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**Reviews of literature regarding  
interpersonal skills and the workplace  
over the years 2011-2021**

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# REVIEWS OF LITERATURE REGARDING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND THE WORKPLACE OVER THE YEARS 2011-2021

Review  
Article

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## Keywords

Soft skills;  
Communication skills;  
Interpersonal skills;  
Workplace;  
Training;

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## Abstract

**Background:** *The changing nature of the labor market places more value on interpersonal skills than in the past. An examination of what has been done in the field in the past decade reveals the relationship between interpersonal skills and indicators such as employment ability, promotion, and salary, as well as the link between interpersonal skills training and their application in the workplace.*

**Objectives:** *The purpose of the paper is to present the results of a literary review of the relationship between interpersonal skills and the labor market between the years 2011-2021.*

**Methodology:** *Literature search was conducted on databases with the use of cumulative Index of ResearchGate, Jstor, Emerald-Insight, Semantic Scholar, Wiley Online, Elsevier and Google Scholar—using specific keywords and a timeframe of 2011 to 2021. All relevant articles were read critically.*

**Findings:** *In view of the changing labor market, the academy should prepare new candidates not only through the acquisition of professional skills, but also through the acquisition of interpersonal skills through an ongoing dialogue with employers. The impact of interpersonal skills on a range of workplace parameters, including mobility, promotion, and salary, has been documented. Positive correlations have been found between work performance and interpersonal skills training. Through off-the-job training programs, workers can improve their interpersonal skills and improve their performance after training.*

**Conclusion:** *As interpersonal skills correlate positively with various metrics in the labor market, the trend of change in the labor market in the digital age requires adjustments on the axis between*

*entering the labor market, agreement on the skills list, and agreed measurement tools for improving interpersonal skills training programs and their implementation while at work. Several studies have been done on interpersonal skills from the academic level and throughout the employee's career in the organization, but more research is needed to deepen our understanding of their implications.*

## INTRODUCTION

The key to an organization's success is its human resources. Their capabilities, on the one hand, and the level of collaboration they establish, on the other hand, determine the success of an organization. In the highly competitive 21st century marketplace, having hard skills alone is not sufficient. The importance of individual soft skills has increased (Seetha, 2014). Employability skills have become increasingly important in recent years. At present, employers want graduates who have not only technical skills, as shown by their degree class and subject, but also employability skills. Employers want graduates who possess both technical and employability skills (Suartha, Suwintana, Sudhana, Hariyanti, 2017). It is found that the most valuable employees in the organization have a combination of both hard and soft skill competencies (Griffith, David, A and Hoppner, Jessica, J, 2013, cited in Dean and East, 2019). According to job advertisements, most positions require one or more interpersonal skills (Suartha et al, 2017).

As the term implies, Soft Skills are the skills that are not directly related to a specific job. they are necessary for any position since they are mainly concerned with relationships with other people. Meanwhile, a hard skill is a set of capabilities that allow a person to perform a specific job (Cimatti, 2016). A soft skill is a cluster of qualities, habits, personality traits, attitudes, and social graces, which everyone tends to possess in varying degrees throughout their life and are necessary for everyday life just as much as they are necessary for work (Ibrahim, Boerhannoeddin, and Bakare, 2017). The term soft skills is referred to in different ways in various papers, such as interpersonal skills, social skills, people skills, and communication skills. Other terms may include transferable skills, generic skills, or employability skills (Abelha, Fernandes, Mesquita, Seabra, & Ferreira-Oliveira, 2020). Although these competences are referred to in a variety of ways, they refer to those that go beyond technical subjects and pertain to professional practice as well.

Every position requires interpersonal skills, as they are focused on interpersonal relationships. For those skills, the context plays a vital role, which cannot be separated from it. Individuals'

interpersonal Skills are expressed in relation to their surrounding when they work or live (Cimatti, 2016).

Learning interpersonal skills is an ongoing process. In other words, they can be acquired and developed through education, as well as through personal and professional experiences (Cimatti, 2016). To improve those Skills, the individual himself is fundamentally important, since he must first recognize and understand his skills, then develop strategies and actions to improve them.

The need for interpersonal skills in the workplace has been amplified by technological advances and organizational changes (Borghans, Weel, & Weinberg, 2008). The importance of those skills for understanding individual outcomes in the workplace has been argued in for years, but relatively little research has been done to analyze their economic consequences and understand how those skills impact the labor market (Liu and Fernandez, 2018).

