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How to make softskills accelerate your business growth?

Whitepaper

The world is navigating it's way through a transition from a knowledge economy to a more self-knowledge based economy. In every area of our work operations, automation and robotics are remaking the way we manage traditional day-to-day tasks.

As these tasks are becoming more automated, job roles and responsibilities adapt and evolve. Human competencies are the new essentials for the workforce and workplace. As the landscape of professional development changes, so do the skills and the competencies we value. So which skills prove to be future-proof? The continued competitive advantage of humans over technology is their ability to understand people, their ability to utilise their soft skills. Humans are capable of communicating persuasively, expressing empathy, seeking common ground and investing collectively in working towards a goal and succeeding in doing so. These are all soft skills!

Organizations that invest in their employees' development have proven to achieve higher rates of productivity and innovation than organizations that do not.

What are Soft skills?

Communicating, collaborating, leading, listening, giving feedback, negotiating, motivating; everyone has a different interpretation of ''soft skills''. Soft skills is often used as a collective term for personal, emotional, social and intellectual skills. They are the counterpart of hard skills*, which are measurable, functional and technical, and are often expressed through diplomas and certificates. You could say that hard skills determine what you know and can do, while soft skills determine how effectively you use that knowledge and set of skills. Soft skills are also often used to describe an individual's interpersonal qualities or their "people skills."
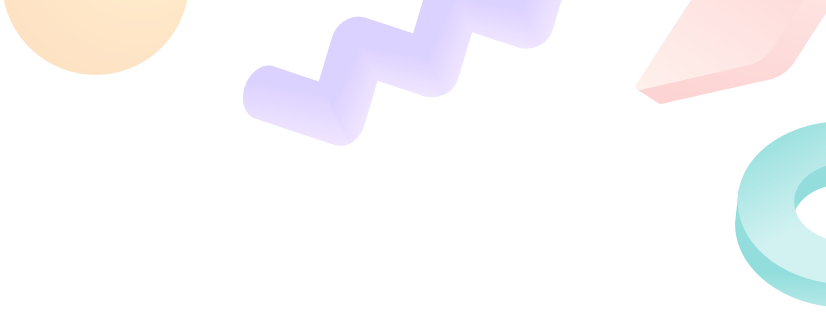
Both types of skills are essential for a successful career. If lawyers do not know the law, it is difficult to set up a good defense; but if they are unable to give a strong and convincing argument, that will not help their case either.

For employees in customer service as well, it is crucial to be able to understand the needs of customers from different geographical and cultural backgrounds, deal with complex and ambiguous problems, and communicate meaningfully.

For **maximum impact**, you need both **hard skills** for the basic foundation of skills and **soft skills** for implementing these skills in practice.

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* In describing soft skills as the counter part of hard skills we ought to be careful. Because the relationship between soft and hard skills is a lot more nuanced than this. Whereas hard skills are often described as the basics, soft skills are very big on impact. Soft and hard skills are two sides of the same coin, and ought to be trained and developed equally. At Lepaya we call this combination: Power Skills.

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Many workplaces devote a lot of attention to developing employees' hard skills. Soft skills, while they are equally as important as hard skills, are often ignored or not invested in. Soft skills are often not in focus as they can take more time to develop than hard skills. Time dedicated to learning is often limited, especially in the workplace where the focus is often placed on developing very practical hard skills needed for daily tasks.

Bogged down in the practicality of day-to-day work, it can be difficult to objectively determine that improvement of your employees' soft skills is necessary and it might be even more difficult to establish both how to improve them and which skills to improve. It is also the case that not every employee needs the same skills at the same time. The learning experience of different employees can vary greatly even if their experience, job and training are similar.

To help companies and professionals develop their L&D strategy, we have identified _____ that have the greatest impact on professional success. In the figure below, we have made distinctions between different career phases, catering to the needs of employees at each stage of their career. Development of the right skills at the right time, in the right place is crucial.

