



Complimentary eBook

The Sad State of Soft Skills and How L&D Can Fix It

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1. What Soft Skills Are and Why Your Organization Needs Them

In this age of emphasis on education in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math), research by LinkedIn, Google, Deloitte, and other organizations confirms what learning and business professionals know well: that technical capabilities are only part of the picture when it comes to business success.

Soft skills (also known as people skills, social skills, transferable skills, and other non-technical designations) are critical for achieving balance between ongoing rapid technology advancements and the *human* side of business. Striking that balance requires emotional intelligence and people savvy—the interpersonal, collaborative, problem-solving, and other abilities needed to engage and work well with colleagues, win customers, provide effective leadership, and drive performance and growth.

How Does Your Organization Define Soft Skills?

Companies—and people—don't always agree on the meaning of *soft skills*. Your organization may create its own definition, or adapt one from examples such as these:

- [Business Dictionary.com](#): Communicating, conflict management, human relations, making presentations, negotiating, team building, and other such ability, defined in terms of expected outcomes and not as a specific method or technique such as statistical analysis.
- [Deloitte](#): A set of non-technical skills—like communication skills, emotional judgement, problem solving, and digital literacy.
- [U.S. Agency for International Development](#): A broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals. These skills are broadly applicable and complement other skills such as technical, vocational, and academic skills.
- [CareerBuilder](#): Soft skills may include nearly any ability that pertains to the way you approach others or handle your professional life.

It Takes More than Tech Skills at Google



Few would argue that Google exemplifies success in the technology space. Like other high-tech businesses, the organization grew out of expertise in the STEM disciplines. Yet when Google examined more than a decade of data on their hiring, promotions, and other talent considerations, STEM capabilities were at the bottom of the list of leading qualities characterizing the company's top employees.

[The Washington Post](#) described the research findings: "Top characteristics of success at Google are all soft skills:

- Being a good coach
- Communicating and listening well
- Possessing insights into others (including others' different values and points of view)
- Having empathy toward and being supportive of one's colleagues
- Being a good critical thinker and problem solver
- Being able to make connections across complex ideas

Subsequent research reiterated the importance of soft skills for individuals, but also revealed them to be distinguishing traits of the most productive teams at Google.

People Skills Are Crucial Everywhere

In 2018, another online leader, LinkedIn, released its [Workplace Learning Report](#), featuring responses from about 4,000 surveyed L&D professionals, business executives, people managers, and employees worldwide. The research found all participating groups in agreement that role-specific technical skills are vital, but soft skills—particularly leadership, communication, and collaboration—are even more critical "to fuel people and business growth."

92%

Executives who rate soft skills at least as important as technical skills.

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As LinkedIn's data demonstrated, the critical role of soft skills in business is a perception shared globally. Major research by [Deloitte](#) underscored that commonality. In Australia, for instance, Deloitte reported that one in four employers struggle to fill entry-level jobs because applicants lack soft skills, and soft-skill demand there exceeds supply by 45 percentage points.

Given the importance placed on soft skills, it isn't surprising that LinkedIn's global respondents named training for those skills as this year's top priority for talent development professionals.

Coming Up Short on Soft Skills

The need for soft skills by businesses worldwide is well documented. However, it has become increasingly challenging for companies to find talent with those capabilities.

89%

Executives who report difficulty finding talent with soft skills.

The Wall Street Journal

In the U.S., [Adecco](#) surveyed senior business leaders and found 92% confirmed a workforce skills gap, and nearly half report a lack of soft skills—particularly in communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. Almost two-thirds of the executives predicted investments in U.S. companies will fall because of workforce skills gaps, and many foresee skills deficits negatively affecting product development, corporate growth, and bottom-line results.

[PayScale's](#) most recent exploration of workforce skills preparedness highlighted the gap, too, adding job seekers' perspectives to the mix. It reported that 87% of recent graduates felt themselves prepared for the workforce, but only half of hiring managers agreed. The managers pointed to soft skills (especially writing and speaking) as grads' biggest deficits.

The Soft Skills Gap Poses Risks for All

As Adecco noted, the soft skills gap affects organizations in multiple ways, potentially creating negative impacts on almost every aspect of business operations and overall performance. Employees who lack people skills are less likely to know how to navigate workplace politics to get their jobs done or understand how to be effective team players.