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

With interpersonal skills considered to be important for the 21st century labor market, this article examines the relationship between interpersonal skills and labor market research over the last decade and answers the following questions:

1. How do interpersonal skills relate to the labor market through academic studies?
2. What effect do interpersonal skills have on job satisfaction, promotion, or wage return in the workplace?
3. In what ways does training improve interpersonal skills at work?

## METHODOLOGY

Literature search was conducted on databases Cumulative Index of ResearchGate, Jstor, Emerald-Insight, Semantic Scholar, Wiley Online, Elsevier and Google Scholar—using specific keywords. All relevant articles were read critically. The following keywords were used during searches: “interpersonal skills”, Or “communication skills”, Or “soft skills”, Or " interpersonal communication" Or “Employability skills”, And “labor market”, Or

“21st-century workforce”, Or Job requirements", Or " Promotion", Or " Job satisfaction" Or “Wage returns”, And “hard- and soft-Skills training”, Or “interpersonal skills training” ". The objective was to find studies that within their titles or key words will capture one or more of the expressions. The timeframe of the search covered all studies that were published from 2011 to 2021.

### **STUDY SELECTION**

The selection of the papers followed three stages. In the first stage the papers were scanned based on the keywords and the title. Seventy-one relevant articles were read critically. The list was reduced to fifty-seven articles. The main reason for filtering was a matching engagement with other topics or a loose match between the keywords and the content of the literary review. Through the analysis and synthesis of the data, the researcher retrieved relevant articles that were read, abstracted, and critiqued. The articles were categorized. Important themes were identified. Using the thematic analysis, the researcher was able to find patterns and regularities, as well as inconsistencies. To develop an argument and provide a context for the research, the patterns of greatest relevance to the phenomenon were explored.

### **FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature about interpersonal skills and the workplace from 2011-2021 was analyzed according to three key themes. The first theme investigates how interpersonal skills relate to the progression of employees from the academic stage to employment. The second theme examines the impact enhancing interpersonal skills has on work performance. The third theme examines the effects of training on improving interpersonal skills at work.

#### **PROGRESSION OF EMPLOYEES FROM THE ACADEMIC STAGE TO ENTRY INTO THE LABOR MARKET**

In the first theme, interpersonal skills are examined in relation to the progression of employees from the academic stage to entry into the labor market, to integration and career development with a focus on promotion. Literature has been devoted to the link between learning and imparting interpersonal skills to students at the academy and the job market on several dimensions. The first dimension relates to the chance that students will be accepted into the labor force based on their interpersonal skills.

There is widespread agreement in the literature about the importance of interpersonal skills in making the transition from academia to the workforce. The literature has consistently indicated that recruiters consider interpersonal skills to be among the most important hiring criteria for the past 30 years (Hopkins, Raymond, & Carlson, 2011; Velasco, 2012, cited in Hynes, 2012). Teaching students interpersonal skills could help them be hired for a job in their field (Robles, 2012), and the lack of those skills can sink the promising career of someone who has technical ability and professional expertise but no interpersonal qualities (Klaus, 2010, cited in Robles, 2012). A few research studies indicate that employers in the 21st century are looking for candidates with strong interpersonal skills (Perreault, 2004; Wilhelm, 2004; Mitchell, Skinner, & White, 2010, cited in Robles, 2012). According to Valesco (2012), interpersonal skills (personality traits and other characteristics) are even more important than academic records when it comes to selecting employees. In the modern labor market, although technical skills are needed for workers to get jobs, they may not be sufficient to advance beyond entry-level jobs or enter professional careers. Achieving success beyond those levels requires mastering interpersonal skills, according to Laker and Powell (2013).

The need for interpersonal skills is acknowledged to be a critical factor in career success. However, employers report that new graduates lack those abilities (Hanson, 2020). Employers are increasingly seeking people with interpersonal skills, according to Bailly & Lene (2012). According to the paper, the rise of interpersonal skills has also been accompanied by the tendency to personify employees' skills and treat them as innate characteristics. As a result of the need for interpersonal skills, employers select their employees in a very specific manner based on criteria that may seem very ill-defined or discriminatory.