> **Hard skills are soft: they change all the time, are constantly being obsolete and are relatively easy to learn. Soft skills are hard: they are difficult to build, critical and take extreme effort to obtain."**
>
> Josh Bersin, Best-selling author and founder of Bersin & Associates, a leading research and consulting firm focused on talent management

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The Future of Workplace Learning
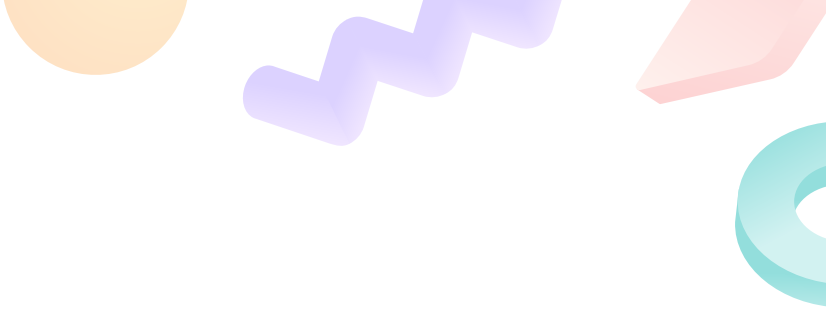
Skill gaps create real business gaps

In the last 3 years, soft skills in the workplace have become even more prominent. Learning budgets are increasing and higher management is putting more emphasis on continuous learning as it proves to increase employee retention, engagement and overall satisfaction. The number of roles that primarily require soft skills is growing exponentially and by 2030, two thirds of the workforce is expected to be made out of soft skill focused roles.

Soft skill intensive employment

53%
2000

59%
2015

63%
2030

94%
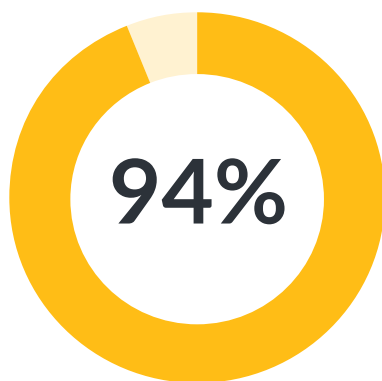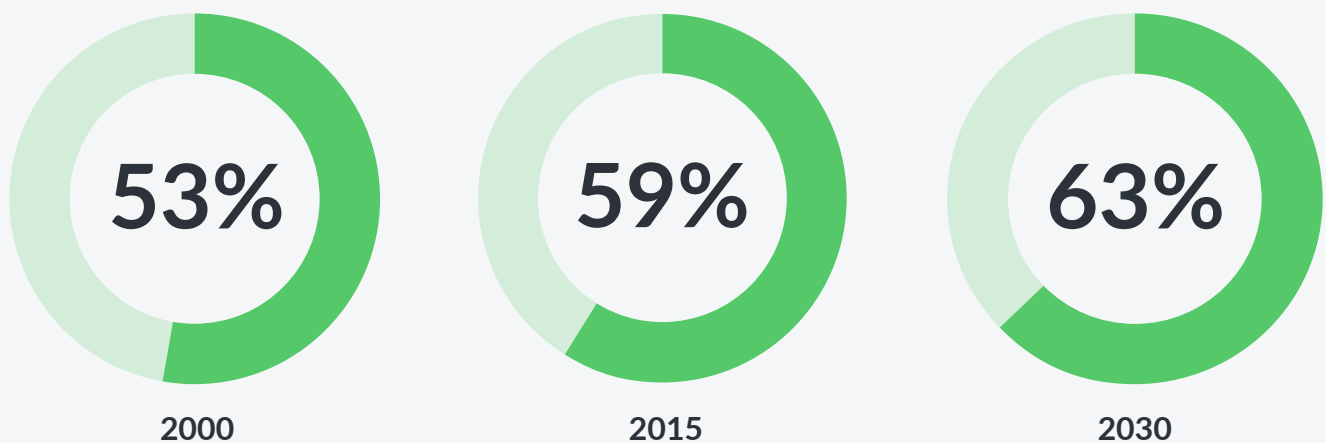
Of learners said they see the career benefits of investing in their skills

Employees are looking for new personal development opportunities. Highly relevant learning experiences are sought. Employees and learners want highly personalized learning opportunities that serve the right learning purpose at the right time. They value receiving personalized course recommendations based on their career goals and skills gaps.

