2015

Soft Skills Perceived by Students and Employers as Relevant Employability Skills

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Abstract

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B.Ed., College of Arts, Science & Technology, now University of Technology, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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August 2015

Abstract

Local employers believe the lack of prerequisite soft skills is inhibiting the graduates

from a local community college from securing employment. The rationale of this

phenomenological study was to investigate the perceptions of students and employers

related to the soft skills needed to be successful in future employment. The theoretical

framework was based on Mezirow's transformational and Daloz's mentorship theories.

Individual face-to-face, semistructured interviews were used to gather data from 12

business and computer students and 7 employers (*N*=19) who were selected using

purposeful random sampling. The typewritten transcripts of participants' responses were

imported in MAXQDA 11, then were open coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

According to emergent findings among these 19 participants, for entry-level jobs,

communication was the most important and the most lacking soft skill. The

recommendations informed the creation of a mandatory 3-day professional development

training program, which was developed to help students enhance their soft skills before

entering their future careers. This study directly affects positive social change by

enhancing the quality of soft skills for future employees who enter the local work force.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband, Leabert, who has been an outstanding support emotionally, physically, and intellectually. To my daughters, Lee-Ann and Anna-Lee, two motivating factors for my completing this study; it is my hope that their academic achievements will be no less than their parents' achievements.

Acknowledgments

Life is a journey that cannot be experienced alone. Achievements as completing a doctoral degree are best celebrated with significant others who have been consistently present on this journey. This doctoral journey was a success primarily because of God's leading and sustenance. I owe gratitude to my husband, Leabert, for his unwavering support and motivation. Special thanks to my daughters, Lee-Ann and Anna-Lee, for exercising empathy and high expectations of me.

I specially acknowledge my doctoral committee: Dr. Olga Salnikova, Chairperson; Dr. Thomas Hadley, second committee member; and Dr. Kathleen Maury, university research reviewer (URR), for their expertise in research, scholarship, and project development. Dr. Salnikova has been an exemplary Chairperson and mentor; I want to acknowledge her consistent presence in class discussions, and her timely review of my work. Her dedication to me and my colleagues is admirable.

I thank my sister, Patrice Sukie, for providing the opportunity for me to conduct all my oral defense presentations free of cost, and for her general support. Thanks also to my dear friend, Yvette Castell, a motivator and spiritual support. To other colleagues who have given encouraging words and kept me motivated, I express my gratitude.

Finally, I also thank the Ministry of Education and the community college administration for granting permission to conduct the study, and to the participants, who voluntarily provided the data for the study. This collaborative effort has provided the opportunity to enhance the lives of adult learners. A solid foundation has been established to the help employees prepare for the workplace.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Employers recruit new employees on the basis of competencies in technical and nontechnical or soft skills. However, potential employees lack the required composite soft skills relevant for the particular work setting. The aim of the doctoral study was to conduct a qualitative project study on the perceptions of students and employers regarding the nature of soft skills that are relevant employability skills. The term soft skills, used interchangeably with nontechnical skills, is defined as the "interpersonal, human, people or behavioural skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace" (Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera as cited by De Villiers, 2010, p. 2). Soft skills are categorized as being related to human issues, such as communication, teamwork, leadership, conflict management, negotiation, professionalism, and ethics (Azim et al., 2010). However, technical skills, which are also referred to as hard skills, are defined by Litecky, Arnett, & Prabhakar (2004) as "those skills acquired through training and education or learned on the job and are specific to each work setting" (p. 69). Litecky et al. (2004) further noted programming skills as an example of a technical skill in the field of computing. A clear distinction exists between technical and soft skills.

Technical skills and soft skills are on the opposite sides of the skills spectrum, but both are relevant for employment. Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht, and Lee (2010) noted that soft skills are different from technical skills, although both sets of skills are complementary. The complement of soft and technical skills is known as employability skills. Shafie and Nayan (2010) defined employability skills as job readiness skills.

Identifying prospective employees who are competent in both soft and technical skills, particularly soft skills, creates a challenge for employers, and it is with this background that the phenomenological study was conducted.

One of the outcomes of education is to satisfy the employment needs of employers and graduates. Graduates seek to obtain lucrative employment opportunities and employers pursue suitable new recruits from the pool of graduates to fill job offerings. Community colleges, as part of the education system in Jamaica, enhance national development through the provision of higher level training in technical, professional, and managerial skills (Ministry of Education and Youth, Jamaica, 2004). Community colleges foster the employment opportunities of their students by integrating theoretical and practical training. The practical training component involves collaborating with employers to provide work experience for students. The work experience program aims at providing hands-on training in technical skills and helps students integrate other personal and professional skills relevant for employment. Even with the work experience component, the training opportunities provided by the community college prove inadequate for some employers. Further evidence of these conclusive statements is discussed in the rationale and the literature review.

The community college of interest to the project study needs to be deliberate about the training and assessment of students' development of soft skills. Currently, soft skills' training is a hidden curriculum. The community college targeted in the project study needs to influence the development of a curriculum that can provide focus on helping students to hone the relevant soft skills required by employers. Soft skills

training approach has the potential to foster students' acquisition and transference of relevant employability skills (Adams, 2007; Westray, 2008). It is the college's responsibility to identify and implement the appropriate soft skills training approach to help students with this transition.

Researchers have suggested that students have challenges transferring soft skills to the workplace. Herren (2008) stated that employees in the United States demonstrated much difficulty in transferring soft skills to their work settings. The problem of transference of soft skills to the work setting is also evident in the local setting of the study, as employers have opined about their disappointment with the employment readiness level of students of a local community college. Employers participating in the college's work experience program indicated that some of the students are technically competent, while some students' soft skills and competencies are far below expectations of prospective employers (J.M. Bonner-Clarke, June 7, 2012; I. Campbell, January 6, 2012; S. Daley-Smith, June 25, 2012). The students are able to carry out accounting and information technology related job skills, but lack basic punctuality and people skills. Taylor-Stone (2008) supported the employers' claims that Jamaica was producing workers who were knowledge-based than competency-based. Taylor-Stone referred to knowledge-based skills as the technical skills that demonstrate practical knowledge, and competency-based skills as combining critical thinking, and problem-solving with other technical skills. The lack of competency-based skills, which incorporate soft skills, is an integral factor hindering students from acquiring employment after graduation. Taylor-Stone noted that the supply of workers from tertiary institutions cannot suit the demands

of the workforce due to irrelevant curriculum. Identifying the soft skills needs and helping students to meet the requirements of employers is congruent to closing the soft skills gap.

The aim of the phenomenological doctoral study was to investigate the perceptions of students and employers regarding the nature of soft skills that are relevant employability skills. The results of the study fostered the development and implementation of a strategy that can address this problem (Appendix A). In Section 1, I address the definition of the problem and provide supporting evidence from research regarding the problem.

Definition of the Problem

Employers opined that prospective employees do not possess the full complement of employability skills relevant for the workplace, and employers are concerned that the deficiency in prospective employees is the soft skills competency. Keller, Parker, and Chan (2011) defined employability skills as an assorted array of knowledge, skills, and attributes that are relevant for the workplace. Employability skills include two categories of skills: technical and soft skills (Omar, Bakar, & Rashid, 2012; Robles, 2012). The category of skills known as soft skills or nontechnical skills, incorporate the ability to handle customers/guests inquiries, maintaining professional and ethical standards, being flexible, responsible, and tolerant (Jungsun, Erdem, Byun, & Jeong, 2011). Fundamentally, employees who possess soft skills work well with others, and display a positive work attitude in a professional work setting. Technical skills are also referred to as work knowledge, for example computer-programming skills (Nilsson, 2010). In the

current competitive job market, obtaining and retaining a job requires the right employability skills (Adams, 2007; Shafie & Nayan, 2010). Shafie and Nayan (2010) claimed that employers require not only technical skills; there is an outcry for work ethic, interpersonal skills, initiative, dependability, teamwork, self-management, and other soft skills. The lack of or need for improvement in the soft skills domain is a problem. In the local setting, some students graduate without developing the expected level of certain soft skills, such as self-management, work ethic, and professional attire. New recruits require an eclectic combination of relevant soft skills, which supports the need for a focused attention on the nature of soft skills college students should possess. In this phenomenological study, I addressed the problem of students' lack of prerequisite soft skills in the context of a community college in the Caribbean.

Community colleges provide relevant services in the education system. According to Porchea, Allen, Robbins, and Phelps (2010), community colleges play a role in the training of skilled workers. A typical community college in the Caribbean offers programs of study that facilitate the training of students who will qualify to fill technical or vocational skills-related career fields such as accounting, administrative assistance, customer service, marketing, and other careers. Some vocational careers demand a classification of vocational skills necessary for use in the specific trade or industry (Young & Mattucci, 2006). Employers require employees with technical and vocational training to fill the vocational careers because they are prepared for the job market (McIntosh, 2013). Anderson and Williams-Myers (1999) reiterated that although technical training is relevant, employers expect a multiskilled workforce. The problem

lies in developing the right combination of employability skills that will foster job performances. The problem intensifies because employers and students have a different view of the relevance of soft skills for employment.

There is a disparity in the perceptions of students and employers regarding the type of skills relevant for employment; students assume that acquisition of vocational skills defines readiness for the workforce, while employers are seeking to recruit employees who have well-rounded and highly competent vocational and nontechnical skills. The inconsistency of perceptions lies with the value placed on the nontechnical/soft skills. Many graduates from this local community college have been rejected for available jobs because of the unacceptable standards of their employability skills. Some students have not attained the expected competitive edge in their career fields. The evidence of these conclusive statements is discussed further in the rationale for the study.

Meeting the soft skills needs of the workforce must be of concern to educators and employers. Dutton (2012) reported that the U.S. Department of Labor has set aside $2 billion to boost community college students' career preparation, but questioned whether the teaching of soft skills will be incorporated. Dutton was concerned because managers in computing technology had reported that community college students lacked interpersonal skills, a key soft skill. Omar et al. (2012), from the Malaysian context, found that employability skills of community college students were moderately high; however, thinking, resource, and informational skills were below average. Omar et al. recommended that the colleges focus on helping students develop employability skills.

The scenario is similar in Latin America as the Economist Intelligence Unit (2009) reported that Latin American graduates were lacking in the relevant employability skills, both hard and soft skills. The solution to the lack of hard (technical) and soft skills lies in a collaborative effort with postsecondary institutions and world of work (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2009). Educational institutions and industries must make a concerted effort to allocate adequate resources to prepare students to meet job requirements.

In the context of the phenomenological doctoral study, the nature of soft skills that students and employers consider important for employment was explored. The primary focus was to address the gaps in the expectations of students and employers. The disparity in the goals of the education system and the expectations of employers contribute to the gaps that are evident in the students or graduates' poor performances at interviews and work experience opportunities. It is imperative that the educators and other agents responsible for the community college education system work collaboratively to minimize such related problems. Therefore, the purpose of the phenomenological study was to examine the soft skills perceived by students and employers as relevant employability skills for students at a community college in Jamaica.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The Jamaican workforce lacks the right combination of requisite employability skills that will be competitive in a global workplace. Boahin and Hofman (2013) explored, from the perspective of several countries including Jamaica, the impact of

competency-based training on the acquisition of employability skills across academic disciplines, students' background, and industry training and found that employers worldwide require employability skills. Similarly, McIntosh (2013) surveyed Jamaican employers/human resource managers island-wide and reported that while the technical and vocational training curricula needs a boost, 26% of the employers recommended a restructured curriculum that would inculcate positive work culture. Another 15% of the respondents supported the introduction of soft skills in the curriculum because individual were reporting for work without the right attitude (McIntosh, 2013). McIntosh reported that employers complained about lack of professionalism, telephone etiquette, and customer service skills. Bloomfield and Pinnock (n.d.) noted that there is an increasing skills gap existing between organizations' needs and the current workforce in the Caribbean and Latin America. Bloomfield and Pinnock sought answers to the extent to which a skills gap existed among career and technical education university graduates in Jamaica, and found that 83% of the employers expressed dissatisfaction with newly hired graduates, as they did not possess the basic soft skills.

For several years, many employers have complained that some students from the target community college have displayed lack of regard for their organizations' employment standards. The employers' responses to the community college students' competencies provide evidence that indicated the imperative need for soft skills training. Typical examples of the existence of the concerns of employers are examined in the subsequent paragraphs. The absence of research addressing skills gaps in the region as supported by Bloomfield and Pinnock (n.d.) has impacted the extent to which peer-

reviewed literature formed evidence of the problem at the local level. Due to the lack of published evidence of the problem at the local level, some of the evidence is based on personal communication from the perspectives of employers and graduates or students' experiences.

