
 - ▶ Wrong approach?

Our Goal

- ▶ Futureworx has worked to help people maximize their potential, particularly with employment, since 1984.
- ▶ We believe that soft skill development, while different from other skills, deserves the same level of investment as literacy and technical skill development, especially as the workplace evolves.
- ▶ We believe that the integration of soft-skill assessment and development into all forms of training and education is needed to ensuring competency in these critical skills, leading to maximum participation in the work-force.

Pan-Canadian Soft Skills Framework: Project Overview

- ▶ Aim – to consider whether, and how best, to build a pan-Canadian soft skills framework.
- ▶ Questions
 - ▶ Do we need a framework? Why?
 - ▶ What terminology should a framework use?
 - ▶ What should the framework do/look like?
 - ▶ How could we build one?
- ▶ Approach
 - ▶ Literature Review
 - ▶ National Survey
 - ▶ Stakeholder Workshop
 - ▶ Report

LITERATURE REVIEW - SUMMARY

- ▶ The importance of soft skills is widely recognized by academics and employers, and is growing in the face of increased automation of some forms of work.
- ▶ There is no agreed national soft skill language, skill set, or database.
- ▶ Work is required to identify optimum soft skill training methods, but embedding soft skill development into education/technical skill training is likely more effective than direct soft skill training.
- ▶ Work is required to identify/validate ways of assessing soft skill development.
- ▶ Some researchers express concerns that establishing soft skill standards may be unduly influenced by class or cultural differences.

SURVEY - SUMMARY

▶ Participation:

- ▶ 235 unique responses from across Canada (low Quebec and Northern responses)
- ▶ Majority from service providers (low employer response)
- ▶ Good demographic response via service providers. Less direct response from under-represented groups.

SURVEY – Terminology

- ▶ The terms used most commonly to refer to soft skills were employability (78%), essential (74%), soft (72%) and life (60%).
- ▶ The word 'skills' was much more commonly used than attributes or competencies.
- ▶ The top ten soft skills most commonly listed by respondents were: Communication (78%) Teamwork (56%) Problem solving/Thinking skills (41%) Time management (41%) Attitude (31%) Adaptability/Flexibility (30%) Motivation (26%) Accountability (22%) Work ethic (11%)

SURVEY - Importance

- ▶ The average rating of importance for soft skills in maximizing a person's potential in society was 9/10, with 10 being very important. Over 90% saw this importance as stable or increasing.
- ▶ 80% saw participants struggle with these skills. 42% saw employees struggle.
- ▶ 86% of respondents felt a pan-Canadian framework on soft skills would be beneficial in some way. Opinion was split as to whether such a framework should be part of or separate from the Essential Skills Framework

SURVEY – Actions Being taken

- ▶ Soft skills support efforts:
 - ▶ 64% short-term as needed
 - ▶ 59% coaching/counselling support
 - ▶ 59% group workshops
 - ▶ 46% short talks or sessions
 - ▶ 24% long-term in-depth support or training
- ▶ 54% develop their own approach.

SURVEY – Limiting Factors

- ▶ Lack of tools and resources 60%
- ▶ Low funding 59%
- ▶ Lack of time 58%
- ▶ Lack of staff knowledge/capacity 52%
- ▶ Lack of best practices 33%

Do clients who need support on soft-skills have appropriate training opportunities?

PROJECT WORKSHOP

- ▶ 20 REPRESENTATIVES FROM ACROSS CANADA
- ▶ 3 DAYS
 - ▶ DAY 1 – TRAINING AND REVIEW OF SURVEY
 - ▶ DAY 2 – BRAIN STORMING
 - ▶ DAY 3 – WAY AHEAD
- ▶ CONSENSUS BASED REPORT

Workshop Recommendations

Create a national soft skills framework and database to support their development in the Canadian workforce.