Company representatives who are unable to establish and nurture relationships with customers and suppliers put brand credibility at risk and can't contribute to business results and growth. Nor will such individuals prove to be effective people managers or the inspiring leaders that organizations need to drive future success.

Businesses have a lot to lose, but individuals feel the fallout from soft-skills deficits, too. Those PayScale-surveyed graduates who see themselves as being ready for the workplace, are in for disappointment if job offers aren't forthcoming. And that's a distinct possibility: two-thirds of [HR managers](#) acknowledge that they would hire candidates with good soft skills over technically proficient applicants who lacked them. In fact, fewer than one in 10 managers said they'd hire applicants with strong tech skills and poor soft skills.

"The technical term for navigating a workplace effectively might be soft skills, but employers are facing some hard facts: the entry-level candidates who are on tap to join the ranks of full-time work are clueless about the fundamentals of office life."

TIME

When individuals who lack soft skills do find jobs, their productivity and performance are likely to be less than top-notch. Further, their earnings may lag, and their prospects for advancement trail those of their more socially skilled peers. Over the long term, employees who aren't able to work well with their colleagues and be productive are likely to join the ranks of the disengaged and, perhaps, ultimately, the unemployed.

Despite the gloomy picture of extensive soft skills shortages, there are solutions for businesses and workers, alike. For organizations, progress centers on active involvement of the L&D function and begins with identifying the soft skills needed to drive success. And for employees and job seekers, understanding which skills are in demand is the first step toward building those capabilities to greatly enhance employability and advancement prospects.



2. Which Soft Skills are Most in Demand?

Unlike technical, or hard, skills that are easily defined and measured, soft skills can cover a wide range of capabilities and may be challenging to quantify. That ambiguity is reflected in the diverse efforts to define soft skills. Further, as [Deloitte](#) points out, “Soft skills are clearly important for all occupations and industries. Yet outside of communication skills, the importance of individual skills varies across industries and roles.”

Their potential for vague interpretation aside—or, perhaps, because of it—much research has focused on identifying the soft skills that employers value most highly at present, as well as the capabilities that the evolving nature of work will demand in coming years.

The Top Ten Soft Skills in Demand Today

LinkedIn, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), other organizations, and subject matter experts have published lists of the soft skills employers say they want in job applicants and their workforces today. Naturally, there is some variation in wording, but there is significant similarity in core concepts.

Top Ten Soft Skills Business Leaders Want Today

LinkedIn	Careerbuilder	National Association of Colleges and Employers	Business Communication Quarterly M.M. Robles, Eastern Kentucky University
1. Communication	1. Work ethic	1. Problem solving	1. Integrity
2. Computer/technical literacy	2. Dependability	2. Ability to work on a team	2. Communication
3. Interpersonal skills	3. Positive attitude	3. Written communication	3. Courtesy
4. Adaptability	4. Self-motivation	4. Leadership	4. Responsibility
5. Research skills	5. Team-oriented	5. Strong work ethic	5. Interpersonal skills
6. Project management	6. Organized	6. Analytical/quantitative skills	6. Professionalism
7. Problem solving	7. Work under pressure	7. Verbal communication	7. Positive attitude
8. Process improvement	8. Effective communicator	8. Initiative	8. Teamwork
9. Strong work ethic	9. Flexible	9. Detail oriented	9. Flexibility
10. Emotional intelligence	10. Confident	10. Flexibility/adaptability	10. Work ethic

Across leading sources, this consensus on the most critical soft skills emerges: communication (both written and verbal), problem solving (including use of critical thinking, reasoning, and creativity), ability to work on teams (collaboration), interpersonal capabilities (such as relating to others, courtesy, and managing conflict), strong work ethic, flexibility/adaptability (including change management, resilience, and ability to manage multiple tasks), and emotional intelligence (especially reliability, responsibility, and integrity).



Narrowing the focus to new graduates and others preparing for initial entry into the work world, the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#) defined these “key soft skills for youth workforce success”: social skills, communication skills, higher-order thinking skills, self-control, and a positive self-concept.

For organizations operating in worldwide marketplaces, [Hult International Business School](#) cited seven soft skills critical to global business success: cross-cultural communication skills, excellent networking abilities, collaboration, interpersonal influence, adaptive thinking, emotional intelligence, and resilience.