The human resource manager from an IBM branch in the region noted that the graduates who applied for employment could not be effective employees, as they were not prepared for the job interviews. For example, some graduates lacked the basic knowledge of the company and could not articulate the degree of their contribution to the growth and development of the company (S. Adman, personal communication, October 15, 2009). In another scenario, three graduates were interviewed for the position of customer service clerk at an optical outlet; the employers indicated that applicants were ill-prepared for the world of work (W. Yap, personal communication, January 26, 2012). Similarly, a member of the human resource team at the Registrar General's Department reported that one of the graduates would have been offered the job, but the applicant's interview skills did not complement the high technical competency (J. Wilson, personal communication, February 27, 2012). Another employer noted that the levels of graduates' competencies in communication, decision-making, problem solving skills, and initiative were inadequate (S. Patterson, personal communication, May 9, 2012).

An examination of the postinterview feedback from the students' perspective also indicated a similar trend. One student opined that the employer denied the employment opportunity because the employer detected an unwelcome aggression, which could intimidate colleagues and customers (M. Ming, personal communication, October 21,

2009). In another instance, the graduate noted that during the interview the employer

discarded the graduate's application documents because of signs of tardiness, poor career

management, and a lack of interest (K. Redwood, personal communication, January 27,

2012).

The problem of poor soft skills is evident in job interview scenarios as well as

work experience situations. Students who displayed inadequate soft skills during work

experience diminish the prospects of obtaining permanent employment through the

program. Students' withdrawals from the work experience program were voluntary or

mandatory due to poor dress code, a lack of respect to superiors, poor work attitude, and

attendance issues. For example, one student resigned from the work experience program

because of dissatisfaction with the underutilization of technical skills (N. Bowman,

personal communication, January 27, 2011). In another instance, the employer noted that

the student made rude remarks about the organization and the nature of work assigned (C.

Nelson, personal communication, January 27, 2011). Over the period 2003–2012, some

students have been disallowed from the work experience program to deal with dress code

issues. There is a gap in students' and employers' perception of job expectations.

Additionally, employers are expecting future employees to possess ethical decision-

making skills that meet societal standards. A scenario from the perspective of another

employer revealed a reluctance to facilitate on-the-job training for a student based on a

prior summer employment experience with the student; an experience in which the same

student displayed lack of respect, poor work attitude, and insubordination (I. Campbell,

personal communication, January 26, 2012). Although some students on work

experience may not display insubordinate attitudes toward the employers, other deficiencies were exhibited. For instance, the human resource manager at the Planning Institute of Jamaica, noted that a particular student's eagerness to learn and diligence were commendable, but that the student lacked a necessary soft skill, communication etiquette. The trainee displayed poor etiquette by inappropriate tone and interruptions of colleagues' personal conversations (S. Ward, personal communication, January 27, 2012).

Although I was concerned about the phenomenon at a local community college, the problem is not confined to that community college. The training manager at a prominent hotel in the region, after concluding work experience recruitment processes, expressed disappointment that the students were not prepared for the work environment. The manager's criticisms leveled at the students included timidity, impersonality, poor communication skills, limited rational thought process, a lack of enthusiasm, low self-confidence, and immaturity in dealing with hypothetical scenarios (S. Patterson, personal communication, May 9, 2012), noting that the interview panel consisted of the hotel's executive committee, along with the human resource team. The panel was impressed with 1 of 60 students interviewed. The 60 students were not only from the community college of interest in the project study, but were enrolled in several tertiary learning institutions in Jamaica. The manager suggested that the problem was a social issue across the island and has seen the trend widening each year (S. Patterson, personal communication, May 9, 2012). Evidently, the problem exists at the local community college, but is also of concern in the wider society.

Although these are only anecdotes from communication with potential employers, a pattern emerges. Consistent with the viewpoints of employers in the Jamaican context, Boahin and Hofman (2013) reinforced the need for employability skills such as "creativity, ICT skills, communication, problem solving, organizational skills, proactive, teamwork, and adaptability" (p. 394). Students' soft skills are not meeting the expectations of employers. The employers are disappointed with the lack of or poor levels of certain soft skills that students bring to their organizations. Based on the pattern of employers' responses, while there are common soft skills that employers expect employees to possess, there are certain skills relevant to particular job requirements. The employers are concerned that students' lack of awareness of employment expectations is becoming a social issue. Gordon-Brydson (2013) stated, the "problem of weaknesses in key employability skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, initiative, and creativity" exists with university graduates in Jamaica (p. 6). Gordon-Brydson concluded that, excluding technical competencies, employers valued communication skills and relevant work experience for effectiveness in a global market. To support the perspectives of the employers and the experiences of the students of the selected community college, I extended the discussion of the problem to include evidence from professional literature.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The problem of particular underdeveloped soft skills clearly exists on a wider scale. According to the Training and Workforce Development Sector Plan: Vision 2030 Jamaica (2009), Jamaica has not attained the optimal for competitiveness based on the

qualification profiles of its workforce. The task force postulated that the ideal Jamaican worker should possess among the basic educational foundation skills such as mathematics and English language, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, and excellent interpersonal skills.

Not only are soft skills critical in the economic context, but also Jamaica's Vision 2030 (as cited by the Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2009), highlighted the antisocial behavior and increased violence in schools as one of the challenges affecting society. One of the goals and outcomes of the education system is to establish a learning environment that is safe from violence, drugs, inequality, and a lack of respect for others. Evidence of the need for soft skills is corroborated in the Training and Workforce Development Sector Plan: Vision 2030 Jamaica; it was noted that Jamaica needs to focus on the training and development of traditional academic and technical skills in addition to skills that enable an individual to possess attributes such as initiative, problem solving skills, communication, and team spirit. As such, the recommendations for training dictate the necessity for attitude transformation programs and processes. The task force argued that employees with the soft skills noted above, will enjoy increased productivity, which will benefit the Jamaican society (Training and Workforce Development Sector Plan: Vision 2030 Jamaica, 2009). Although Taylor-Stone (2008) emphasized the need for the development of vocational skills, Jamaican tertiary institutions fail to provide other skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. Learning experiences in the Jamaican context need to help prepare students who are socially and technically competent.

The lack of preparedness of students for the 21st century job perquisites is not limited to the Jamaican context. As noted by Hargis (2011), students in Kentucky did not demonstrate proficiency in 21st century soft skills. The students' proficiency levels were inconsistent with those soft skills employers required. Hargis investigated whether career and technical education goals were meeting the employment needs of industries in Kentucky, and concluded that there is a compilation of common soft skills that employers in the region required, which students lacked. Similarly, Abraham and Karns (2009) were puzzled by the discrepancies between the competencies of employers and educational institutions, especially because preparing students for employment is the mission of schools. Business schools in the United States and Canada needed to include soft skills competencies in their curricula (Abraham & Karns, 2009). Employers in different territories are facing challenges identifying graduates with the relevant soft skills.

Employment traits are important to employers. During interview processes, employers seek out applicants who possess problem solving and decision-making skills, and work ethic (Green, Graybeal, & Madison, 2011). Green et al. (2011) concluded that employers valued a strong work ethic; therefore, compensating vibrant personalities for a poor work ethic is unacceptable. Likewise, Mitchell (2008) found that business educators highlighted communication skills and general ethics as significant skills for the workplace and recommended an integration of soft skills into the curriculum for business students. Employers in the Jamaican hotel industry agreed that soft skills such as communication, persuasion, and interpersonal were among the top 5 rated soft skills and

agreed that these soft skills were important when compared with hard or technical skills (Hinds-Smith, 2010). Hinds-Smith (2010) noted that while hotel recruitment processes sought managers with highly technical-based skills, most managers have been selected based on their possession of soft skills such as organizing and time management. One of the recommendations by Hinds-Smith was the need for educational institutions to incorporate and emphasize soft skills training and development in their curricula. The employers are expecting that new recruits possess soft skills prior to their employment, and therefore, expect that the learning institutions take responsibility for facilitating students' development of such skills.

The need for soft skills has no industry boundaries; typically, employers seek employees who portray social, interpersonal, communication, and other soft skills. Consequently, the concern is whether students and employers value the same soft skills for employment. Based on literature reviews and interactions with the stakeholders of the work experience program at this community college, students see the nature and relevance of soft skills differently from employers. Students are either unaware of the required skills or they undermine the importance of certain soft skills. In this study, I explored students' and employers' perspectives of soft skills and suggested an approach that will bridge the gaps in perceptions of students and employers regarding employability skills, particularly those considered soft.

Definitions

The following terms were used in the study; their meanings were defined based on their usage in the context of this study.

Communication skills: "Verbal, written, and listening skills that encourage effective interaction with a variety of individuals and groups to facilitate the gathering, integrating, and conveying of information" (Evers, Rush, & Berdrow, as cited in Arensdorf, 2009, p. 13).

Critical thinking skills: Higher order intellect skills that enable an individual to form, check, and evaluate beliefs and then to decide a person's actions (Brungardt, 2009, p. 11).

Decision-making skills: The ability to solve problems, getting correct information, and making the right decision (Kar, 2011, p. 38).

Employability skills: Those skills that encompass a wide array of skills, which are technical and nontechnical (generic) competencies (Ju, Zhang, & Pacha, 2012, p. 2). Jackson (2013) suggested that employability skills, also known as "professional, core, generic, key, and nontechnical skills," enhance the work-readiness of graduates (p. 272).

Generic skills: The skills that allow an individual to function in routine or changing work environments (Brown, as cited in Tribble, 2009, p. 10). Generic skills, according to Badcock, Pattison, and Harris (2010), incorporate critical thinking, problem solving, and interaction skills, in addition to written communication skills.

Hard skills: "Correspond to the skills in the technical and administrative categories (Weber et al., 2009, p. 354). Dixon et al. (2010) posited a similar definition of hard skills, but added that hard skills can be quantified and measured. Hard skills are also referred to as technical, generic, and vocational skills (Dixon et al., 2010; Hargis,

2011). To add to a better understanding of hard skills, Laker and Powell (2011) associated working with equipment and software as using hard skills.

Interpersonal skills: The skills that influence how one relates to other people by using human skills effectively; it involves effective communication, listening, and comprehension (Kar, 2011, p. 38).

Nontechnical skills: Those skills including ability to work with others, communication, problem solving, leading and inspiring others, and decision making (Brungardt, 2009, p. 36). According to Gokuladas (2010), communication is the top rated nontechnical skill; other skills categorized as nontechnical skills are creativity, problem solving, and teamwork, (Boahin & Hofman, 2013, p. 390); Jackson and Hancock (2010) included "initiative, enterprise, decision management, critical thinking, ethical behavior, emotional intelligence, and work ethic" (p. 58).

Problem solving skills: "The ability to find the cause of a problem, understanding it, and establishing a solution to it" (Kar, 2011, p. 42).

Self-management: The ability to conduct "assess self accurately, set personal goals, monitor progress, and exhibit self-control" (Bates & Phelan, 2002, p. 125).

Soft skills: "The nontechnical traits and behaviors needed for successful career navigation" (Klaus, 2007, p. 1). Klaus (2007) further suggested that soft skills include "personal, social, communication, and self-management behaviors" (p. 2). In addition to communication and social skills, Fogle (2011) cited "teaming skills" as a type of soft skill (p. 80). Additionally, Hargis (2011) classified "work ethic, critical thinking, and problem solving" skills as soft skills (p. 2).

Technical skills: The skills, which are also known as occupationally specific skills that workers must possess in order to function in specific occupations (Guy, Sitlington, Larsen, & Frank, 2008, p. 40). Omar et al. (2012) described technical skills as the skills needed to perform specific tasks (p. 473). Hargis (2011) stated that technical skills are also known as hard skills, which are defined as "job specific tasks directly necessary for successful completion of the job," for example, electricity, robotics, and computer technology (p. 1).

Teamwork skills: Teamwork skills refer to the ability to work with others from diverse backgrounds (Griffin & Annulis, 2013; Raftopoulous, Coetzee, & Visser, 2009, p. 120).

Traditional students: Traditional students are within the age range of 18 and 24 years and enrolled in fulltime studies at the college level (Arnaud, 2013, p. 20).

Vocational skills: The skills that refer to the technical, hands-on, job-specific skills (Davis, 2009). Skills taught in vocational education that focus on 'know-how or practical expertise' rather than theoretical knowledge; vocational skills are related to a trade, for example, catering, carpentry, and electrical engineering (European Commission, 2010; Mucunguzi, 2013).

Work ethic: The disposition an individual displays toward work, which includes attendance, punctuality, patience, attitude, dependability, business etiquette, and maturity (Heimler, 2010, p. 37).

Significance

The significance of the study is based on its impact on the key stakeholders in the local setting. The attention to soft skills required for successful career development, and by extension, an improved society is of primary importance in this study. The study enhances research literature on the nature and relevance of soft skills as employability skills for community college students. In general, stakeholders must become aware of the status of the college in its preparation of students for employment; the key stakeholders include college faculty, students, employers, and governing bodies.

Studying the problem of soft skills as relevant for employment introduced college faculty to the nature of soft skills that employers demand from prospective employees. When faculty become aware of the soft skills that employers need, there is an understanding of the need to incorporate soft skills training in instructions and/or the need to revise the curriculum and instructions to foster students' development of soft skills. Therefore, faculty will see the need to teach soft skills to students.

