

The Importance of Soft Skills



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Soft skills refer to both character traits and interpersonal skills that will influence how well a person can work or interact with others. The term soft skills covers a wide range of skills as diverse as teamwork, time management, empathy and delegation.

The World Economic Forum **Future of Jobs** report suggested that by 2025, complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management and emotional intelligence would be among the most important skills required in the workplace.

The importance of these soft skills is often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills such as coding. Organizations seem to expect people know how to behave on the job and the importance of skills such as taking initiative, communicating effectively and listening, which often is not the case.



What are soft skills?

Soft skills are personal attributes that influence how well you can work or interact with others. These skills make it easier to form relationships with people, create trust and dependability, and lead teams.

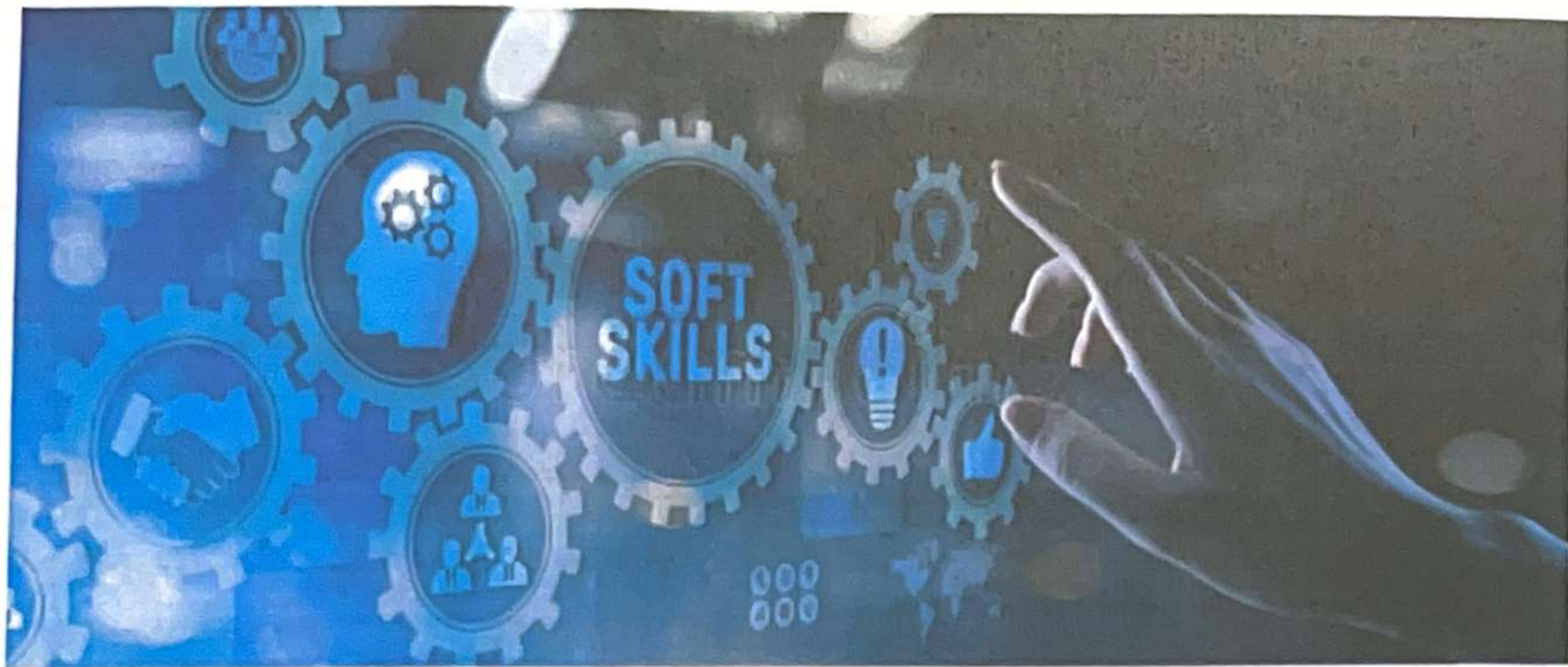
In essence, they are essential for your success in the workplace, your company's success and your personal life.

Why are soft skills important?

Most interactions with other people require some level of soft skills. At a company you might be negotiating to win a new contract, presenting your new idea to colleagues, networking for a new job, and so on. We use soft skills every day at work and developing these soft skills will help you win more business and accelerate your career progression.

On the other hand, a lack of soft skills can limit your potential, or even be the downfall of your business. By developing strong leadership, delegation, teamwork, and communication abilities, you can run projects more smoothly, deliver results that please everyone, and even positively influence your personal life by improving how you interact with others.

