

Developing and Measuring Soft Skills in the Changing World of Work Literature Review

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Abstract

Over the past decade, an ever-growing body of research has shown that soft skills contribute substantially to success in the labor market, to improved employability, and to increased productivity – in some cases exceeding the contribution of hard skills.

Efforts to identify the range of skills that increase a person’s chances of a successful integration into employment have found that these include, amongst others, numeracy and literacy, digital literacy, the ability to understand complex ideas and adapt to a changing environment, social and communication skills, and self-control. Addressing the issue of soft skills is particularly important in light of recent studies that show that it is possible to develop and improve them among adults – mainly young adults, but also older adults of working age. The understanding that it is possible for adults to acquire new soft skills has led to the development of practices and programs to help people acquire skills in many countries across the world. These include National Skills Councils, which were designed to reduce gaps in skills at the national level, programs to develop and improve soft skills at the individual level, and further interventions focusing on specific skills. In Israel, JDC-TEVET has developed the I PRO Skills model (hereafter I PRO), with the goal of updating social planners’ knowledge of employment skills necessary to keep pace with the dynamic world of work, as well as the tools for developing and improving them. The model was designed as an applicable tool for the development of employment skills, both for participants and professionals in employment programs and services.

The development of these programs, including I PRO, has underlined the need to measure the improvement in skills and to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs. In doing so, it has also demonstrated the complexity of skill measurement, especially when measuring change over time, or when presented with the need to adapt concepts and measurement tools to the local culture. The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute has conducted a literature review that aims to address the challenge of skills measurement, to validate and elaborate the I PRO model, and to identify applicable tools for integrating the model into employment programs.

This report presents a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on the subject of the soft skills needed in the changing world of work. The review examines the varied definitions of soft skills, their contribution to success in the labor market, and the extent to which they can be acquired and/or improved via targeted interventions. The report also presents prominent programs aimed to improve

skills, and describes key measuring tools. The review reveals a wide range of tools to assess and measure skills, including self-report questionnaires, tools for reporting by others, simulations and performance assessment. Each of the tools emphasizes one or more of the main levels of skill measurement – knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. At the end of the review, we have examined the I PRO model in light of the existing literature.