The students and/or college graduates will become aware of the skills that prospective employers consider relevant for employment. The students will understand the importance of developing soft skills throughout learning experiences. The students' awareness of the relevant soft skills in the specific industry could improve the employment opportunities for students and/or graduates.

One of the objectives of college education is the preparatory work of nurturing students to hone employability skills to function in the workplace. Knowledge of what employers (human resource managers, training managers, line managers, supervisors, and

other managers) require for recruitment will facilitate the goal of college education. Employers will be able to communicate the nature of soft skills that colleges should be helping students to develop. Employers will be able to articulate the relevant soft skills desired in prospective employees.

The governing bodies affecting the local educational setting include the Ministry of Education, Council of Community College of Jamaica (CCCJ), and University Council of Jamaica (UCJ). The Ministry of Education is the government arm of the education system in Jamaica that monitors and funds public educational institutions. The Ministry of Education will be able to measure the effectiveness of the college's preparation of students for the job market and would also determine the need for investing additional resources in community college education.

The CCCJ is the governing body under which community colleges operate in Jamaica. One of the core responsibilities of the CCCJ is to design and revise curricula for community colleges. Therefore, based on the findings of the study, I would inform the CCCJ of the necessity of program design and/or revision to incorporate soft skills.

The UCJ is the accrediting body for colleges and universities in the region. An investigation of the nature of soft skills as employability skills as perceived by students and employers would become evidence of the college's involvement in institutional research. Additionally, the accrediting body will understand the rationale for the programs of study offered by the college. With adequate information on the program offerings, instructional methods, and evaluation standards, the UCJ would validate the accreditation of the college's programs of study.

The study is significant to college faculty, students, and employers. The educators and students can use the results to identify the most desirable employability skills required by employers; educators can use the results of the study to develop and implement innovative techniques that integrate soft skills in the technical courses, and/or the development of an employability training program. The overriding benefit of the study is to improve the social and economic status of the graduates of a local community college. Additionally, any improvement in employability will trigger further improvements in the graduates' communities and society in general.

Guiding/Research Question

Based on the concerns of employers and students in relation to the level of employability of graduates from a local community college, students need to focus attention not just on the acquisition of technical career skills, but also on the accompanying soft skills. The above concerns result in the need for an investigation of the perception of students and employers regarding the nature of soft skills as necessary employability skills. I did not discuss an exhaustive list of soft skills, but I identified the top 10 relevant soft skills that students and employers perceive to be applicable for students of the community college. The key stakeholders to be selected as participants are students and employers.

To explore the perceptions of the participants regarding the nature of soft skills needs for employability, the phenomenological study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the most important soft skills students perceive as relevant employability skills?

2. What are the most important soft skills employers perceive as relevant in their selection and recruitment processes?

3. What are the relevant soft skills for employment that students and employers perceive that community college students possess?

4. How do students and employers' perceptions of relevant soft skills for employment differ?

5. What can the community college do to help students develop relevant soft skills?

To this point in Section 1, I provided a description of the direction of the study; in the subsequent subdivision, I present an informed discussion on the perspectives of other scholars on the relevant soft skills for employment. Throughout the following subsection, I also discuss the theoretical framework of the study, and research related to the problem.

Review of the Literature

The peer-reviewed and scholarly literature analyzed in this section relates to the purpose of the study and includes a review of the theoretical framework, employability skills, relevance of soft skills, soft skill sets, and trends in higher education institutions and industries regarding soft skills valued by employers. The information represents different perspectives obtained by using online libraries of Walden University, Northern Caribbean University, and printed texts. The database searches employed for the

literature review included, but were not limited to, EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost Education Research Complete, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, ProQuest ABI/INFORM Complete New Platform, Sage Premier, Emerald Management Plus, and Google Scholar using key words and phrases. The key terms included *adult learning theories, transformational learning, mentorship, employability, technical and nontechnical skills, generic skills, soft skills, work ethic, self-management, teamwork, sociability, self-confidence, negotiation skills, communication skills, critical thinking, communication skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills, and decision-making skills*. The use of connected key words using Boolean operator "and," "or," and "not" limited, extended, and narrowed the searches.

Community colleges cater to adult learners. The application of adult learning theories in the teaching-learning process must be a feature in assisting students in the development and transference of the relevant skills in workplace environments. The transformational learning and mentorship theoretical framework were applicable to this study.

Theoretical Framework

The transformational learning theory, as proposed by Mezirow's (1996) and Daloz's (1999) contribution on mentorship formed the theoretical framework for the project study. As an adult educator, I initiated this investigation as a means of creating positive changes in the lives of community college adult learners through improved employment opportunities. According to Galbraith (2004), good teachers of adults are constantly aware of the impact the teaching process has on their learners. The two

theories include the right combinations to enhance professional development of adult learners and contribute to social change.

Transformational learning theory. The essential theme of transformational learning is that learning evokes changes in the adult's perception of the world and himself or herself; then applies the concepts as learning experiences (Hodges, 2010; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Transformational learning is the brainchild of Mezirow (1996), who purported that "learning is the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 116). The principles of practice in transformational learning have the capacity to influence the lives of unskilled students. For example, students who do not qualify for entry into universities and 4-year degree colleges accept entry into community colleges as alternative means of creating the opportunity to transform lives, communities, and society.

According to the transformational learning approach, learners use life experiences to inform the changes that they need to function in the workplace. As Harbison (2005) posited, the adult educators use learners' experiences to create curriculum related to real life that produces transformational learning outcomes. Community colleges can apply the 10 steps proposed by Mezirow's transformative learning theory to the acquisition and development of soft skills by community college students (Merriam et al., 2007). Merriam et al. (2007) concluded that implicit in transformative learning theory is the idea that the individual learner experiences development and growth; applied to learners,

transformational learning fosters the acquisition of knowledge and skills that help develop self-confidence that leads to transformed lives.

Building on the contributions of Merriam and Caffarella (as cited in Madsen, 2009) and Merriam et al. (2007), the steps of the study, particularly, the data collection process are clearly stated: The first step highlights the crisis in life (in the context of the study, poor performances in external examinations at high school, inability to acquire employment, and/or rejection from 4-year colleges and universities). The second step involves self-examination; at this stage, the individual takes an introspective look at the future (professionally and personally). The process leads to the third step, which is an evaluation of a person's assumptions. The fourth step relates to the experiences of others who have had similar experiences, but subsequently undergo transformation and change. The learner thinks about community college graduates who have excelled in diverse career fields. At the fifth step, the learner generates possibilities to effect change; this stage leads to the learner establishing a strategy or plan of action. The seventh stage is the determination of the learner to acquire the skills and knowledge to effectuate the plan of action. At Stage 8, the learner becomes familiar with new roles and/or behaviors that he or she needs to adopt. These behaviors and roles include social and personal quality skills. As the learner explores relevant soft skills, he or she develops self-confidence in these new roles or relationships, which Mezirow (1996) defined as the ninth step. The final step describes the process for the learner to integrate these ways of seeing himself or herself into his or her real life.

Transformational learning can take place in adult learners in varied environments, although the evidence has not been documented in some regions. As Madsen (2009) declared, the transformational learning theory applies to diverse environments, except for the Middle East. Similarly, the theory has not been applied to the community college setting in Jamaica. However, as outlined above, the transformational learning theory can be applied to the project study and context.

Mentorship theory. In addition to Mezirow's (1996) transformational learning theory, I integrated the mentorship perspective postulated by Daloz (1999). Daloz defined a mentor as anyone concerned with guiding learners in the process of their development in a changing environment, where the effective mentor introduces the learner to the new environment. The mentor interprets the environment and coaches the learner how to function in his or her new environment (Daloz). Daloz (1999) stated that a mentor could be an educator; in this study, the concept of a mentor includes the educator, as well as the employer or work experience supervisor. The development of soft skills will become real to learners when they interact with their mentors. The learner identifies the relevance of learning and develops new generic skills and attitudes to meet employers' expectations, which ties in with the self-directed learning approach expected of adult learners (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Daloz assumed that the mentor provides learning experiences in a nonthreatening manner and helps the learner's transition to the new and the wider world.

The theoretical framework outlined above, as purported by Mezirow (1996) and Daloz (1999), was appropriate for the nature of the study. The two theories present an

amalgamation of perspectives appropriate for the collection of relevant data and recommendations for changes that can influence the students' level of soft skills. With the theoretical framework established, the views of other research on the problem of soft skills as relevant employability skills are imminent.

Research Related to the Problem

Community colleges remain relevant, particularly as the services offered meet skill and academic needs of the students through the provision of viable training options for vocational skill development, job training, and community-based programs. The students must develop and adopt the skills required by the workforce. Students' awareness of the relevance and nature of soft skills requirements directly impacts employability.

Relevance of soft skills as employability skills. Employability skills are technical and nontechnical competences that are fundamental requirements for employment in the current competitive job market. Overtoom (2000) defined employability skills as the "transferable core skill groups that represent essential functional and enabling knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the 21st century workplace" (p. 2). Keller et al. (2011) claimed that employability skills are a classification of attributes and skills, in which attributes speak to nonskill-related behaviors and attitudes, while skills refer to the ability to carry out a technical task. Employability skills encompass a wide array of skills that include technical and nontechnical (generic) competencies. For the purpose of the study, the nontechnical (generic) category of employability skills was termed soft skills.

The definitions of soft skills identified in literature were similar. Klaus (2007) defined soft skills as "personal, social, communication, and self-control behaviors" (p.2). Yaacoub, Husseini, and Choueiki (2011) posited that soft skills are relative, based on the domain in which the skills are used and are difficult to define. However, Tribble (2009) defined soft skills as those competencies related to the people skills that foster good working relations with others as a team player in order to satisfy customers. There are many subsets of soft skills. Tribble claimed that skills related to self-improvement, interpersonal relations, communications, career preparation, leadership, teamwork, self-discipline, self-confidence, good work ethic, and showing courtesy are viewed as soft skills. Additionally, Stumpf (2007) reported that examples of soft skills include "honesty, team building, problem solving, critical thinking, and communication skills" (p. 7). However, soft skills are not limited to those indicated by Stumpf and Tribble; other authors have reiterated additional competences that are categorized as soft skills. Brungardt (2009) defined soft skills as nontechnical skills that are based on personal competencies and interpersonal skills. Klaus also added that soft skills guide individuals to use technical skills and factual knowledge effectively, and described these traits such as self-awareness, trustworthiness, self-control, integrity, and problem solving. Similarly, Hargis (2011) described the term soft skills as communication, teamwork, and other interpersonal skills that promote improvement in job performances. Researchers agreed that soft skills are nontechnical in nature, therefore, throughout this study, I adopted a similar meaning to the term soft skills.

Higher education institutions around the world are acknowledging that soft skills are the distinctions between obtaining and retaining jobs. Technological advancements and globalization prompt the need for higher levels of competence in the workforce. The competitive nature of the job market makes this need a priority (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2009; Mitchell, 2008).

Based on current research, I extrapolated from other scholars that higher education graduates' need for soft skills has increased with the changing demands of employers, although, in some instances, the graduates do not possess the soft skills relevant to the work place. Kazilan, Hamzah, and Bakar (2009) found that Malaysian students in vocational training centers had average levels of soft skills; based on a sample of 436 final year students across the country, the results indicated a significant difference in employability skills and area of specialization. Employers expressed concern about recruiting employees who lacked the requisite soft skills. Bhanot (2009) cited an example where the human resource manager refused to recruit an individual who displayed impolite telephone manners. Employers are reluctant to incur additional expenses to train unprepared graduates to fill jobs and, therefore, prefer employees with experience and soft skills (Rao et al., 2011). Although education institutions' role is to produce graduates ready for employment, research claimed that employers need to shoulder some of the responsibility (Maxwell, Scott, Macfarlane, & Williamson, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). College and university graduates need to possess relevant soft skills because there is no guarantee that employers will assume the responsibility of providing such training.

While scholars have found that some higher education graduates lack soft skills, there are some educators who integrate the skills in regular courses. However, the graduates may require additional training to function effectively on the job (Bennett, 2006; Heimler, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). Heimler (2010) opined that even with the emerging trend that soft skills are relevant for successful job retention and career advancement, some graduates believe additional soft skills' training is irrelevant. Orner (2009) had a similar experience; the subjects participated in soft skill training programs, but the programs did not positively influence the participants' interest in acquiring soft skills. On the contrary, Jackson's (2013) investigated students' perceptions of the importance of employability skills provision in undergraduate business programs, and concluded that students valued skill development in communication and teamwork. In other separate cases, Bennett (2006), and Mitchell (2008) noted that there are significant differences in the perception of whether soft skills affect the success in the workforce, although business educators strongly recommended soft skills development for students. Unless students understand the value employers place on soft skills as work-related competencies, the students will not appreciate the need to develop soft skills. The students need life experiences to inform a change of attitude toward soft skills training.