The takeaway for L&D is this: Even when the context of their application varies, the most critical soft skills needed by today’s organizations tend to remain constant (though their levels of importance may shift). To gain insight into soft-skills priorities for your organization, consider the company’s specific business goals (current and future), its existing workforce skillsets, identified skills gaps, evolving roles, and skillsets of the external applicant talent pool.

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Soft Skills for the New Decade and Beyond

As work and those who perform it continue to evolve, are the soft skills needed in workplaces likely to remain the same in 2020 and beyond? Although the disruptive nature of the business world and factors affecting it make forecasts of the future especially challenging, some projections have been made of the capabilities employers will require in the years ahead.



A few years back, the [World Economic Forum](#) predicted 2020 would see the demand for social skills exceed that for technical skills, noting that “technical skills will need to be supplemented with strong

social and collaboration skills.” The organization’s projection of the top capabilities needed for 2020 highlighted a focus on soft skills:

Top 10 Skills 2020

1. Complex problem solving
2. Critical thinking
3. Creativity
4. People management
5. Coordinating with others
6. Emotional intelligence
7. Judgment and decision making
8. Service orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive flexibility

Taking a longer-term look into the future, [Deloitte](#) predicts that “soft-skill-intensive occupations will account for two-thirds of all jobs by 2030,” adding that growth in those jobs will be double that of other roles.

Won’t the influence of technology, especially artificial intelligence, mean more technical skills will be needed? [PwC](#) envisions a 2030 workplace where automation will change the job landscape, but says, “By replacing workers doing routine, methodical tasks, machines can amplify the comparative advantage of those workers with problem solving, leadership, EQ (Emotional Intelligence), empathy, and creativity skills.” Those soft-skilled workers will see their value rise.

In the years ahead, soft skills will continue to differentiate employees and leaders in workplaces worldwide. For L&D, bringing that future to life begins with powerful soft skills training today.



3. What You Should Know About Effective Soft Skills Training

Given the current importance of soft skills, it's not surprising that business leaders, learning and development professionals, and employees, alike, agree that training for those capabilities is a top priority for L&D.

At the same time, business leaders are ramping up pressure for L&D to identify future skills trends and prevent gaps before they occur. With greater soft skills needs projected in coming years, building training programs and strategies around those capabilities now is a proactive step in addressing current training demands while also demonstrating L&D's future focus.

Soft Skills Training Now and in the Future: Key Takeaways for L&D

Begin with the Skills Needed: In this eBook, you've seen the soft skills most in demand in today's workplaces and needs projected for the decade ahead. As you structure your own training program, include any additional soft skills required to achieve your organization's business goals, strategies, and plans.

The L&D Takeaway: Your L&D team may need to do a skills-gap analysis and look at existing performance issues to gain an accurate and comprehensive picture of the full range of soft skills needs unique to your company. If a deeper dive is indicated, there are assessments and tools available to assist L&D in gauging the soft skills strengths and deficits of current and prospective employees.

Learning Content: [Employee priorities](#) for training content reflect evolving and specific preferences. More than 90% of surveyed workers say they want training that is engaging and fun, easy to understand and complete, and relevant to their needs. Nearly as many want content that is applicable not only to their work, but also in their personal lives; almost half of the employees said that their workplace training was successful because it was presented in ways that made the material easy to digest and retain.

"Talent development professionals are most excited about digital learning solutions that can support quick takeaways, immediately solve needs, and provide great engaging content."

—n.ed.n

The L&D Takeaway: Soft skills training offers L&D unique opportunities to provide learning that is as applicable in employees' personal lives as it is in the workplace. Emphasizing that aspect of training can help strengthen motivation to learn. Leveraging video training, microlearning, and interactivity enhances engagement, streamlines time required for training, and makes learning easy to consume and retain.

Learning Delivery: Looking at the ways employees want to consume learning, [LinkedIn](#) found 68% reporting that they prefer to learn at work. Nearly six in 10 want training they can do at their own pace. About half say they prefer flexible learning that enables them to access information when and where needed, a finding that highlights the importance of multi-device access.