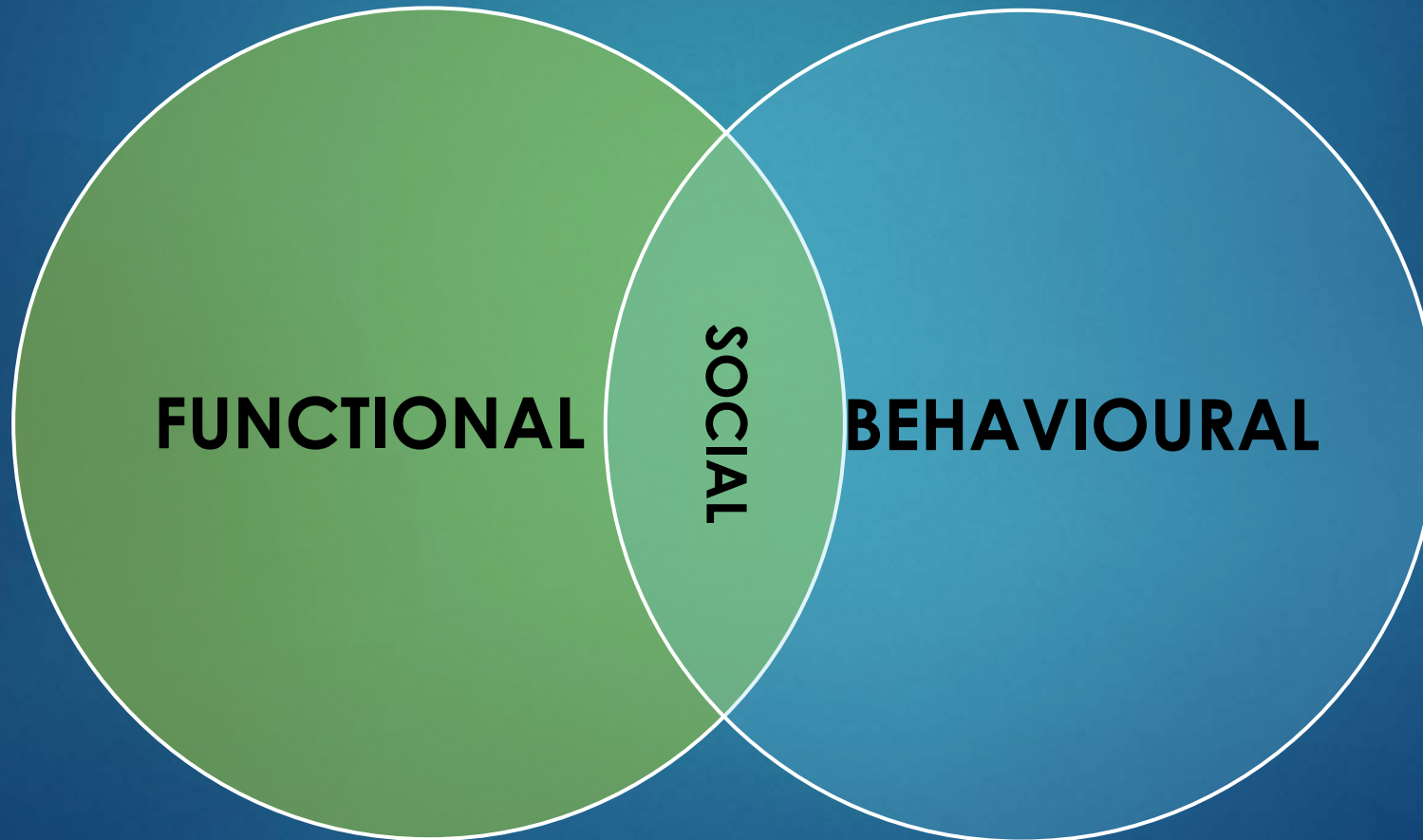
The current Essential Skills framework is seen as a good starting point.