Regarding interpersonal skills and graduates' employment readiness, the second dimension relates to the division of responsibilities between academia and labor market. According to Bin Saeed (2017), Interpersonal skills are developed in the academia in accordance with labor market requirements. At the same time, Students and graduates have a major responsibility in trying to understand the job market and in transforming themselves according to it. This can be accomplished only by using university cooperative training programs, internships, and on-the-job training. In order to create and improve a skilled workforce for the future, the industry should be involved at every step and partner with universities, training institutes, and community colleges. Students at the college and graduate

school levels would benefit from including interpersonal skills as part of their business communication courses (DeKay, 2012). Balcar, (2016), however, argues that setting educational objectives according to the requirements in specific occupations or economic sectors, and developing and assessing the necessary skills are common practices in schools for hard skill development, but very rare in schools for soft skill development.

In the 21st century workplace, college graduates will be required to possess a growing number of sophisticated interpersonal skills. colleges and universities should identify the skills employers are looking for and align their communication programs accordingly. According to Kyllonen (2013), Education plays a key role in future employees' development, and their ability to improve throughout life. In recognition of this, new methods of education, training, and intervention should be developed as well as new assessment tools. However, Course and program completion dominated the assessment of competency, as opposed to placement in employment (Hanson, 2020).

It is important to develop student learning outcomes and assessments together with industry, standardize curriculum content and delivery, provide opportunities for practice and reflection, and provide staff training.

Recommendations for practice include developing student learning outcomes and assessments with input from industry, standardizing curriculum content and delivery, creating opportunities for practice and reflection, and providing training and support for staff. There is a need to develop an instrument to pretest and posttest student interpersonal skill gain, incorporating the voices of students and employers, and investigating how to teach soft skills in a volatile environment.

The third dimension focuses on the skills students must learn in university before entering the job work. The interpersonal skills list in the workplace has been explored in a few papers (Waldeck et al, 2012, Keyton et al, 2013, Ellis et al, 2014, Coffelt et al, 2016, Pandei & Shukla, 2020, cited in Coffelt & Smith, 2020). A lack of consensus exists on the list, the way those skills developed, and how they are measured. The list of skills in some articles is precise according to the changing labor market, but some don't. The papers lack a compelling argument about the importance of communication in workplaces and the correlation between the inventory of those skills and work performance. Research on soft skills acquisition is mostly geared towards high school or college students and graduates. there is little information on adult learners (Hanson, 2020).

The fourth dimension relates the interpersonal skills of the graduates of the academy with the chances of promotion. According to Reinch &

Gardner (2011), individuals recognized as having strong interpersonal skills are likely to be considered favorably for additional promotions. According to the study, oral communication skills are more closely associated with promotion in the eyes of the employer than written communication skills.

### **THE IMPACT OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT ON WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE**

The second theme examines the impact of interpersonal skills improvement on workplace performance. Interpersonal skills have become an important part of the success and development of the technology industry sector globally in the past few years (Fadhil et al, 2021). Despite the strong focus on skills and competencies in the knowledge-based economy in recent years, few quantitative studies have been conducted on the relationship between skills and labor market outcomes (Grzeskowiak, 2020). There is no consensus regarding the meaning of interpersonal skills and the scope of their application. Since those skills are hard to measure, they are routinely omitted from quantitative research as opposed to hard skills.

Performance and interpersonal skills are often regarded as linked. The activity and interest in this area are based upon the likelihood that there is such a link. Through the acquisition of specific qualifications, an individual can maximize his lifetime earnings, decrease the chances of being unemployed, and make himself more attractive to employers (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2011). Although performance and interpersonal skills are often viewed as connected, it can be difficult to determine whether it is the supply or demand sides of those skills that drive this relationship. It is possible that employees with a high level of interpersonal skills are more likely to obtain high-ranking jobs. Alternatively, high-ranking positions often require employees to utilize interpersonal skills like influencing, planning, etc. Further research may examine the causal effects and the directionality of the relationship between interpersonal skills and occupational status. (Liu and Fernandez, 2018).

It should be underlined that the measurement of interpersonal skills encounters many problems and limitations Although those skills are an integral part of work, they are difficult to evaluate and isolate, and evaluations of them, and other types of skill, may be influenced by prejudice. In addition, performance is not easily defined and existing research into HR practices and performance does little to shed light on the contribution of skill. There is a fundamental need to differentiate between



those areas in which skills can make a difference in performance and those in which they cannot.

Some evidence indicates that employers are not only looking for workers who can use interpersonal skills in their jobs but are also paying higher wages to workers who possess those. Yet, no direct tests have been performed to see if there is a statistically significant relationship between interpersonal skills and holistic measures of an employee's status (Liu and Fernandez, 2018).