The L&D Takeaway: When L&D professionals were asked about their strategies for delivering training, they reported greater reliance on online solutions. Classroom training still tops the list of current learning delivery approaches, but significant increases in the use of online/eLearning were reported, along with a nearly 20-percentage-point uptick in use of external providers for those eLearning assets. Further, many talent developers expect learning budget increases, which they plan to use for eLearning expansion.

Motivation and engagement: A whopping 94% of employees told LinkedIn that an employer's investment in their career development would keep them at that company for a longer period, and that employer commitment was especially important to Millennials (87%).

Incentives, colleagues' recommendations, and opportunities for advancement are significant factors in motivating employees to spend time learning new skills. But the single greatest driver of employee interest in training, according to the LinkedIn study, is a worker's manager. Fifty-six percent of employees said they would devote more time to learning new skills if their managers directed them to specific modules or courses.

Manager direction is the single greatest driver of employee interest in skills training.

Providing easy ways for managers to recommend specific courses could help L&D improve employee participation and engagement in soft skills training.

The L&D Takeaway: For L&D, the manager's influence is a particularly revealing insight, and clear direction that providing easy ways to involve managers in recommending soft skills training could contribute to stronger employee participation and engagement.

(Media Partners has included a free **Soft Skills Quick Reference Tool for Managers** that can help in this area.)

Return on Investment: Certainly, logic suggests that building skills that are critical to gaining new customers, enhancing collaboration, driving innovation, and improving business results constitutes a good spend for organizations. In fact, studies by [Harvard University and others](#) report returns of more than 250 percent on soft skills training.

The L&D Takeaway: For L&D, crafting learning strategies to improve soft skills should be no different than designing any other training intervention. That is, measurement—of ROI, quality, and effectiveness—must be built in to the program structure.

[The Association for Talent Development](#) (ATD) says, “Soft skills programs should perform just like any other training program. If the learning is designed to be applied, it should be applied in the work environment with an action, activity, or behavior change that can be measured.” ATD and others provide detailed advice on measurement strategies for soft skills training.

Where to Find Engaging, High-Quality Soft Skills Training Solutions

The latest research into organizational learning makes it clear that, more than ever, employees know what and how they want to learn. And executives worldwide understand that soft skills training is crucial in shaping workforces with the capabilities to execute business strategies now and in coming years.

Increasingly, L&D and HR professionals charged with providing soft skills training are looking beyond their organizational walls for solutions that truly connect with learners and help change behavior.

Enter Media Partners—producer and provider of engaging, effective soft skills content, suitable for delivery in a number of different ways. Whether used in facilitator-led classroom training, individual online learning, mobile learning, or a blend of methods, our award-winning films, micro-learning content, and eLearning courses deliver consistent knowledge that’s memorable, fun, easy to understand, and as relevant off the job as it is in the workplace.



We believe in equipping learning leaders, facilitators, and learners with all they need to achieve a successful result. Our videos, along with accompanying workshop facilitation materials and self-study components, are created by a team of experienced filmmakers and instructional designers. We support this content with job aids, learning reinforcement tools, and free resources (like self-assessments, infographics, and activities).

When your organization’s executives turn to you for soft skills training—no matter what your definition of soft skills may be—Media Partners is the answer. Our experienced sales consultants provide personalized product and delivery recommendations, while our free full-length previews help

you narrow your search and ensure that you choose products that will generate the results your organization demands.

The list below is just a sample of the Media Partners programs available for today's most in-demand soft skills areas:

Film Title	Interpersonal Skills	Positive Attitude	Teamwork	Adaptability	Problem Solving	Ethics/Accountability	Management/Leadership
Who Was Your Favorite About? (a cartoon)	X		X				
Right Wrong to WIN WIN: (a cartoon)	X		X		X		
Communication Counts (a cartoon)	X		X				
Give 'em the Pickle (customer service)		X		X			
Who To Connect in Seconds or Less	X						
Can We Count on You	X	X				X	
Questions Every Leader Must Ask			X	X	X		X
The Unified Team	X		X				
Management Minutes: How to Build a High Performance Team			X				X
Taking Charge of Change				X	X		
Emotional Intelligence	X	X		X			X
Moment of Truth						X	
The Practical Coach							X

Utilize the attached **Soft Skills Quick Reference Tool** that shows specific behaviors that can be corrected or developed through different types of soft skills training.