The discussions on the relevance of additional soft skills training present divergent views; not all scholars support the need for additional training. Arensdorf (2009) found that not all training programs would reflect an improvement in the soft skills of students. However, due to the low supervisory level experienced in Arensdorf's study, further study to validate findings was recommended. Training is only one of the

approaches to skill development, and its effectiveness may be dependent on other factors that may influence the training process.

The value of training for generic skill development is so critical to professional and personal growth, that it is considered relevant for students and faculty. In Pukelis and Pileicikiene (2010), the rationale for the development of generic skills of students in Lithuanian universities and colleges to meet the labor market needs was investigated; the conclusions from the investigation of 1,021 participants, indicated that generic skills are important for employment, sustainable employment, improved personal security, and self-actualization. Pukelis and Pileicikiene claimed that generic skills enhance the development of a democratic society. Additionally, Stoner and Milner (2010) agreed that both teachers and students should develop generic skills in higher education. Although there is no guarantee that all training programs will result in improvement of students' soft skills, researchers suggested that employers value soft skills as relevant employability skills. It is imperative that college graduates become cognizant of and encourage other students to acquire the relevant soft skills. Not all employers will assume the responsibilities to train employees in soft skills, therefore, education institutions and students must undertake the responsibilities of such skill development. However, the students and faculty must become familiar with the nature of soft skills employers expect.

Nature of soft skills valued by employers. Although it is evident that soft skills are relevant employability skills for college graduates to possess, knowing exactly what an employer means by soft skills creates another concern to graduates. Students and

employers have differing views of what constitute relevant soft skills; similarly, students and employers also view the degree of importance of some soft skills from different perspectives. Additionally, the nature of soft skills requirements depends on the industry (Pace, 2011). Nevertheless, several relevant soft skills emerged in literature.

There is a wide array of soft skills employers expect from potential employees. To relate the problem specifically to the learning environment, the investigation was not limited to any specific soft skills, but focused on the nature of soft skills that students and employers perceive to be relevant employability skills. Consequently, a wider cross section of relevant soft skills that students and employers consider important employability skills was derived. Soft skills are interrelated with employability, and are relevant in the field of business and computer industries. The subsequent paragraphs provide a detailed exploration of the top 10 commonly noted soft skills related to jobs in the fields of business and computer technology.

Communication skills. Communication skills refer to the ability to actively listen, to communicate in oral, written, and nonverbal forms (Klein, 2009). Fogle (2011), as supported by Griffin (2012), reported that employers stated that business graduates from a particular institution lacked soft skills, including communication skills. Westray (2008) conveyed that the employers' criticisms continue to be leveled against community colleges for the inability to keep pace with key soft skills–teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, and communication skills, which were deemed the most deficient skills. Ju et al. (2012) emphasized the need for schools to provide adequate training for students in basic literacy skills, mathematics, and communication skills. Stovall and Stovall

(2009) concurred with Yaacoub et al. (2011) that communication skill is a necessary skill for effective performance in modern work environments. Other researchers agreed that in a global competitive market with its technological advancements, management skills, and diverse cultures, employees must be fully equipped with excellent communication, problem solving, and critical thinking skills (Orner, 2009; Shafie & Nayan, 2010).

Critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are referred to as the ability to think creatively to identify key concepts, generate solutions to problems, and to make decisions (Heimler, 2010). Although critical thinking skills represent one of the skills that employers consider during the recruitment process, students experience challenges developing the ability to think critically. Heimler (2010) reported that college graduates were not certain about training in critical thinking skills; however, faculty and human resource managers agreed that graduates needed additional training in critical thinking.

Decision-making skills. Shafie and Nayan (2010) highlighted decision-making skills among other skills as an important category of employability skills. Kazilan et al. (2009) supported the idea that decision-making, a nontechnical skill, recorded the highest mean in the group of thinking skills. Additionally, Rivera and Schaefer (2009) advocated for career development programs to guide students in the development of decision making skills.

Interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills, as defined by Heimler (2010), incorporates the necessary skills that allow an individual to work with others, which include customer service, negotiation, and dealing with diversity of cultures and views. The importance of interpersonal skills on the job is emphasized in the selection of top

management as well as lower level employees. Klein (2009) found that interpersonal skills were strongly correlated with higher levels of job complexity, and therefore, concluded that organization representative must demonstrate satisfactory level of interpersonal skills to meet customers' needs. Heimler also concluded that students, faculty, and human resource managers agreed that interpersonal skills are important for job recruitment. However, Heimler pinpointed the disparity in perspectives; unlike faculty and human resource managers, graduate saw no necessity for additional training in interpersonal skills.

Problem solving skills. Problem solving skills are demonstrated in the comprehensive process of identifying a problem, generating and implementing solutions, and the assessment of the results (Arensdorf, 2009). In support of Arensdorf, Bujham-Maragh, (2010) agreed that students and employers consider problem solving skills as important employability skills. Harris and Rogers (2008) purported that problem solving and other soft skills should begin at an early age and encouraged at postsecondary level. Harris and Rogers reported that problem solving skills were the second highest ranked soft skills that technology students needed for successful postsecondary level, as these skills were integral to careers in technology and engineering. Mason, Williams, and Cranmer (2009) corroborated that problem solving skills represented one of the generic skills that enhance graduates' employability, and further noted that this perspective was a growing trend in higher education.

Self-management. Self-management is an individual's ability to "assess self accurately, set personal goals, monitor progress, and exhibit self-control" (Bates and

Phelan, 2002, p. 125). The definition employed in the study is the ability for an individual to control emotions, to plan and execute tasks or goals in an established time frame, as well as, the ability to plan and execute job-related activities (interviews and assigned tasks). Interestingly, Shafie and Nayan (2010) reported that participants ranked self-management as the third most important employability skill. Mitchell (2008) also concluded that time management and organization skills, components of self-management, were ranked above other soft skills in terms of importance.

Teamwork. Teamwork, as defined by Raftopoulos, Coetzee, and Visser (2009) is the ability to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Teamwork encompasses flexibility, adaptability, cooperativeness, and respectfulness. Employers are seeking to recruit individuals who pay due attention to relations with peers and superiors. The tone of the conversations and body language are indicative of the level of respect that one has for self and others. According to Ju et al. (2012), showing respect for others, among other skills, was deemed one of four important skills identified as relevant for employment. Raftopoulos et al. concluded that students and employers noted the ability to work with others effectively is an important work-readiness skill and concurred with Falconer and Pettigrew (2003) that effective teamwork is among the top 10 work-readiness skills as noted by other authors, mentioned in their study.

Teamwork is synonymous to working collaboratively in groups, and as Dupin-Bryant (2008) expressed, the business world is nonexistent without groups, therefore, the use of groups in educational settings should not only build collaborative skills, but also fosters other positive interpersonal relationships and skills. Robles (2012) concluded that

among the top 10 soft skills, teamwork was the most important to business executives. According to Robles, business executives want to recruit employees who will add value to the workplace with a composite of soft skills and who will embrace teamwork.

Work ethic. Adams (2007) postulated that work ethic is initiative behavior, interpersonal skills, and dependability. While Heimler (2010), defined work ethic as an individual's disposition toward work and includes attendance, punctuality, motivation, the ability to meet deadlines, patience, attitude, and dependability. Additionally, the characteristics of work ethic include professionalism (maturity and business etiquette), realistic expectations of job requirements, and career advancement" (p.37). In the context of the study, work ethic is defined as an individual's attitude toward work, which includes attendance, punctuality, dress code, responsibility, and accountability, (Heimler, 2010).

Based on the findings of the study conducted by Adams (2007), work ethic is related to employability skills, and significantly improved the students' workplace knowledge and attitude. Adams further supported the implementation of an employability skills curriculum, which involves work ethic, as a potential of filling the gap of workplace expectations in areas such as independence, initiative, and interpersonal skills. Similarly, Ju et al. (2012) suggested work ethic as one of the five most important employability skills that high school graduates should possess. Other studies (Adams, 2007; Heimler, 2010; Robles, 2012) supported the concept that work ethic was one of the key soft skills students required for employment. Additionally, Ju et al. reiterated that the 'ability to be on time' was a highly recommended work ethic skill.

Heimler (2010) found that while graduates reported that work ethic and career advancement had a weak relationship, faculty and human resource managers agreed that work ethic is a preferred skill for job performance. Like Heimler, Harris and Rogers (2008) contended that work ethic, among other competencies, are desired attributes that engineering technology students possess before pursuing postsecondary education. Heimler also posited that it was necessary for students developed proper work ethic from an early age, as this skill was difficult to modify in older years.

Throughout this literature review, an array of skills that are deemed relevant for successful employment opportunities have been identified and defined. These skills are either technical or nontechnical. Based on the literature review, I designed Figure 1 to summarize the overall concepts of employability skills.

Figure 1. Categories of employability skills. Summary of the caterogies of employability skills as presented in the literature review. Employability skills include technical and non-technical skills. Non-technical skills are refered to as soft skills.
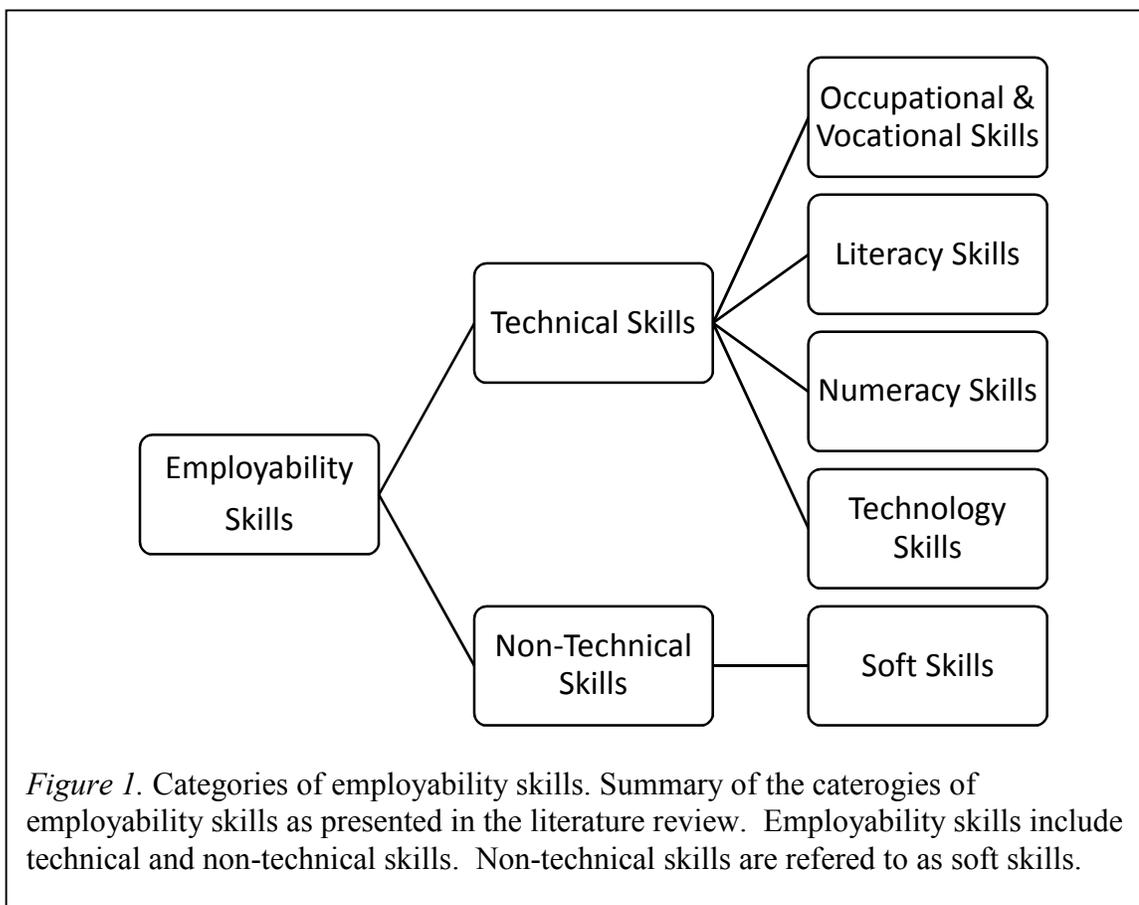
Figure 1 outlines a graphic presentation of the two categories of employability skills–technical and nontechnical skills. As depicted in Figure 1, technical and nontechnical skills can be further categorized into other subsets. The techinical skills inlcude occupational and vocational, literacy, numeracy, and technology skills. The subset of nontechnical skills is classified as soft skills. The array of soft skills are summarized in Table 1 that appears later in the project study.

Employability skills are stated in terms of technical and nontechnical skills. The technical skills are occupational or vocational, technology, literacy, and numeracy skills; however, nontechnical skills are soft skills. The soft skills are further subdivided into an array of other skills, as summarized in the self-designed Table 1, which employers believed that competent employees possessed and modeled in combination with other technical skills. Table 1 depicts a self-designed synopsis of the common subsets of soft skills as supported by this literature review.