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Across generations, the majority of professionals value knowledge sharing. They want to learn with their colleagues, to exchange ideas, share insights, and ask questions for a more impactful learning experience. Not only should learning be personalized, it should be a social and collaborative experience. Learners, regardless of their generation, are more motivated to learn in a social environment.

In addition, advancing technological possibilities are highlighting the value of soft skills. The rapid pace of business and technology changes is putting upskilling and reskilling front and center.

Consider your smartphone and the accompanying pressure to be accessible at all times and to constantly share how cool your life is via social media. There is a reason that the number of burn-outs among young people is higher than it has ever been. Dealing with these technological possibilities requires careful time and stress management. Essential human-centric skills will ultimately not only affect one employee, team or department, but an organization overall. To stay future-proof and support your organization's success, it is vital to choose the right soft skills to develop your employees. The skills with the greatest impact will keep your organization prepared for any changes that the future brings and equip your employees to overcome whatever obstacles they may face.

Technological developments are causing skills to age faster and faster. Soft skills such as empathy, communication, problem-solving skills and strategic insight are becoming increasingly valuable."

Richard van Hooijdonk, Trendwatcher and Futurist

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The 25 soft skills with the highest impact

Career Starters:

- Growth Mindset
- Conscious Communication
- Taking Ownership
- Personality Styles
- Actionable Communication
- Feedback for Growth
- Time Management
- Commercial Sensitivity

Professional

- Personal Strengths Development
- Impactful Influencing
- Managing Stress and Energy
- Entrepreneurial Mindset
- Structured Storytelling
- Presenting with Confidence
- Leading Stakeholders
- Unbiased Communication

Team Leader

- Leadership Styles
- Difficult Conversations
- Coaching
- People Development
- Hiring for Success
- Effective Team Management
- Strategy & Prioritization
- Meeting Mastery

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Recognize the signals in your organization

A lot of issues and frustrations that exist in workplaces often come down to a lack of focus on soft skill development. In order to determine whether this is also the case in your organization, we have set up a set of sub-optimal behaviors that can result from a lack of soft skills. So if you see many of the following points in your company, consider taking a closer look at your own soft skills as well as your colleagues.

> **The biggest communication problem is we don't listen to understand. We listen to reply."**
>
> Stephen Covey, Author of the famous bestseller 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People'

In the case of career starters, for example:

- Difficulty with prioritization: more focus on what is urgent rather than what is important
- A passive attitude in involving stakeholders
- Lengthy emails and meetings
- Focus on activities instead of results

In the case of professionals, for example:

- Strong focus on content, little on form
- Limited visibility in the organization despite good performance
- Difficulty presenting for a group
- Little sense of the interests of different stakeholders

In the case of managers, for example:

- Many meetings, few decisions
- Little attention to a positive and safe working environment
- Surprises during appraisals
- Little coaching and feedback on the job

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Tips for **strengthening** your organization

To see real results, the occasional training is not enough. A behavioural change will prove effective after lengthy periods of practicing and developing. A learner must work on it consistently and continuously involve as many employees as possible. A holistic approach is necessary when working structurally with soft skills and for the creation of a learning mentality and culture in your organization.

> **Soft skills get little respect, but will make or break your career."**
> Peggy Klaus, Best-selling author and leadership expert

Take into account the following three points of attention, when working on strengthening soft skills within your organization.

1   **Start today, not tomorrow. Soft skills have a direct impact on your organization and the well-being of your employees.**

2   **Soft skills are often seen as 'habits', the earlier and more you practice, the better you get over time.**

3   **Ensure you choose the right skills for your employees' development**
Choose a form of learning that suits the current generation of (young) employees: digital, application-oriented and fast. Time is limited, while learning is becoming more prominent, either offline, online, or blended. Be sure to take into consideration your employees' preferences as it can hugely affect the learning success, impact and overall experience. Whilst offline and online are most common, blended learning has become foundational to the development of employees as it is of online learning and a mix of in person training, where they can practice certain scenarios with trainers or actors.

Questions or inquiries?