Outside of the office, soft skills such as communication are used to build friendship groups and meet potential partners. You might be negotiating the price of your new house renovation or mentoring your neighbors' children on the weekend. Soft skills are useful both in our professional and personal lives.



Let's have a look at some specific examples supporting the importance of soft skills.

1. Career progression and promotion

iCIMS Hiring Insights (2017) found that "Ninety-four percent of recruiting professionals believe an employee with stronger soft skills has a better chance of being promoted to a leadership position than an employee with more years of experience but weaker soft skills."

It's become vital to develop these skills if you want to progress in your career as they will set you apart from others at the interview and on the job.

2. The modern workplace is interpersonal

Skills such as active listening, collaboration, presenting ideas and communicating with colleagues are all highly valued in the modern workplace. Strong soft skills ensure a productive, collaborative and healthy work environment, all crucial attributes for organisations in an increasingly competitive world.

3. Customers and clients demand soft skills

Consumers these days have a huge number of choices of where to buy from, bought about by the internet and smartphones. For these consumers, convenience and low prices are easy to come by, so customer service is often what influences the choice to use a particular business.

The ability to communicate at a human level with customers is therefore a vital factor in an organisation's success./.../

4. The future workplace will rely on soft skills

Automation and artificial intelligence will result in a greater proportion of jobs relying on soft skills. Advances in technology have caused tasks that require hard skills to decline, making soft skills a key differentiator in the workplace. A study by Deloitte Access Economics predicts that 'Soft skill-intensive occupations will account for two-thirds of all jobs by 2030'.

As the cost of robots decreases and the performance of artificial intelligence improves, jobs such as manufacturing line workers, will become automated. Traditional skills like teamwork, communication and critical thinking will be more important than ever.

5. Soft skills are hard to automate

Following on from the previous point, soft skills such as emotional intelligence are hard to automate and unlikely to become automated anytime soon. This means they're expected to become more desirable in the near future.

However soft skills can be difficult to teach and track improvements on.

6. Soft skills are in high demand by recruiters

Soft skills are in high demand in the workforce. According to the 2017 paper by a Harvard student on the importance of social skills in the labour market, jobs requiring high levels of social interaction grew by nearly 12 percent as a share of the U.S. labour force.

Most in-demand soft skills (from [LinkedIn research](#)):

- Communication
- Organisation
- Teamwork
- Critical thinking
- Social skills
- Creativity
- Interpersonal communication
- Adaptability

In the paper's conclusion, it reasons that because computers are very poor at simulating human interaction, social skills are still important. Therefore, individuals should still look to improve their social and soft skills through activities such as volunteering or leading a team /.../.

Do you need to improve your soft skills?

Many people are strong in certain soft skills, while weaker in others. For example, someone might be a great public speaker and able to command a room full of people while on stage, but struggle to interact with people at a busy networking event.

It's common to either underestimate the importance of soft skills or overestimate your own abilities. Here are a few scenarios that may be improved with stronger soft skills:

- You have a low client retention rate compared to others in your field
- You are frequently late for meetings or struggle to meet deadlines
- You fail to grow your professional network, or avoid networking opportunities altogether
- You manage to land meetings with prospective clients, but rarely proceed to the next stage or close deals

The importance of soft skills to businesses

Soft skills are needed across all industries, for example, strong communication skills are needed whether you are working as a nurse, a hairdresser, a mechanic etc. Developing each soft skill comes with its own advantages, for instance, improving communication will help your employees interact more effectively and improvements in time-management can increase productivity.

There are also general benefits of employees developing their soft skills:

- **Increased productivity** - Employees' efficiency in their tasks and responsibilities increases which will help bring the company closer to achieving its goals.
- **Improved teamwork** - For a business to function effectively people must work well together in order to achieve a common goal. The quality of work improves when people use their individual strengths and skills together in collaboration.
- **Improved retention rates** - People want to work at a company that invests in employees' career development, in fact, 63% of UK employees would change their employer if they are offered a job at a company with more training opportunities. Also, recruitment costs for the company decrease with increased staff retention.
- **Improved employee satisfaction** - Investing in employees' shows them that they are valued. Feeling appreciated and having a positive outlook of the company increases job satisfaction.
- **Improved leadership** - Soft skills help prepare employees for leadership positions because specific skills are needed, such as, active listening, empathy etc. This is important because 50% of employees leave their job due to poor managers.
- **Attracts new clients** - If your clients are happy with your company's service, they are more likely to recommend you to other clients. This provides your company with new business opportunities.
- **Increased workplace communication** - Effective communication between staff increases which consequently reduces the risk of messages becoming distorted. This allows the company to operate more smoothly.

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