Table 1

Key Soft Skills Identified in Literature

Key Soft Skills Identified in Literature	Clarification of Soft Skills	Author(s)
Communication	Oral, written, and nonverbal means of processing and sharing information.	Evers, Rush, and Berdrow, (as cited in Arensdorf (2009), and Klein (2009)
Critical thinking	Ability to evaluate ideas–self-criticism, constructive critique of others' ideas.	Brungardt (2009) and Heimler (2010)
Decision-making	Using accurate information to determine action.	Kar (2011)
Interpersonal	Working and/or interacting well with others.	Adams (2007), Heimler (2010), and Kar (2011)
Negotiation	Using power tactics to arrive at agreement or compromise; cooperating with others.	Bates and Phelan (2002)
Problem solving	Generating and implementing solutions to problems.	Arensdorf (2009) and Kar (2011)
Self-confidence	Belief in one's competencies and/or abilities; lack of self-doubt.	Fernández-Santander, García-García, Sáez-Pizarro, and Terrón-López (2012)
Self-management	Ability to plan, execute, and monitor one's activities and goals.	Bates and Phelan (2002) and Brown, Hillier, and Warren (2010)
Teamwork	Ability to work well in groups or teams; collaborating with others.	Mitchell (2008) and Raftopoulous et al. (2009)
Work ethic	Modeling professionalism and business etiquette.	Raftopoulos et al. (2009) and Heimler (2010)

Table 1 is a graphic presentation of the array of 10 soft skills that are relevant

employability skills; the highlighted soft skills were derived from the literature review.

The soft skills revealed in the literature review are varied; the top 10 common subsets

include problem solving, decision making, self-management, work ethic, negotiation,

interpersonal, critical thinking, teamwork, self-confidence, and communication skills.

The 10 skills are by no means exhaustive subsets of soft skills; however, the list

represents the most prevalent skills noted by employers and students in current literature.

Countries around the world address the social and economic needs of their

citizens by depending on employment opportunities. Downes (2007) and Catanzaro

(2010) agreed that the development of human resources is a means of national

development for Caribbean countries, and should receive emphasis. Catanzaro noted an

observed difference in the distribution between the job requirements and the knowledge

and skills of the labor force. Catanzaro also discussed the significant skill deficiency and

the difficulty of employers to recruit workers whose work ethic, attitude, and technical

skills need improvement. After investigating the employability of graduates based on a

comparison between Great Britain and Netherlands' educational contexts, Tholen (2014)

reported that governments debate centers around increasing employability of the

workforce because of the importance it plays in public and political realms. Tholen noted

that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) assigned

responsibility to the government to ensure that opportunities are available for the

development of labor market skills, especially at the higher education level. As Tholen

noted, 'Human capital accumulation is an important determinant of individuals' earning

capacity and employment prospects, and therefore, plays an important role in determining the level and distribution of income in society' (p. 3).

The need for soft skills is relevant to the success of higher education graduates. Similar to Kazilan et al. (2009), Pukelis and Pileicikiene (2010), and Mitchell (2008) argued that higher education institutions design programs of study that will meet the needs of labor force effectively; soft skills are to be included in those programs. Kazilan et al. further recommended that industries collaborate with technical and vocational educational departments to produce higher quality employees. Therefore, employers and education institutions must corroborate efforts to evaluate the degree to which students possess the relevant soft employability skills prior to graduation.

As indicated in the review of related literature, employers place value on the possession of soft skills. Evidently, there are numerous soft skills that prepare students for employment and career prospects; in this project study, I explored the nature of soft skills perceived by employers and students as relevant to students of a local community college. Based on the review of literature, employers are keen on the quality of skills prospective employees possess; therefore, graduates are expected to be competent in vocational and nontechnical skills. The results of the literature review inform the recommendation for a project as the solution to the problem examined, because I have not yet conducted the data collection process. However, I consider the implications of the solution as an integral part of the discussion.

Implications

The literature review, thus far, supports the possible project direction, and based on the findings I suggest an action plan that involves the development of a pilot soft skills course or a model for integrating the soft skills in existing courses. If a pilot soft skills course were implemented, it would mean that community college students would be required to pursue an additional course of study in addition to vocational courses. A recommendation that the Council of Community College of Jamaica (CCCJ) implement the pilot soft skills course would also be provided; a recommendation of this nature could lead to changes in course requirements and requisites for ratification and certification of graduates. Community college instructors and other adult educators in the wider education arena would also need to address the need to integrate soft skills in curriculum and instruction strategies. There would need to be deliberate collaboration with students and employers in the preparation of prospective employees who will function in a global and competitive job market. The current work experience program coordinated by the college and sanctioned by CCCJ and University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) would need to incorporate the evaluation of soft skills. If the pilot soft skills course or the integrated program is effective, other community colleges and universities in the region may also implement a similar course.

Summary

In this phenomenological study I investigated the perceptions of students and employers of the nature of soft skills as relevant employability skills that students or graduates of a local community college need to possess to acquire employment. The

literature supports the need for a wide array of soft skills; employers in different career fields reported that soft skills are just as important as vocational skills. The transformational learning theory as proposed by Mezirow (1996), in collaboration with the Daloz's (1999) mentorship approach, was applied to the study. The two theories have the potential to influence changes in adult learners' perceptions of the world and support how the adult learner fits in his or her view of the world.

The study employed a qualitative approach to gather data to respond to the planned research questions. The procedures that were employed in the study are discussed in the Section 2 of this project study. Section 2 outlines the qualitative research design and approach. The section includes the research approach and justification for the approach, the description of the participations, procedures for accessing the site and ethical considerations. Section 2 also provides the procedures for data collection and analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

A gap exists in the students' and employers' perceptions of the nature of soft skills that are relevant employability skills. Some students of the community college believe that employers seek to recruit individuals who possess the required technical and vocational skills. However, employers seek recruits who are technically competent with a repertoire of relevant soft skills. According to Yow (2010), business sector employers expected new recruits to possess technology skills–Microsoft Office, E-mail, and Internet–as well as soft skills such as communication, punctuality, commitment, interpersonal skills, and work ethic.

Based on employers' evaluations of the community college students and graduates, some students lack some soft skills and/or need improvement in other relevant soft skills. Therefore, in keeping with the related concerns of the local setting, I did not limit this qualitative project study to any specific list of soft skills. Instead, the study was designed to explore a wide cross section of soft skills as perceived by students and employers as relevant employability skills.

The purpose of this phenomenological project study was to investigate the perceptions of students and employers related to the nature of soft skills as necessary employability skills. The five research questions that guided my investigation were

1. What are the most important soft skills students perceive as relevant employability skills?

2. What are the most important soft skills employers perceive as relevant in their selection and recruitment processes?

3. What are the relevant soft skills for employment that students and employers perceive that community college students possess?

4. How do students and employers' perceptions of relevant soft skills for employment differ?

5. What can the community college do to help students develop relevant soft skills?

In Section 2, I outline the research design and approach, a description of the participants, sampling procedures, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. The ethical considerations include the protection of the participants and the procedures that I employed to maintain the participants' rights. In the latter part of Section 2, I provide the descriptions and justification of the appropriateness of the data collection and analysis procedures for the investigation. I also present an overview of the accuracy and credibility of the data analysis procedures in this section.

Research Design

I used a phenomenological approach to conduct this doctoral project study; this approach involves the collection of qualitative data. In a phenomenological study, the researchers explore a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (2009) described phenomenological research as a method that focuses on the lived experiences of individuals who employ phenomenological interviews as the primary data collection method. Glesne (2011) posited that the qualitative

approach focuses on social structures, individual experiences, and their interrelations. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it provides the opportunity to allow participants to describe their experiences in depth. The nature of the investigation supports the use of open-ended questions through interviews.

I did not adopt the same research questions used by other studies conducted on soft skills as employability skills. As a result, I had to modify previous instruments; the modification process is equivalent to the process of designing the instrument. In a study conducted by Misra and Mishra (2011), the process of developing the survey questionnaire took 18 months, and the questionnaire was developed only after the researchers conducted interviews with employers. The data collection method for this study included semistructured interviews and would not support the approach implemented by Misra and Mishra. In the context of this phenomenological study, I designed the interview protocols and administered the interviews with the participants. The design of the interview protocols followed the template formats and procedures used by Davis (2009), Nilsson (2010), and Yow (2010).

In instances where researchers used semistructured interview protocols, the researchers designed the instrument instead of using standardized or adopted tools. Davis (2009) employed semistructured interviews to determine faculty's perspectives on the impact of teaching employability skills. In addition to document reviews, Yow (2010) used interviews and focus group discussions to investigate employers' perspectives on their expectations of basic technology skills for entry level employment. Like Davis and Yow, Nilsson (2010) used the semistructured interview instrument to generate responses

regarding participants' ability to transfer learning to the workplace, the level of individual employability, and the skills considered important for gaining employment. Davis, Yow, and Nilsson used self-designed instruments–focus group and semistructured interview guides–to collect data. Nilsson's methodology resembles the approach that I employed in the project study. In my project study, I emulated the use of semistructured interviews.

Based on evidence in literature, it is appropriate to use self-developed data collection instruments. None of the researchers (Davis, 2009; Yow, 2010; Nilsson, 2010) adopted instruments from other researchers. I believe this procedure was appropriate for this project. Additionally, although Weber et al. (2009) implemented a quantitative design, Weber et al. used a self-designed survey instrument to gather data regarding the level of importance of a list of soft skills that human resource professionals perceived to be relevant competencies for employment. Therefore, I replicated the procedure used by Davis, Weber et al., Nilsson, and Yow and designed the interview protocols for the study. The format used by Davis and Yow provided the guidelines that I used to design the interview protocol for this study.

Participants

The participants included samples from two populations and represented two categories of key stakeholders of the community college: students and employers. Later in Section 2, I described the selection procedure for each category of participants. The population of students included two enrolment conditions: first, traditional adult students who participated in the work experience program coordinated by the college; second, adult learners with current or previous employment experiences and are enrolled in the

college on a part-time basis. The population of employers involved human resource managers, training managers, line managers, and other supervisors who participated in the community college's work experience program. The selection criteria for the two categories of participants included (a) students who are final year (second year) associate degree students from the schools of business and computing at the community college; students must complete the work experience program coordinated by the college and be of a legal adult age; and (b) employers who provide work experience opportunities for the final year associate degree students at the community college and are of legal adult age. I recruited potential participants via e-mail; the letter of invitation and consent forms was attached with the recruitment correspondence.

Population

The Ministry of Education (n.d.) reported that, in the 2012–2013 academic year, 1,674 students were enrolled in the community college selected for this study. The community college has an average attendance population of 1,200 students; this figure fluctuates each academic year. The average enrollment of adult students who participate in the work experience program is 60. As a result of the variable student enrollment size, it was difficult to state a definite student population size for the combination of the two schools of interest. Therefore, I used the average enrollment of 60 to represent the student population. Further elaboration of the sample chosen is discussed in the sampling procedures. The student population included unemployed; full-time/traditional students (18 years and older), employed, and part-time adult learners within the age range of 20 years and above. Final year students participate in the work experience program;

therefore, I used the cohort of students from the two schools (business and computer) for the semistructured interviews. The number of employers who actively participated in the college's work experience program was 35. The two populations, students and employers, were taken into consideration when the sample was drawn.

Sample Selection

The aim of qualitative researchers is to understand participants' perspectives regarding a phenomenon, rather than generalizing results to a wider population (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Lodico et al. (2010) noted that in qualitative research, participants are selected on the basis of their experience and knowledge about a particular phenomenon. As a result, unlike quantitative designs, sampling procedures for qualitative research generally use purposeful selection of small sample sizes that have little emphasis on randomization (Creswell, 2009).

I selected participants using purposeful random sampling. Lodico et al. (2010) asserted that purposeful random sampling uses a purposeful sampling followed by a randomization procedure. The purposeful random sampling procedure provides the opportunity to obtain a deeper insight into the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling is associated with qualitative research, and the use of a randomization procedure increases credibility, because randomization supports representation of the population, and provides the scope to gather in-depth data from the participants (Creswell, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, I employed purposeful random sampling for this project study, as I was also able to obtain desirability and incorporate a wider cross section of participants.

Prior to selecting the sample, I sought the necessary approvals from the Ministry of Education and the college's Institutional Review Board, hereafter referred to as the college's IRB Committee. After obtaining the relevant approvals, I accessed the participants through student enrollment list from the registrar, and the list of employers from the work experience office. I used the following steps to access and conduct this sampling procedure:

1. Request access to documents with students' and employers' data from relevant personnel.

2. Access documents with the names of participants from the following sources:

   a. Class registration data with alphabetic listing of the final year (second year) associate degree students in the schools of Computing and Business studies from the office of the college registrar.

   b. List of employers who participate in the work experience program related to the second year associate degree business and computer students from the work experience/job placement office.