Workshop Recommendations

Divide the Essential Skills framework into two categories:

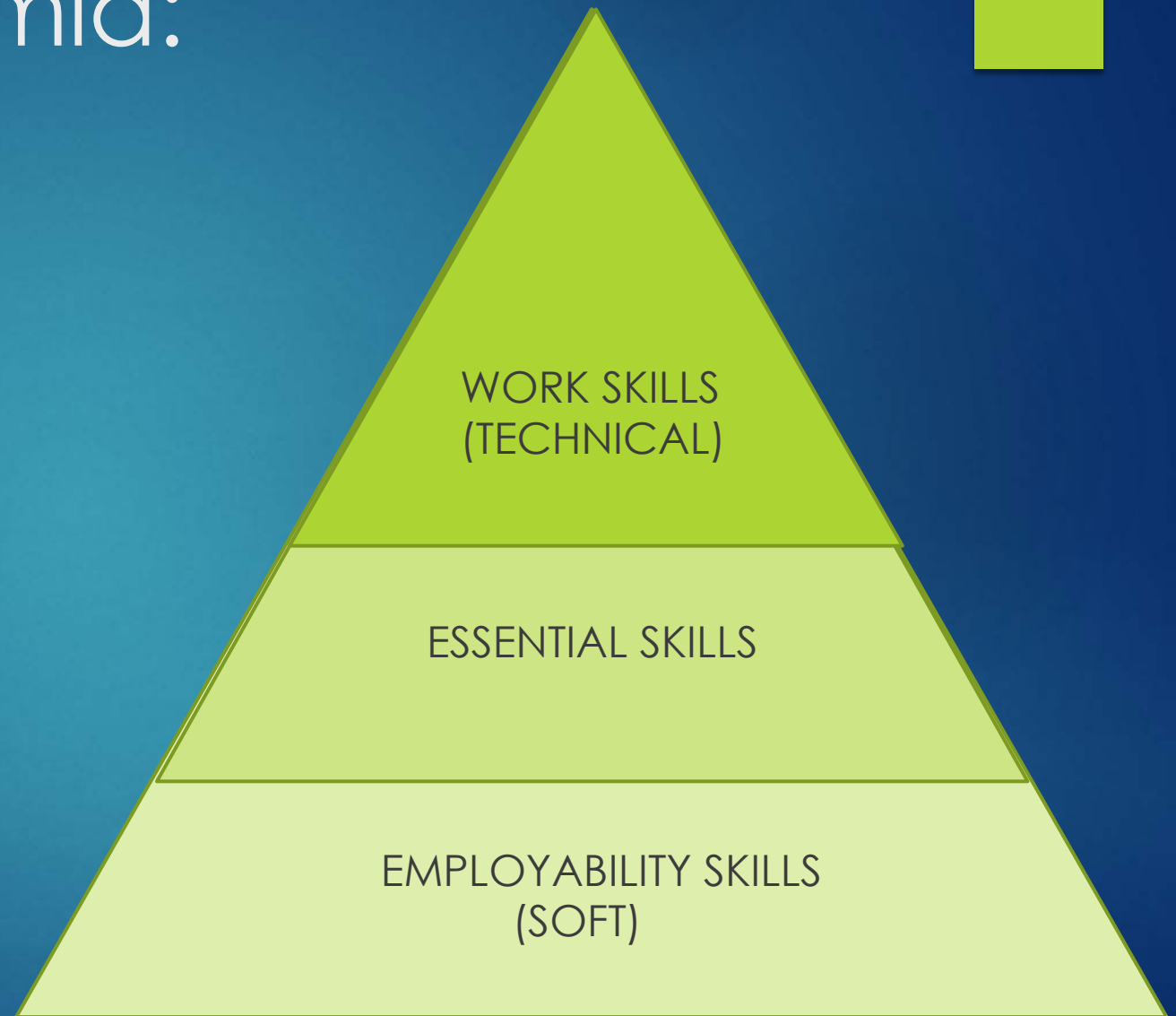
- * Functional Skills**
- * Behavioural Skills**

The recommended framework breaks Essential skills into two sets that overlap to form a common region:



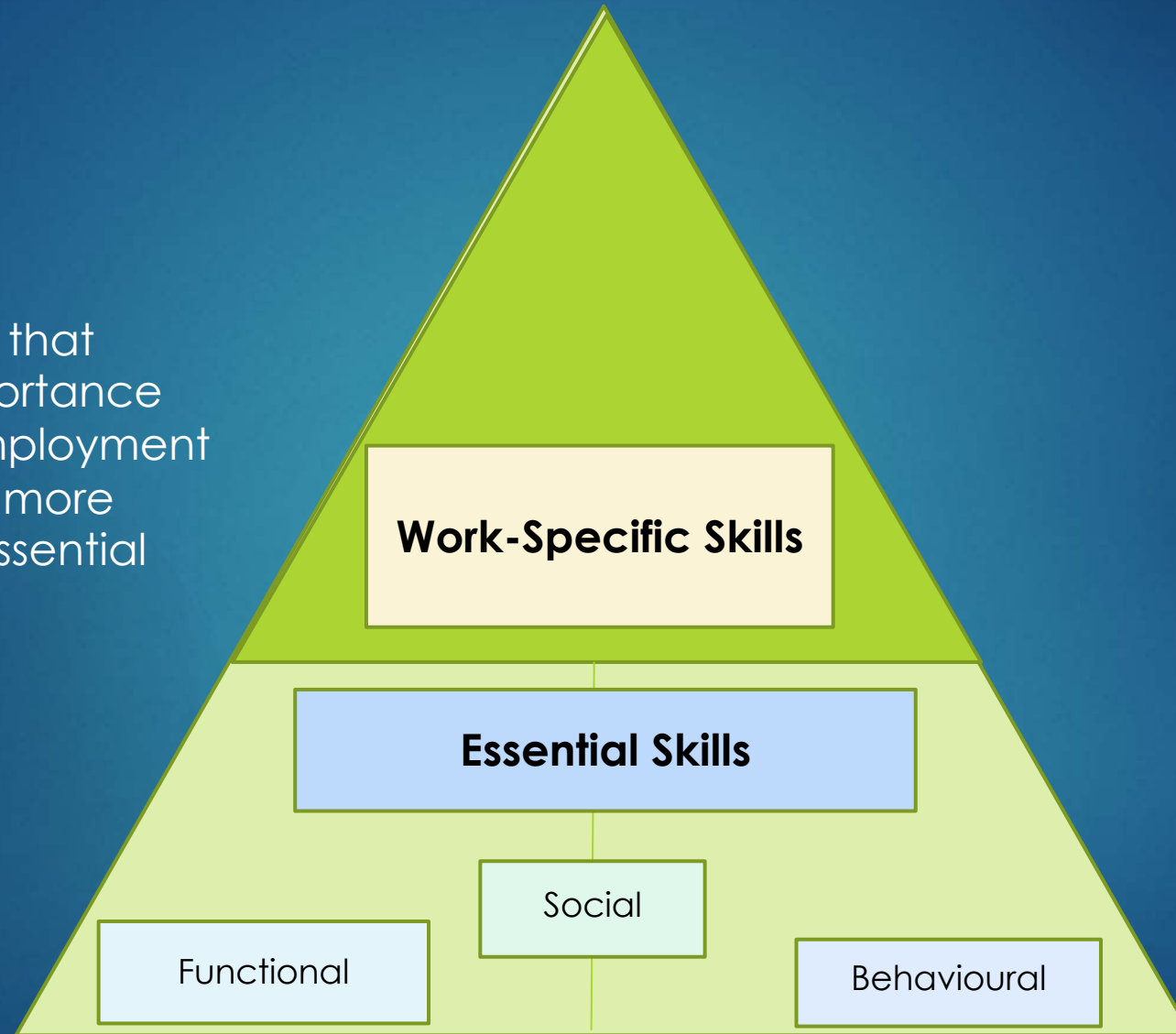
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- ▶ **Functional skills:** the skills and associated knowledge that indirectly support the completion of other work-specific activities. Examples include reading, writing, numeracy, digital skills etc.
 - ▶ **Behavioural Skills:** the skills and associated knowledge needed to demonstrate personal behaviours that support the completion of other work-specific activities. Examples include the demonstration of motivation, accountability, resilience etc.
 - ▶ **Social Skills:** A descriptor to recognize those Behavioural or Functional skills that have significant elements of the other set. Examples include Teamwork, Oral Communication etc.

