Assessing Soft Skills in the Workplace
Trends, Challenges and Recommendations

ONE TEN RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

In an era where AI and automation are reshaping the landscape and nature of work, the value of soft skills is increasing. LinkedIn's research highlights this trend, noting that 92% of employers value soft skills as much as or more than hard skills, with 89% attributing poor hires to a deficiency in soft skills.

Challenges with Assessing Soft Skills

Despite their recognized importance, only 41% of companies have a formal process to evaluate soft skills, and 57% find it challenging to assess them accurately. Traditional methods, such as interpreting body language, are fraught with unconscious bias and lack predictive power for a candidate's potential success.

Methodologies for Evaluation

Employers employ various techniques for assessing soft skills, including:

- Behavioral questions (75%).
- Situational questions (58%).
- Reading body language (70%).
- Projects (31%).
- Tech-based assessments (17%), using platforms like Koru, Pymetrics, and Plum.

Case Studies on Implementation

Companies like Citi, White & Case, and BYTON have incorporated soft skills assessment into their hiring processes, yielding more diverse and competent workforces. Citi, piloted Koru to assess soft skills. As a result, Citi has expanded its entry level talent pipeline to be more diverse and reduce bias in their hiring processes.

The law firm White & Case decided to emphasize the need for soft skills. They identified the six core competencies it needs to be successful at its company. Once the skills were identified, interviewers across the company were trained to assess these skills by asking behavioral questions. As a result, White and Case have hired candidates that may have previously been overlooked.

Lastly, BYTON, is an electric car start-up company which values both soft and hard skills but has previously only assessed individuals for hard skills. Since growing their company, BYTON now focuses on assessing both soft and hard skills. BYTON assesses soft skills by using a standardized set of situational questions. Recruiters are trained to flag any concerning behaviors throughout the candidate's journey.

Educational Gaps in Soft Skills Development

Research indicates that 73% of employers struggle to find college graduates with adequate soft skills, particularly in critical thinking, communication, and interpersonal domains and roughly one-third of the employers (34 percent) indicated colleges and universities have not prepared students for jobs. This gap is attributed to an overemphasis on technical skill development and the decline of liberal arts education, which traditionally fosters soft skills, underscoring the disconnect between educational curricula and hiring needs.

Additionally, students also express concerns over their preparedness for the workforce, emphasizing a lack of soft skills developed in college. Despite this discrepancy between the soft skills demanded in the workplace and those developed through higher education, some employers remain confident in the preparatory role of colleges, especially when supplemented with microcredentials and practical experience.

Recommendations for Assessing and Teaching Soft Skills

While assessing soft skills can pose challenges, innovative assessment tools and techniques, continuous learning approaches, and cultural shifts in workplace training can be effective in bridging the soft skills gap. To meet the challenges highlighted, it is recommended that:

- Employers establish clear criteria for soft skills relevant to their specific context.
- Employers use standardized questions, involving multiple interviewers, implementing scoring systems, and practical tasks.
- A multi-faceted assessment approach be adopted, combining behavioral, situational, and project-based evaluations.
- Employers and educational institutions collaborate to ensure that soft skills development is integrated into curricula and training programs.
- The potential of microcredentials and other certification programs should be explored to supplement traditional education in bridging the soft skills gap.

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