Research on wages returned to interpersonal skills has improved over the last few years, but the amount of research is still small. Often, there is a lack of data because interpersonal skills are difficult to measure and therefore cannot be empirically examined (Balcar, 2014). Those skills are measured using two different methods in empirical papers. As for the direct assessment, it is based on questioning individuals about their preferences and attitudes, while the indirect assessment approximates soft skills by identifying job tasks by trained experts or by the workers themselves (Balcar, 2014). In an overview of the empirical literature on the wage returns to interpersonal skills, it is shown that those skills are highly correlated with wage returns. More empirical research is required.

The main results of few studies show that there are statistically significant differences in earnings between groups characterized by different levels of skills. Those findings are in line with the outcomes obtained by other researchers, although the analytical approaches differ (Grzeskowiak, 2020). Positive relationships between interpersonal skills level and earnings are proved in a few papers. It is shown that wage returns to interpersonal skills are positive even after conditioning on cognitive skill, noncognitive skill, and a variety of other covariates, and that cognitive skill and social skill are complementary (Deming, 2017). As compared with the 1980s and 1990s, interpersonal skills were a greater predictor of employment and wages among young adults aged 25 to 33 in the mid-2000s.

Across professional fields, employers agree that interpersonal skills are increasingly important to employee mobility and success in the workforce (Carvalho & Roque, 2015; Deming, 2017; Griffith and Hoppner, 2013, cited in Dean and East, 2019; Ibrahim, Burhanuddin, & Kazeem, 2017, cited in Botke et al, 2018). Interpersonal skills are also often difficult to measure compared to hard or technical skills. It is likely that interpersonal skills will become more important in the future workplace, along with the growth of the global digital economy (De Gruyter, 2021).

### **THE EFFECTS OF TRAINING ON IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AT WORK**

The third theme focuses on the effects of training on improving interpersonal skills at work. Many corporates recognize the importance of Interpersonal skills for productivity in today's workplace, which is why they are focusing on developing those skills (Nealy, 2005, cited in Robles, 2012). It has long been held by senior executives that interpersonal skills training contributes primarily to the inspirational dimension and is of less value to the company that invests in it (Onisk, 2011). Despite this, there is also a consensus among senior executives that new employees lack interpersonal skills needed for success in the business world (Robles, 2012). Despite having attended excellent training courses and being eager to use their new skills, there may be limitations in the work environment that prevent employees from applying what they have learned (Blume et al., 2010; Chiaburu, Sawyer, & Thoroughgood, 2010; Govaerts & Dochy, 2014; Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, 2012; Van der Locht et al, 2013, cited in Botke et al, 2018).

Work performance and training (interpersonal skills and training methodology) have been found to be positively correlated (Ibrahim et al, 2017). Training methodology (time-spaced learning) might affect an employee's ability to apply the interpersonal skills acquired during training to their job, which invariably leads to improved productivity (Deming, J, 2017).

To address the interpersonal skills deficit, businesses must develop and implement strategies to develop successful interpersonal skills training programs. In this highly competitive global work environment, failure to do so can have far-reaching consequences on business outcomes (Dean and East, 2019).

Sato et al (2019) found that experience in the training program was significantly associated with post-training evaluation and promotion probability, suggesting that improving interpersonal skills through off-the job training program may improve worker's post-training performance and lead to future promotion.

It is crucial that interpersonal skills can be quantified and measured in terms of returns (Onisk, 2011). Hard skills are specific, measurable abilities that can be taught. Soft skills, on the other hand, are more difficult to quantify. Identifying the impact of soft skills training on return on investment (ROI) versus hard skills training is a challenge (Georges, 1996; Redford, 2007, cited in Onisk, 2011). Interpersonal skills training is difficult to measure in terms of ROI and effectiveness. Therefore, many corporate training

departments are reluctant to provide it. Few research, however, indicates that the impact of soft skills on ROI is much greater than the money spent on training (Phillips & Phillips, 2017).

Balcar (2016), claims that soft skills are as important a wage determinant as hard skills. Thus, on-the-job training programs are necessary to develop both hard and soft skills to improve worker productivity. Philips & Philips (2017), have developed a tool for measuring the impact and the ROI of soft skill training programs.