Our old skills pyramid:



THE NEW MODEL:

A simple skill model that recognizes the importance of behaviours in employment and focusses effort more evenly across the Essential Skills.



Workshop Recommendations

Develop a virtual skill library that can be searched by people, employers, trainers etc. for the behavioural skills needed to work and the tools, resources and jobs that are applicable to them.

Standard Skill Definition Process

ANNEX D: DRAFT ESSENTIAL SKILLS LIBRARY SKILL TEMPLATE

SKILL NAME:

SKILL TYPE: FUNCTIONAL SOCIAL BEHAVIOURAL

DEFINITION:

PRIMARY FOCUS: EMPLOYMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LIFE

APPLICATION: (List General or specific sectors, regions and/or demographic groups)

EXEMPLARS:

STANDARD	TYPE	DESCRIPTION (tasks or behavioural expectations)
Level 1 of 5 complexity	TYPICAL TASKS	Task descriptions Level 1 complexity
Level 2 of 5 complexity	TYPICAL TASKS	Task descriptions Level 2 complexity
Competent	VERBAL BEHAVIOUR (Sounds like?)	What the employer wants to hear.
	PHYSICAL BEHAVIOR (Looks Like?)	What the employer wants to see.
Not Competent	VERBAL BEHAVIOUR (Sounds like?)	What the employer does not want to hear
	PHYSICAL BEHAVIOR (Looks Like?)	What the employer does not want to see.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY & RESOURCES:

Strategy:

Resources:

NAME	DESCRIPTION
Name: Source: Link:	

DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGY AND RESOURCES:

Strategy:

Resources:

NAME	DESCRIPTION
Name: Source: Link:	

SPONSOR:

Organization:
Contact:
Email:

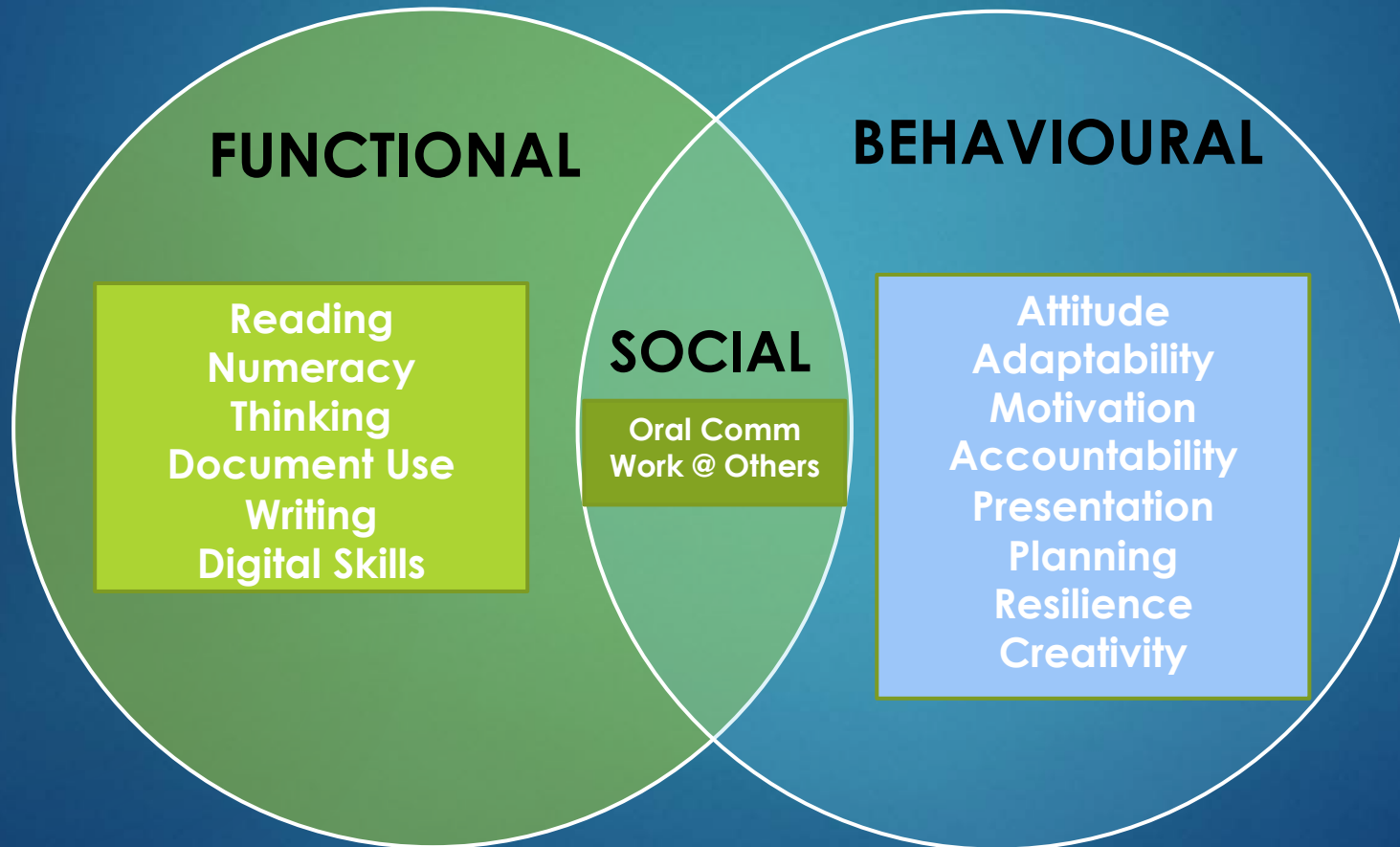
Workshop Recommendations

Identify/create a back-bone organization to develop, promote and manage the framework and library. This organization should be governed with input from users and funded to ensure sustainability.

Workshop Recommendations

- ▶ Under each heading Behavioural, Functional, Social, identify a core skill set recommended for inclusion in general employment related education and training programs.

Each set should have a core generic list of skills which can adapt based on use. Some examples:



Workshop Recommendations

Provide funding:

- For an annual national symposium for stakeholders and service providers to share insights/work on Behavioural and Social Skill development and assessment.
- To validate existing and develop new Behavioural and Social Skill assessment and training methods.

Suggested Guiding Principles

- ▶ **The Framework should be:**
 - ▶ **Driven by the needs of those seeking employment/self employment and their employers.**
 - ▶ **Of practical value as a frontline tool to be applied by individuals seeking work, employers, career developers and trainers/educators.**
 - ▶ **Highly adaptable and open to vetted changes and additions by its users.**
 - ▶ **Focussed on supporting action versus achieving a perfect solution.**

Guiding Principles cont'd

- ▶ Easy to understand and use.
 - ▶ Avoid complexities that are unnecessary for the target audience (i.e. abilities vs attributes vs competencies vs skills).
 - ▶ Use 'skills' as a term to encompass the knowledge, skills and abilities required for work, as per the term Essential Skills
- ▶ Governed by a body representing both funders and the users of the framework.
- ▶ Able to reflect the special needs of sectors, regions and demographic/cultural groups.

What does this mean for programming?

- ▶ Behaviours need to be assessed and developed in respectful, supportive ways. This means:
 - ▶ Program design needs to encompass behavioural skills.
 - ▶ More formative assessment methods need to be used.
 - ▶ Programs need enough time to have an impact.
 - ▶ Service providers need training in Behavioural Skills.

What can you do?

- ▶ Learn more about behavioural skill assessment and development.
- ▶ Explore integrated programming for behavioural skill inclusion.
- ▶ Talk about behavioural skills with funders.

Accessing the report:

▶ <https://futureworx.ca/projects/>

Discussion

- ▶ In tables please address the following questions (plse keep notes):
 - ▶ Do you agree with expanding the essential skills as suggested?
 - ▶ Does the language of Behavioural and Functional Skills work for you?
 - ▶ Which do you think is more useful:
 - ▶ Having a core set of behavioural skills defined for generic application.
 - ▶ Have a clear process to allow practitioners/employers to define the behavioural skills they need.

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