3. Separate population into respective strata. (Steps 3–5 were conducted for each stratum of participants).

4. Assign a number to each participant's name.

5. Select every fifth name until the required number of participants is drawn.

6. Select 10 additional participants in the sample from each population to facilitate nonrespondents.

In the context of this study, I selected randomly 20% of the participants from each group of populations; I calculated 20% of 60 students and 20% of 35 employers to determine the total sample. Therefore, the sample represented 12 students and 7 employers (N=19). I selected 12 students for the semistructured interviews (6 representatives from each school–business and computer). The 7 employees participated in the semistructured interviews. To accommodate nonrespondents, the sample size for each group of participants included 10 additional participants, therefore, a total of 22 students and 17 employers were drawn from the respective populations.

After the sample of participants was selected, I telephoned participants to solicit and/or confirm the accuracy of their personal e-mail addresses, and sensitized them of the pending correspondent regarding the project study. I then e-mailed the letters of invitation to students and employers. Appendices B and C represent the letter or invitation (recruitment correspondence for students and employers, respectively. One student did not respond; so, I selected and e-mailed another student from the 10 additional names reserved for cases of nonrespondents. Seven students volunteered to participate in the study.

When I e-mailed the employers, all seven employers volunteered their participation. However, due to work schedule, one employer had to withdraw. I replaced that one employer with another employer from the 10 additional names created for nonrespondents. Each volunteer agreed to the terms of the study and signed the consent form. Upon consent from participants, I initiated the data collection. None of the participants withdrew from the study after signing the consent form.

Role of the Researcher

The project study was conducted at the community college where I am employed, which eliminated the need for a gatekeeper. There were no challenges gaining access to the participants. I discussed my research interest with the principal of the community college, and subsequently, a written request to the Ministry of Education and the college's Institution Review Board Committee to use the college as the research site, and permission to access participants. I impressed the principal of the significance of the study, and the implications for improvement in the college's performance. After approval was granted from the Ministry of Education, the college's Institution Review Board Committee issued the Letter of Cooperation. I then accessed students and employers via telephone contact and/or e-mail addresses to dispatch the invitation letter and consent forms. My involvement with the college's work experience program justifies my in-depth knowledge of some of the challenges students/graduates and employers face during the employment process.

Although data were collected at my current college, some of the students who volunteered as participants for the interviews were not necessarily my current students. The students who are my students had already completed the college's work experience prior the data collection, which was noted as one of the criteria. To ensure that there was no coercion of students to participate in the study, I e-mailed the consent forms to students for their perusal prior to deciding whether or not to be participants in the study. The consent forms indicated that the student's status in the work experience program was not affected by their decision to refuse participation, become participants, or to withdraw

from the study. The consent forms also indicated that the student's future employment status was not affected as employers have no knowledge of who participated in the study. E-mailing the consent forms provided the opportunity for students to ask further questions prior to their decisions to volunteer participation.

The employers shared a professional relationship with me, as they facilitate the placement of students for work experience; gaining the trust of the employers was not a problem as some of the employers have solicited my assistance in identifying prospective employees on their behalf. Additionally, I built researcher-participant relationships by maintaining a professional tone and attitude as I related to the participants. Thus, establishing a researcher-participant working relationship was not a challenge for me. Given my past relationships with the employers, I had the confidence and support of all employers. A similar approach to that employed with the students was implemented to ensure that the employer-participants did not experience any coercion to participating in the study. The employers were e-mailed the consent forms, which outlined that participation or nonparticipation in the study did not affect their relationship with the college, their involvement with the work experience program, and recruitment process through the college were not jeopardized. Maintaining a professional attitude encouraged participants to share honest and detailed thoughts about the experiences.

My role as the instrument for qualitative research procedures as outlined by Merriam (2009) denotes that I am involved in every aspect of the research methodology. As the researcher, I assumed the role of interviewer, and participated in the transcription, verification, and analysis of data. Interpreting and reporting the data required that I

separated my personal ideologies and reported only what the participants communicated

during the interviews. In the data analysis section, I provide details on the approaches

that were implemented to minimize bias.

Protection of Participants' Rights

The ethical issues for consideration include informed consent, protection from

harm, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

The protection of participants' rights practices complied with Walden University's

Human Subjects Protection policy. Consequently, on August 2, 2014, Walden University

Institutional Review Board approved the research plan (IRB approval number 08-20-14-

0195368). The data collected and the data collection process had no potential to harm

participants, particularly the most vulnerable group–the students. Participation in the

study did not interfere with students' work experience evaluation results and/or work

experience placements, as students completed the work experience program prior to

becoming participants. Additionally, students participated in the study on a voluntary

basis, and indicated consent by signing the consent form. Participants were informed of

their right to withdraw from the project any time without any penalty or discrimination.

There was no potential harm for employers, as the data collected did not contain

any identifying characteristics of the employer/organization. Similarly, all employers

were adults, who participated voluntarily and indicated their involvement by the signing

of the consent form. The data provided by the employers had the potential to benefit than

harm the employers; the responses provided a guide to the college how to prepare

students to fill vacant jobs.

The measures implemented to ensure informed consent began with obtaining permission from the Ministry of Education to conduct the study at the college. The consent process continued with request from the community college's Institution Review Board Committee to conduct the study at the site. I consulted with the principal in a face-to-face meeting prior to providing a written request to the Ministry of Education and the college's IRB Committee. Once approval was granted from the Ministry of Education and the college's IRB Committee, I sought the informed consent in a formal e-mailed letter to all potential participants–students and employers–of the study. As a means of establishing confidentiality and anonymity of participants, I instructed participants to omit their names during the data collection process. I referred to employers as Employer 1, 2, 3, etc., and students as Participant 1, 2, 3, etc. As discussed further in the data collection procedure, the data collected from both students and employers was kept confidential and stored in a safe place.

Data Collection

I obtained permission from the Ministry of Education to conduct the study at the community college, and upon approval from the Ministry of Education, I applied to the Institution Review Board Committee of the community college for a Letter of Cooperation. I received the Letter of Cooperation confirming the college's partnership in allowing me to utilize the contact details of potential participants. The process of gaining permission took 4 weeks. After I obtained the relevant approvals from the Ministry of Education and the community college, I selected the sample using the procedure I outlined in the sampling procedure. I e-mailed the letters of invitation and consent forms

to the participants who volunteered their involvement. The letters of invitation and consent forms for the students applied a similar format as Yow's (2010), as exhibited in Appendix D. Appendix E illustrates the students' interview protocol that was designed utilizing a template similar to Davis (2009), Yow, and Arnaud (2013); however, no similarity existed with the interview questions/items. The format of the employers' invitation letter and consent forms, as shown in Appendix F, were similar in format to Yow's (2010). Appendix G represents the template for the employers' interview. My aim for this phenomenological study was not to replicate the studies conducted by Davis, Yow, and Arnaud.

I conducted semistructured individual interviews with students and employers as the data collection process. Creswell (2009) noted that in qualitative studies, the data collection methods are typically observations, interviews (individual or focus group), document reviews, and audio-visual materials. Merriam (2009) corroborated with Creswell that interviews are used in all forms of qualitative research to collect some or all of the data. In the context of this phenomenological study, I believe that the individual interview was the appropriate, convenient, and manageable data collection tool. The data required for understanding the perceptions of students and employers regarding the relevant soft skills as employability skills could not be amassed using observations, document reviews, or audio-visual materials. As noted by Merriam, in phenomenological approach studies, primary data collection is phenomenological interviews. I was able to control the focus of the interviews because of the semistructured format of the interviews (Creswell, 2009).

I used two separate interview protocols as the data collection instrument: I designed one interview protocol for the students and another for the employers. Each instrument included open-ended questions. With the open-ended interview format, I was able to ask follow-up questions to grasp a better understanding of the participants' experiences in a non-threatening atmosphere. The participants were comfortable providing honest and in-depth responses. The interview protocol was researcher produced, therefore, limiting the restriction of manipulating the interview questions.

The students responded to interview questions regarding research question 1 and 3, through which I investigated students' views on soft skills as relevant employability skills, and the soft skills the community college students currently possess. Employers also responded to interview questions regarding their perceptions of the relevant soft skills for employability (research question 2), and the soft skills the community college students possess (research question 3). Based on the responses of employers and students, I made a comparison of the nature of soft skills reported by each group of participants to respond to research questions 4 to determine the differences in perception regarding the nature of soft skills that are relevant employability skills. In response to research question 5, I solicited responses from both students and employers regarding recommendations on how the community college can facilitate students' development of relevant soft skills. Appendix H outlines the alignment of research questions with interview questions for students and employers.

Before I conducted the interviews, I scheduled appointments with the participants. All students met the scheduled appointments; however, some employers rescheduled

their appointments due to work-related responsibilities. All data collection from students occurred during nonacademic hours throughout Mondays to Fridays, prior to the resumption of the new academic year. I conducted the students' interviews in a private office on the college campus. I conducted the employers' interviews off-site; I scheduled a private cubicle at public library as the interviewing site, instead of the college compound or the employers' workplace.

Prior to the start of the interviews, I outlined the conditions of the interview and advised the participants of their option to withdraw at any time without reason. All participants agreed with the conditions and I conducted each interview as planned. All of the 19 participants agreed that I audio-tape the interviews. I conducted each interview once; each interview session lasted less than 1 hour. The participants were represented by a number during the interviews, to ensure anonymity. I recorded handwritten notes of the interviews, and with the permission of the participants, I also recorded audio-taped versions of the interviews. I anticipated a period of one month to conduct the interviews; however, the process lasted 2 months. To keep track of the data, and to minimize errors, I transcribed the audio-taped interviews early in the process; I dated and stored the transcriptions in all forms (handwritten notes, printed transcriptions, flash drive/thumb drive, and audio taped) in a lockable file cabinet. I also protected electronic files on my laptop by password access.

After face-to-face interviews were conducted, I started the transcription within 5 days. I transcribed a verbatim account of each interviews, and e-mailed the relevant transcripts to each participant to facilitate members check. All respondents returned the

transcription without modification. I began the process of coding the interview notes

immediately after transcription as a data tracking measure. I discuss the process of

coding further in the data analysis section.

Data Analysis

Researchers identify connections; understand perceived and new concepts about

the problem they are investigating during the data analysis process. This phase is

rewarding for researchers. Data analysis in qualitative research is about making sense of

what the participants express about a phenomenon in text and image (Creswell, 2009;

Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) suggested the use of computer analysis as a method of

analyzing large volumes of data; thus in this study, I used MAXQDA 11 (VERBI GmbH,

2014) computer analysis software. In analyzing the qualitative data, I used codes and

themes. I also applied the triangulation strategy to strengthen the validity and confidence

of the results (Lodico et al., 2010). I adopted the data triangulation supported by Guion,

Diehl, and McDonald (2011). The triangulation process included the use of two data

sources, students and employers. I conducted semistructured interviews with each group

of stakeholders to gain in-depth understanding of their perspectives of soft skills as

relevant employability skills. During the data analysis process, I compared the responses

of the two groups of participants to determine similarities and differences in perspectives.

I began the first phase of the analysis with coding the transcriptions of the

interviews. The coding process was ongoing; I commenced the coding process during the

interviews and continued throughout the data collection and analysis stages. I used the

computer to color code participants' perceptions of the nature and acquisition of soft

skills as employability skills. MAXQDA 11 (VERBI GmbH, 2014) computer software was used to manage the coding process. I read through each transcription thoroughly several times; I compared the transcriptions from each interview to establish similarities and differences in the participants' responses. The codes and themes I used outline the stories behind the employers' perceptions of the need for the noted soft skills in the context of employment expectations, recruitment/interview processes, and employment experiences with employees and student-trainees. I portrayed the students' stories of the nature of soft skills they possess, as well as the soft skills that are relevant for employment with similar codes and themes. The codes formed the basis on which I provided descriptions of the participants' experiences with soft skills. I presented the findings of the study using narrative descriptions.

Accuracy and Credibility

Accuracy and credibility in research are relevant for the process to make sense and gain respect in the related disciplines. Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative researchers have a challenge maintaining research quality and credibility. To address the concerns of credibility of qualitative research, Merriam, as well as other research experts, suggested triangulation as an appropriate approach, particularly when data collection involves multiple sources (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010). In addition to member checks, as outlined in the data collection process, I employed triangulation to cross-check the data collected from the different sources.

The procedures I used for dealing with discrepancy cases included detailed verbatim transcriptions sent to participants for verification. To maintain the accuracy of

the transcriptions I compared notes from the two media–written notes and audio-tapes.

Participants reviewed and confirmed their responses because I e-mailed the verbatim

transcriptions of the interviews to the participants for corroboration.