It is understood that interpersonal skills training is essential to the workplace and its impact on a variety of indicators, but there is very little ongoing research in this area. While Research shows that investing in training can result in demonstrable outcomes that positively influence individual and organizational performance (Arthur et al, 2003; Tharenou et al., 2007, cited in Botke et al, 2018), there is a need to continue to increase the understanding of the factors that influence the transfer of training. Transferring interpersonal skills training throughout an organization is one of the main challenges. According to Laker & Powell (2011), interpersonal skills are harder to transfer than hard skills (technical). In other papers, training transfer research and theory training content has no impact on transfer (Burke & Hutchins, 2007, cited in Botke et al, 2018). However, some studies discuss how transferring soft skills differs from transferring hard skills. Transfers of soft skills are viewed as far transfers, whereas transfers of technical skills are seen as near transfers since it is easier for the trainee to use the skills learned during training in the workplace. The imprecision that is involved in applying soft-skill training arises from uncertainty surrounding what the trainee needs to know and in what context he or she must apply that learning (Laker & Powell, 2013).

According to Laker et al (2011), several factors adversely affect Training Trainees learning interpersonal skills. The prior skills experience, the level of resistance, the level of organizational support, the level of managerial support or resistance, identifying training needs and objectives, immediate feedback, the immediate and subsequent ability to use their training, self-efficacy, the differences in trainers and instruction methods are all factors.

Few studies have found that job relevance, workload, autonomy, supervisory support, peer support, facilitating learning climates, and appreciative learning climates are positively related to new skills used after training. (Govaerts & Dochy, 2014; Nijman, 2004, cited in Botke et al, 2018). This study demonstrated that different transfer stages are relevant after interpersonal skills training and that the work environment, defined in terms of job-related factors, social support, and the organizational facilitation of learning, is directly

related to the transfer of soft skills training. However, the effects of specific factors vary by transfer stage. Future research that pursues this line of inquiry is necessary if we are to move beyond the question of whether training works to the more important question of why training works.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the literature, interpersonal skills are emphasized from the job acceptance stage to the promotion stage. Although those skills are important, many graduates entering the job market lack them. There is a common consensus that the Academy should prepare new candidates not only through the acquisition of professional skills, but also through the acquisition of interpersonal skills in continuous dialogue with employers to refine the skills in response to the changing labor market. As a result of the complexity of those skills in relation to the labor market, an adaptation of the interpersonal skills in the content, methods and measurement tools is required between academia and the labor market. There is a need for more research to be done on a skill list when entering the job market.

According to the literature, interpersonal skills positively impact a range of workplace parameters including mobility, promotion, and salary. At the same time, given the complexity of the measurement, there is room for further research to examine the subject more closely. It is likely that interpersonal skills will become more important in the future workplace, along with the growth of the global digital economy. With the increasing importance of interpersonal skills in the workplace and the impact they have on parameters like salary, satisfaction, and mobility, there is a need for focused field research that will enhance these relationships over time.

Work performance and interpersonal skills training have been found to be positively correlated. Improving interpersonal skills through off-the job training program may improve workers post-training performance and lead to future promotion. However, Identifying the impact of interpersonal skills training on return on investment (ROI) versus hard skills training is a challenge. Even though there are a few studies that have found several factors adversely affecting trainees learning interpersonal skills, training in interpersonal skills needs to be accompanied by an increased understanding of the factors influencing their transfer. There is a need for continuing field research to deepen our understanding of the factors that inhibit and improve interpersonal skills outside and after the work environment.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Throughout the years, academia and the labor market have kept up with the changing roles and the transition from academia to the workforce. As the labor market and the pace of change in it has changed, so have academic organizations and institutions.

In addition to interpersonal skills, there is a need for an in-depth collaboration of human resources departments in order to identify exactly the skills needed for positions within a career vision so as to reduce training loads. Each job candidate's critical soft skills availability should be assessed by human resources to prepare for job tasks and challenges (Fadhil et al, 2021). There is a need for a close relationship between human resources departments and officials in the academy in order to pinpoint what skills are required in order to prepare candidates for the labor market. It is evident that interpersonal skills and workplace performance are positively correlated, so there is room to create a continuum throughout the employee's career at the organization from recruitment through training. Both the productivity and the satisfaction of the employee will increase as a result.

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**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1

**Distribution of the literature according to the themes in the article  
(The numbers correspond to indexes in the reference)**

Theme name	Progression of employees from the academic stage to entry into the labor market	The impact of interpersonal skills improvement on job satisfaction, promotion, or wage return in the workplace	The effects of training on improving interpersonal skills at work
Article name by number	1, 5, 6, 20, 29, 38, 42, 45, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54	2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40, 41, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 55, 57	10, 12, 17, 25, 32, 35, 39, 56