[Connect with Media Partners](#) today and find the high-performance soft skills training solutions you need.

Media Partners produces and distributes premier people skills training films and learning content that help change employee behavior.

We help organizations of all types and sizes improve results through highly engaging soft skills training programs

We can help you, too.

Contact Us

1.800.408.5657

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Soft Skills Quick Reference Tool for Managers

Skills

Soft Skills Training May Be Needed If You See These Behaviors ...

Communication Skills

Verbal communication

Struggles to talk or get ideas across · Speaks too loudly or softly · Avoids conversations

Non-verbal communication

Uses closed body language (crossed arms, no eye contact) · Misses others' non-verbal cues

Written communication

Written projects include grammatical errors or misspellings, lack logical construction, etc.

Listening skills

Attention wanders · Ignores the remarks of others · Fails to listen to directions · Interrupts

Participates in team/group discussions

Hesitates to speak in a group/ resists asking questions or sharing opinions · Often dominates conversations

Provides/receives feedback effectively

Displays anger, defensiveness, distress when receiving feedback · Avoids or struggles with giving feedback

Public speaking

Struggles to write and/or deliver speeches · Displays difficulty speaking to groups

Presentation

Lacks proficiency with PowerPoint/other presentation tools · Delivers presentations poorly

Negotiation

Hesitates to negotiate terms for contracts/job aspects, etc. · Lacks ability to compromise

Influence/persuasion/motivation

Unable to gain buy-in of others when needed · Unable to motivate others

Professional and Work Skills

Organization

Unable to set/achieve goals · Work projects consistently lack oversight · Fails to adhere to schedules

Collaboration/teamwork

Does not encourage/support others · Hesitates to ask for/provide help · Hesitates to join in · Causes team conflict

Critical thinking

Lacks analytical skills · Does not question assumptions · Fails to consider varied perspectives

Problem solving/troubleshooting

Allows situations/issues to decline or become problematic · Unable to identify problem causes · Doesn't seek input from others

Decision making

Decisions reflect inadequate information gathering or poor risk vs benefit assessment · Reluctant to make decisions

Work ethic/dedication

Lacks initiative/self-motivation · Does not accept responsibility/accountability · Fails to meet goals/deadlines

Creativity/innovation

Lacks curiosity/imagination · Resists taking intelligent risks/trying new things · Doesn't question assumptions

Resilience/adaptability/flexibility

Low tolerance for uncertainty · Doesn't manage change effectively · Difficulty adjusting to unexpected circumstances

Time management

Fails to create/adhere to schedules · Misses deadlines · Chronically late · Inability to prioritize

Planning/setting/achieving goals

Lacks skills to set/achieve goals · Fails to plan/execute projects · Doesn't measure progress