Another concern that qualitative researchers face is the issue of bias. This

concern is understandable, especially when the researcher is the instrument through

which data are generated (Chenail, 2009). According to Mehra (2002), qualitative

research generates much discussion concerning researcher bias and the ability to maintain

complete objectivity; however, adding value to the research means shifting the focus

from the researcher to the participants' experiences and views of the phenomenon. There

are different strategies that a qualitative research can implement to minimize bias. For

example, Akinwumiju (2010) used follow-up surveys as the approach to control

researcher bias. Chenail (2009) recommended the strategy of interviewing the

investigator, thus allowing the researcher to identify any biased thoughts and impressions

that could arise in the actual data collection process. As suggested by Mehra, constant

reflection and analysis of research design processes, utilizing longer quotes of

respondents' comments rather than short interpretations, and integrating the voice of the

participants with the interpretive voice of the researcher can also address researcher bias.

Epoche is another process that researchers use to remove their own opinions, judgments,

and perspectives so that the experiences of the participants take central focus (Merriam,

2009). Researcher bias can also be evident in the reporting of results. Creswell (2012)

suggested that the use of appropriate language addresses this bias. For example, avoiding

the use of terms that are discriminatory, reflect gender biases or stigmatize minority

groups create bias in reporting findings. Creswell suggested that the best way to avoid language bias is to present verbatim quotes of respondents' views and to use language that is not offensive or discriminatory. In this research, I implemented epoche, interviewing the investigator, constant reflection, and appropriate reporting language to address bias.

Qualitative research adopts several strategies or formats for reporting findings. Thematic, narrative, storytelling, theoretical, amalgamation are the commonly approaches used by researchers to report findings (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Hancock and Algozzine, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010). The approach that I adopted in the project study was the narrative description. The use of verbatim, narrative quotes gives the researcher the opportunity to integrate detailed, thick descriptions of my interpretation of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009). With this approach the reader is transported to the setting, participants' experiences, and the researcher's role as the study unfolded; thus, grasping an understanding of the problem, the findings, and the recommendations (Creswell, 2012). I presented a detailed description of the participants' experiences with soft skills and employment opportunities with the use of the narrative descriptive approach.

Throughout the data analysis process, I interpreted and substantiated the experiences of the participants' perspectives about the phenomenon. As indicated above, I applied care in ensuring that the responses reflected the thoughts and feelings of the participants and not those of the researcher. I used verbatim transcriptions, codes, themes, and detailed narrative descriptions to facilitate the exclusion of the researcher's

thoughts and feelings. Additionally, my use of data triangulation, member checks, epoche, and appropriate reporting language minimized bias, while strengthening the credibility and validity of the research.

Another essential phase in the conducting research is the dissemination of the results. Merriam (2009) asserted that conducting research amounts to being useless if the results are not reported and disseminated to practitioners in the field of study. With this concept in mind, to facilitate the openness encouraged throughout the research process, to educate and/or inform participants of results, and to maintain ethical expectations, I shared the study results with the participants via e-mail. In keeping with the focus on social change, I disseminated a summary of the findings of the study to the community college involved in the study and the Ministry of Education in a formal written report. I also had the report submitted to the Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica for review, as I lobbied for a revision of the work experience curriculum and/or inclusion of a training program relevant to soft skills development to incorporate the recommendations of the study.

Data Analysis Results

In the data analysis process, I read the interview transcripts several times to get a full understanding of the participants' thoughts. The data were coded and I identified and formed themes from recurring perspectives. The phenomenological approach adopted in the project study facilitated the use of stories for participants to describe their experiences with soft skills. Additionally, narrative descriptions are used to strengthen validity and

credibility of participants' perceptions. I analyzed the data in response to the five research question noted below:

1. What are the most important soft skills students perceive as relevant employability skills?

2. What are the most important soft skills employers perceive as relevant in their selection and recruitment processes?

3. What are the relevant soft skills for employment that students and employers perceive that community college students possess?

4. How do students and employers' perceptions of relevant soft skills for employment differ?

5. What can the community college do to help students develop relevant soft skills?

Research Question (RQ) 1

What are the most important soft skills students perceive as relevant employability skills? To address RQ1, the students were asked to respond to three interview questions: (a) Do you think that students need soft skills for employment? (b) What are the soft skills that you believe that students should strive to attain for employment? (c) How would you rank the soft skills in terms of importance? (A pre-prepared typed soft skills rating list with the top 10 soft skills found in literature was provided for students to rate from 1 to 10; 1 being the most important, and 10 being the least important).

Based on the students' responses to RQ 1, three broad categories of data supporting different themes were generated:

1. Endorsement of soft skills–categorized as two themes: (a) procurement of job, and (b) job performances

2. Used soft skills–categorized as four themes (a) engagement with others, (b) time management, (c) work attitude, and (d) dealing with challenges

3. Unused soft skills–categorized as two themes: (a) unnecessary entry-level skills, and (b) nature of job description

The findings I present were in response to the interview questions discussed during the students' interviews. The students responded to interview question 1: Do you think that students need to possess soft skills for employment? After coding, three broad themes and several sub-themes emerged. Table 2 summarizes the themes derived for RQ 1.

Table 2

Summary of Themes Emerged for RQ 1

Broad Themes	Sub-Themes
Endorsement of soft skills	Procurement of job Job performances
Used soft skills	Engagement with others Time management Work attitude Dealing with challenges
Unused soft skills	Unnecessary entry-level skills Nature of job description

Endorsement of soft skills. The broad category, endorsement of soft skills, represented the students' unanimous perception that soft skills are real skills they need for employment. Students believed that in addition to technical skills, soft skills play a vital role in their ability to procure jobs and eventually in the ability to fit in and execute their job responsibilities effectively and efficiently. Therefore, within this category, two themes emerged as students expressed their perception of the relevance of soft skills as employability skills: the procurement of jobs and job performances.

Theme 1: Procurement of job. One of the rationales for students' endorsement of the need for soft skills is that believe soft skills will enable them to secure jobs. Job advertisements are indicating the need for soft skills. Participant 11 noted, "Based on what I'm seeing in the newspapers and articles, what they are asking for in jobs, majority of these [soft skills] are the big ones that you see showing up in the advertisements for work." Additionally, Participant 3 expressed, "I do believe that students…students need soft skills because gone are the days when only your academic record can get you a job. They [employers] want to know who they are employing in their work place." Participant 1 said, "I believe they need soft skills when seeking a job." The same concept was expressed by Participant 6, who stated,

> Yes, I think it [soft skills] is a must, most times person are going seeking a job it's not just the fact that I have these papers to prove that I have these subjects, these courses, degrees, sometimes it's just how you present yourself.

Therefore, the students felt that possession of soft skills is a vital component that will help them to obtain employment.

Theme 2: Job performance. The students generally felt that employees who possess soft skills will be able to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively. Participant 1 noted,

Yes, I believe they do [need to possess soft skills] because communication for example, which is a soft skill, plays a very vital role with communicating with your boss or coworkers. You need teamwork 'cause you might, you may have been given a task for you to work along with others to complete the task more efficiently.

A similar thought process was found in what other students reported, for example, Participant 2 said,

I most definitely think that students need to have soft skills for employment, reason being, soft skills is what makes us better employees or future better employers. Soft skills help us to not only communicate better with people, but soft skills help us to interact with customers better.

The students also noted that soft skills help them to interact with others as they work toward task completion. Participant 4 responded that "You also need to know how to relate to people and work in groups and stuff like that in order to get the job done." Another respondent, Participant 5, supported the view that employers measure and/or compare students' behavior and attitude through the soft skills. He commented,

Soft skills are the key traits that they [employers] use to judge you by. And, ahm, the, the soft skills will come in play when we are starting to work at the

organization, and they start to make reference to other people who were there before, or are there presently.

Participant 7 stated,

Because that is what employers are looking for, the soft skills; because if you can't stand up to communicate with somebody or if you can't be able to solve something on your own, it make no sense you're employed there; because they want people who can use their own initiative to do things. That's what they [employers] are looking for.

The common perspective of being able to perform job effectively and efficiently was supported by Participant 9, who noted,

I strongly believe that students should possess soft skills for employment, reason being, in order to get around effectively, and completing tasks, duties given to employees, one has to understand, one has to understand, ahh, one has to understand the instructions given to carry out that duty. If that is lacking, the soft skills, one cannot perform his or her tasks, and therefore, duties cannot be done.

The trend of thought continued as Participant 11 linked soft skills to job performance, he responded,

Because for example, the ability to listen very well, I believe that persons should have that ability because as you know, the bosses usually delegate certain thing and if you miss it, you didn't hear if properly, you know you are going to be in trouble later if you do the wrong thing.

Some students expressed that having soft skills will help them to perform jobs and thus make them fit into organizations. For example, Participant 3 said that "They [employers] want to know the person as a whole and see if they can fit into the work environment." Similarly, Participant 4 noted, "Students need to possess soft skills for employment, 'cause not only do you need a technical skills in order to be a part of an organization."

Another aspect of RQ 1 addressed the soft skill sets that students perceived are needed for employment. Two interview questions targeted this issue: (a) What are the soft skills that you believe that students should strive to attain for employment? (b) How would you rank the soft skills in terms of importance? (A pre-prepared typed soft skills rating list with the top 10 soft skills found in literature was provided for students to rate from 1 to 10; 1 being the most important, and 10 being the least important). *(Provide pre-prepared paper with typed skills, and then ask student to rate according to the top 10 soft skill–1 being the most important and 10 being the least important).* Follow-up questions were used to probe students' experiences and perspectives on the relevant soft skills needed by students for employment, for example, (a) Do you think employers look for soft skills when they are recruiting? (b) When you were on work experience, what were some of the soft skills that you felt you needed to carry out your job description? (c) Why would students need the communication and interpersonal skills? (d) Can you share an example of how you applied teamwork while you were on working? (d) Can you explain why you gave each soft skill a particular rating?

When I reviewed and coded the students' interview transcripts, I selected the

following two broad categories to present the themes that emerged regarding the most

relevant soft skills that students need for employment: The first category was identified

as used soft skills, and was further subdivided into four themes–engagement with others,

time management, work attitude, and dealing with challenges. The second category was

unused soft skills; two themes emerged from the second category–unnecessary entry-

level skills and nature of job descriptions.

Used soft skills. The analysis of the data indicated that students rated

communication, interpersonal and teamwork as the most important soft skills that student

should possess for employment. The feedback indicated that students considered them

relevant because these skills were most used by them in the work environments. Self-

management, particularly, time management and prioritizing skills was the next highly-

rated soft skills, followed by other soft skills, such as flexibility/adaptability, punctuality,

and initiative, which the researcher classified by the theme work attitude. The four

themes under the category of used soft skills are presented next.

Theme 1: Engagement with others. During the interviews, students highlighted

the soft skills that allowed them to engage with others, thus, communication, teamwork,

and interpersonal skills were the most commonly noted as relevant soft skills. From the

students' perspectives, all participants, except Participants 8, mentioned communication

skills as one of the soft skills they think that students should strive to attain for

employment. As noted by Participant 7, "Communication is one of the MOST

IMPORTANT *(respondent placed emphasis on the words, 'most important')* ones [soft

skills]." Participant 2 focused on the need for communication skills in a technological age, she noted that,

> These skills [communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills] not only help us to communicate with people but in a time where everything is more technological based, more personal are gravitating toward technical instead of interacting with people, so the soft skills are what we have left of interaction with people and that is one of the main things that soft skills enhance us as persons not only as it relates to working but communicating better.

Likewise, "having good communication skills, and that involves both listening and speaking, if you can't speak to whoever you are working with or working for…there will be barriers….You need to listen to instructions carefully…" was the idea expressed by Participant 3.

Another commonly noted soft skill that students considered related to engagement with others was teamwork. The students felt that accomplishing assigned tasks within the working environment is only possible through teamwork. As Participant 4 expressed, "I chose those skills [communication….work ethic…and teamwork…] because those are the ones that I think are most relevant and most important in order to get the job done and to work well with others." To concur with the importance of teamwork in work settings, Participant 10 said, "Well, for one, they have to be able to work in a team. That is one of the most important things you have to learn, because you're not going to always work on your own." To illustrate the need for teamwork as an important soft skill, Participant 2 cited his experience,

When I went on work experience I found out that you have to be a team player. If

you're not a team player you won't get anything done or persons won't be that

receptive to you in dealing with certain things so you have to be a team-player to

make sure that you are on the right tract in the workplace.

When asked to share an example of how he applied teamwork when on work experience,

Participant 5 said,

When I was at the organization, there were like upgrades, upgrades to be done on

every individual machine [desktop units], and that ahm, there were three of us–

one who is good with networking, one who is good with computer repairs and one

was good with software updates…. we went to each department, and we

strategized and say, I take this department, and the next one would take that one

and so. And we were able to complete the task in such a short time.

As students brainstormed about the relevant soft skills needed for employment,

the third skill relating to engagement with others is the interpersonal skills. Participant

11 said, "Most of the work that was assigned [while on work experience] was group work

and I had to use my interpersonal skills in order to cooperate with the group." Similarly,

Participant 2 added that "…at one of the persons I did work experience, my interpersonal

skills is what really helped me to get through because persons were more receptive to

me."