Professional and Work Skills (cont'd)	
Stress management/work under pressure	Does not identify and minimize stressors · Takes on excessive extra work · Fails to ask for help when needed
Accountability/responsibility/dependability	Does not take ownership of behavior/work/results (makes excuses) · Fails to take initiative · Seen as unreliable
Integrity/ethics	Fails to show respect for others · Does not deliver on work expectations · Conduct does not reflect honesty/values
Assertiveness/initiative	Does not express ideas/opinions well · Does not work proactively/waits for direction · Unduly pushy/aggressive
Technology capabilities	Lacks proficiency with work technologies · Fails to regularly update existing technology skills
Continuous improvement/learning mindset	Does not actively pursue learning/development · Lacks knowledge-sharing skills/motivation · Turns down stretch assignments
Effectively manages difficult people/situations	Gets derailed by conflict with co-workers · Lacks ability to work through disagreements · Chooses inaction vs solving problems
Business etiquette	Does not understand/apply appropriate workplace behavior · Lacks consideration/respect for others
Diversity/inclusion	Lacks understanding/awareness of cultural and other differences · Fails to accept others/seek others' perspectives
Research skills	Lacks ability to vet information sources · Unable to define information needs · Does not actively seek new knowledge
Knowledge sharing	Doesn't find and share learning content or new processes/solutions with others · Hoards information to keep control
Customer service/relationship management	Unable to <i>read</i> or relate to customers · Does not identify customer needs/solve problems · Mishandles upset customers
Personal and Interpersonal Skills	
Self-awareness	Lacks cognizance of own strengths/weaknesses · Fails to reflect/learn from past behavior
Confidence	Demonstrates little acceptance of self/others · Lacks assertiveness · Fails to demonstrate positive <i>can do</i> attitude
Emotional intelligence/social skills	Difficulty interpreting situations/emotions accurately · Lacks mastery of most soft skills · Lacks self-control
Ability to manage stress	Fails to identify and minimize stressors · Chooses unhealthy responses to stress · Lacks work/life balance
Self-directed/lifelong learner	Displays little interest in learning/gaining new knowledge · Not motivated by growth opportunities, prefers status quo
Resourceful	Lacks creativity/imagination · Lacks desire/ability to solve problems · Fails to act with initiative · Lacks persistence
Courteous/polite/respectful	Fails to use etiquette · Does not demonstrate consideration for others · Lacks attentive listening skills
Open-minded/able to see others' perspectives	Lacks empathy · Lacks curiosity/does not ask questions · Unwilling to challenge biases and assumptions
Positive attitude/enthusiastic	Displays low energy/lack of enthusiasm · Lacks self-motivation · Seen by others as negative or disengaged
Integrity/honesty	Does not adhere to company values · Fails to act with integrity · Lacks respect for others
Empathy	Inability to relate to others emotionally · Rarely validates others' feelings · Does not display active/reflective listening
Relationship building	Focuses on self rather than others · Difficulty building trust · Lacks good communication skills · Fails to show respect
Networking	Difficulty/discomfort connecting with peers/colleagues · Rarely volunteers · Does not participate in professional groups
Conflict and issue management/resolution	Avoids conflict/contentious situations or issues · Lacks skills needed to find solutions or compromise
Effectively manages difficult people/situations	Lacks tact/diplomacy · Ignores/mishandles disagreements or conflict · Unable to set boundaries with difficult people

Leadership and Management Skills	
Team leadership/team building . face-to-face	Unable to motivate/direct teams or encourage collaboration · Lacks results orientation
Team leadership/team building . virtual/remote	Lacks technical/managerial skills to direct and support remote/virtual teams
Leadership/development of individuals	Fails to delegate · Individual reports lack direction/underperform · Irregular or inconsistent performance discussions
General management skills	Lacks ability to plan, organize work · Individual reports lack needed resources · Employees feel under- or micro-managed
Meeting leadership/management	Meetings lack agendas, produce no results · Too many/too few meetings held · Group discussions lack focus
Project leadership/management	Work projects lack plans · Project execution fails consistently · Deadlines are frequently missed
Strategic planning	Struggles to create business objectives · Fails to identify trends/opportunities/threats · Lacks enterprise focus
Coaching/mentoring	Fails to build rapport/trust with employees · Can't identify/address development needs · Unable to effectively transfer knowledge
Talent development/instruction/teaching	Lacks needs-assessment skills · Lacks teaching/training skills · Fails to measure development results
Prioritizing and delegating tasks/work	Sets unrealistic schedules · Fails to clarify objectives · Ineffective at assigning work
Problem solving	Situations/issues decline/become problematic · Problems/outcomes not fully defined · Diverse input not sought or considered
Analysis and evaluation	Difficulty identifying credible information sources · Fails to view other perspectives · Lacks assessment skills
Brainstorming and innovation leadership	Lacks skills to lead brainstorming sessions · Fails to drive new product/service development · Rejects <i>out-of-the-box</i> thinking
Conflict and issue management/resolution	Avoids conflict/contentious situations or issues · Unable to resolve or mediate issues · Overly authoritative approach to conflict
Diplomacy/tact	Fails to show respect for others · Unable to see other perspectives · Lacks cultural/diversity awareness
Performance management	Fails to set performance expectations · Lacks skills to provide feedback well · Avoids addressing problem performance
Crisis management	Unable to manage stress well · Lacks analytical skills · Low tolerance for uncertainty · Unable to bring calm to chaotic situations

Media Partners has hundreds of award-winning and engaging soft skills training films suitable for classroom training, individual online learning, and mobile learning. We cover the majority of the skills on this list.

Browse our products by topic, and see full-length previews, at
www.mediapartners.com.



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