Based on the overall rating of the soft skills from the pre-prepared rating scale

(Appendix I), which did not include some of the skills students identified as relevant soft

skills, the perspective that communication skill was the top rated soft still was consistent. According to Participant 2,

> I gave 1 for communication, reason being in the work force communication is very important and whether oral and written, we have to acknowledge that we must be able to communicate on that level because we are interacting with people of different walks of life.

This was supported by Participant 3, who noted,

> I ranked communication as number 1 as being important, because as I said before you should be able to, to express yourself, ahm, orally, written and using nonverbal cues. And it is one that is really important, because you need to be able to talk to the persons talk to your boss or the persons around you effectively and you should able to understand what they are saying to you, and know what nonverbal cues to use and what not to use, so that what you are saying does not come off as offensive.

Theme 2: Time management. Although most students did not consider self-management as the top rated soft skills, being able to time manage emerged as a common theme throughout the data. Students expressed that self-management, in terms of time management, prioritizing tasks, and multitasking were critical skills to carry out their duties. According to Participant 6, employees, whether new or old, should not depend on others to get their work done. He noted that "We don't need someone on our back, whipping us behind the back most times…You need to can come up with this and say, 'Then, aright, this has to be done first, then that, then this'." In response to the soft skills

that students should possess for employment, Participant 3 identified time management,

he stated,

> Another one is good time management, because when you're working you're
>
> going to have a lot of assignments to do and you need to be able to prioritize them
>
> and to say, 'Ok, I am going to do this one today, this one tomorrow' and you need
>
> to plan…plan it out so that when they are due you don't have a backup of all of
>
> them.

> The participants who rated self-management as one of the most important soft

skills attested to the fact that they used the skill while on work experience. A business

studies student, Participant 9, exclaimed,

> One has to manage his or her time properly; and one of various occasions, a
>
> number of tasks was given to me, I didn't get a specific time on which I was to
>
> finish, but I know I had a lot of stuff to do so, I would have to manage my time in
>
> terms of, trying to finish X duty first and Y duty. So self-management is very
>
> critical, because if he, one doesn't manage him or herself properly, most of what
>
> is given would not be done on time.

Participant 12, another business studies student, noted that self-management was one of

the soft skills she used on the job; therefore, she rated it, among others, as most

important. She clarified her rating by explaining,

> Self-management, that is also one that I ranked number 1; *(short pause)* the ability
>
> to plan, execute, and monitor one's activities and goals. That I had to do; with my
>
> experience, I was left alone most of the time, my supervisor had to attend to other

things. So, for me to carry out the task that was given to me effectively, I had to

plan it out first; if I'm, I don't understand it that well, I had to plan it out, see how

well it goes with what I am doing, and then I execute it to the best of my ability.

So, that's a critical one; cause you're not…you're not going to be always

supervised; you're going to be left alone to make critical decisions *(short pause)*

at, also in a timeframe. So, that's number 1 for me.

From the perspective of the computer students, Participant 11 agreed that he used

self-management while on work experience; he stated, "…in the world of work you need

to be able to manage your time and what you do in your daily activities, I suppose. And

you know you monitor…monitor your own activities and plans, and I did use that."

Similarly, an example of how the self-management skill helped with her demanding job

was outlined by Participant 8,

Okay, I have five things to do but I have 4 hours to complete it. So, you need to

think that "Okay, I can execute this job within half an hour, so let me do that one

first and then I'll have more time to do the others." So, I'll do the one that is

more difficult or where I have to get more help with.

In other instances, where self-management was rated on the lower end of the 10-

point scale, but still considered relevant for employment, Participant 5 noted that "…one

should be able to manage his own time … they will not be able to feel complete within

themselves to know that ... they've succeeded in getting such task done at the appointed

time," hence he felt that self-management was rated fourth on a scale of 1 to 10.

Participant 4 rationalized his ranking of self-management as 5 by stating "…there were

times when I got multiple tasks and I had to ensure that I managed my time well in order to finish them in the time given to me by my supervisor." Therefore, the researcher concluded that students considered time management or prioritizing as the most critical aspect of self-management, because they can identify with its relevance in a work setting.

Theme 3: Work attitude. Based on the responses of the students, a good employee will possess flexibility/adaptability and willingness to work multiple jobs, punctuality, courtesy/respect, patience/tolerance, initiative, and work ethic. Based on the nature of these soft skills, the researcher has organized these soft skills to establish theme 3, which is work attitude. Having a good work attitude means that the employee will be will make every effort to understand his/her job and get it done well. According to Participant 3,

> You must be motivated really to do the work. You must know what you are
>
> doing or even if you don't know what you are doing, try and find out what you
>
> need to do and do it to the best of your abilities.

Likewise, Participant 5 believed that students should display interest in their work, he is quoted as saying, "…they are hardworking and persistent and determined on getting the job done in time"; he also shared an experience where his supervisor was impressed with his work attitude, he said, "And my supervisor would always congratulate me and told me that he don't understand why I just love to work, love to work." Another aspect of work attitude that was consistently noted was flexibility/adaptability. For example, Participant 6 said,

The soft skills that I think you should have are the ability to handle unique

situations, adapt quickly, adapt quickly to new and different situations. And

being able, being able to accept situations that your employer might put you in or

maybe not in your field, but you still, you still have to at least try.

Participant 3 concurred with Participants 6, 8, and 12 that flexibility is a relevant soft

skill that students need for employment; she explained,

And another one [soft skill] is flexibility–when you are working you should not

be able to do one thing, even if when you get there you only can do a certain

amount of thing, you know what else they might need and you could learn.

Punctuality was one of the relevant soft skills that 4 of the 12 participants noted,

which the researcher classified as work attitude. Without providing a rationale, some

students (Participants 6, 7, and 9) pinpointed punctuality as one of the skills they felt that

students should possess for employment. However, according to Participant 12, "Though

they give you a timeframe, you're supposed to know that at…you should be early and not

late. If late, then it must be a logical reason and a critical reason."

The other common soft skill linked with work attitude is initiative. Participants 2,

7, and 12 agreed that initiative was a key soft skill that employers look for in prospective

employees. Participant 7 declared, "…it makes no sense you're employed there, because

they want persons who can use their own initiative to do things. That's what they are

looking for." Participant 2 discussed the need for initiative; she felt that other soft skills

such as problem solving integrated the use of initiative. She explained, "As it relates to

problem solving…problem solving…you have to…you have to use your initiative, you

have to think fast, you have to be able…be able to understand the problem and take care of the as it comes."

The students rated work ethic as the second highest rated soft skills from the pre-prepared rating scale, even though many of them did not identify the skill initially. All Participants, except Participant 8 felt that work ethic was a highly desirable soft skill. A sample of the responses rationalizing work ethic being a highly desirable soft skill was represented by what Participant 1 stated, "I would go with work ethic as being number 1 'cause first if you're going to go to work you need to attire properly." Participant 6 stated,

> Work ethic, IT IS IMPORTANT *(respondent stressed these words)*; it looks, it's very important even if you don't think it, most people don't really realize it. Yeah, like staying extra hours or eating, working through lunch, certain things like that just showing productivity there. Make your boss rate, make people see that you're serious about the, the work you're doing or the job you're doing.

Similarly, Participant 7 agreed, "I put work ethic at second, because you have to know how to behave in a professional manner, no matter whatever the job is, you just have to know how to behave in a professional manner." Based on one of her experiences, Participant 9 supported giving attention to work ethic as a soft skill, she opined,

> On one of my work experience, the work experience where work ethic is concerned, it was very poor, but also on my other work experience it was excellent, so I had to give it 1, when I saw how they [employees] operated,

dressed the way they wished, not appropriately, punctuality, come in and all of those stuff, it was very poor, so, yeah, it [work ethic] must be given attention.

Theme 4: Dealing with challenges. Although the students did not state initially that the art of solving issues in the workplace was a relevant soft skills they should possess, when they were asked to rank soft skills in order of importance based on a pre-prepared rating scale, problem solving skills was ranked as the third highest soft skill. Interestingly, the students noted that everyday experiences in the work setting will present problems, for example, Participant 10 responded,

Problem solving…you're going to always have problems in whatever you do, and you have to have solutions and different ways how to solve a certain problem. Cause you can't only have one way, you have to think of more than one way and see which way is the best one in the situation.

Two types of problem solving scenarios were drawn from students' responses; firstly, problems associated with dealing with people, and secondly, problems related to dealing with task.

In relation to dealing with people and how problem-solving skills were used, Participant 3 noted,

Because working with other persons there will be problems, because we are all humans and we have our difference in opinion, and all of that and you need to know how to behave or know how to act in certain situation when there is a problem. And if *(pause)* there is a problem with whoever or whatever, you need to be able to speak to that person or speak to the relevant persons about this

problem and see what can be done to solve this problem that is beneficial to both

parties.

A similar concept was shared by Participant 8, when she stated,

And then I think 2 was problem solving; it's because every day you come around

and you're faced with MULTIPLE *(word 'multiple' is emphasized)* problems and

you have to find a way to solve that. So, you really need, really, really need prob,

problem solving skills.

Additionally, Participant 12 elaborated,

With my experience, I encountered like, three different problems, but the main

one was with, with one of my colleagues, an employee also. We had

disagreements about what we wanted to put out. Like, we had different ideas; we

were doing this social event, so we had different opinions and different ideas

about that and thing…we had to be rational with it [the decision], we had to put

each other's ideas, put it together and see how it would benefit the organization.

That was a problem we came across, disagreement, so we overcame that by

looking, seeing our different views on a certain thing and, see which one would be

beneficial to the organization.

Looking at problem solving in the context of dealing with tasks, the students

expressed that they used problem solving skills because sometimes they were left alone

to deal with these problems. For instance, Participant 6 explained,

Through personal experience, organizations that I've been a part of, they relied

heavily on solving different issues, sometimes you really could not carry it to the

boss, he would not be there or you could not find someone, you would have to

actually sit right there and solve it yourself.

Other students explained the need for problem solving as a soft skill from the perspective

of the nature of jobs they perform. For instance, the computer students discussed that

their field of employment is problem solving related, as outlined by Participant 11,

Seeing that my field is IT, and most of the time problem solving is involved.

Because, for example if you have a broken network you need problem solving

skills in order to find that broken line to try to bring the network back up. I did

use that a lot in my work experience.

Participant 2, also noted,

Problem solving, because we are always given the tasks to solve a problem and

we have to use our initiative to make sure that the problem we get down to the

problem and don't leave the problem unsolved, we tackle it as it comes.

Therefore, based on the soft skills rating scale, students reported that

communication, work ethic, and problem solving were the three highest rated soft skills

that they used on the job; however, other soft skills that they found relevant in their own

work experiences were flexibility/adaptability, punctuality, tolerance/patience, initiative,

and time management.

Unused soft skills. To address RQ 1, the researcher prepared a soft skills rating

scale and asked students to rate the skills in terms of importance based on their exposure

in the workplace. Some soft skills were consistently noted on the lower end of the scale,

and the students' perceptions were that these skills were minimally used or unused in

their own experiences. From their discussions, the researcher derived two recurring themes to represent these unused soft skills; the two themes are unnecessary entry-level skills and nature of job descriptions.

   Theme 1: Unnecessary entry-level skills. Throughout the data, negotiation skill was considered the least relevant soft skills by students. The students felt that although negotiation is a good skill to possess, they did not use the skill in their job experiences. For example, Participant 11 stated, "Negotiation, I gave that 2, even though I did not really use that I my work experience but I guess it is *(pause)* you talk to other people and try to reach an agreement. Like I guess if you are having a dispute, negotiate to try to solve it." Similarly, Participant 2 mentioned, "We don't really, we don't negotiate every day." Other students argued that at their level, this skill was basically not required as only higher level workers were expected to negotiate. Likewise, Participant 6 exclaimed,

   Reason being you're a stu, you're new, you're a new worker, you're, you're a

   new worker you're, you literally have nothing to leverage or negotiate with. You

   are trying to get into this, so, you're not in a position to negotiate at any point in

   time.

The data revealed that the computing students represented the majority who indicated that negotiation skills were unnecessary. For instance, one of the computing students, Participant 4, noted "I ranked negotiation at 8. *(Pause)* I put it at 8 because again I really did not use it in the workplace." Participant 8 rated negotiation skill as 10th because as a trainee he did not need that skill; he exclaimed,

Negotiation is the 10th one, they're work experiencers, you just go in the

company, you won't be given that role to make that really big decision, so you

don't really need that as you're starting to work. But gradually you will need the

nego, negotiation skills 'cause then you move up the ladder then you have greater

decisions to make within the company.

He further reiterated the irrelevance of negotiation skill when he stated, "…some

companies for starters, they don't, people coming in, they don't give them that

opportunity to negotiate their salary." The perception was duplicated by Participant 10;

based on his experience, he declared,

Well, not really, because it's not as if I was an actual worker there, so while

like…they would have meetings and stuff, but I wouldn't be in there, to give like

my point of view or anything like that. But I think it is also good, even though I

didn't use…get to use it during work experience.

Continuing on the same view point, Participant 5 rated negotiation skills at number 8, he

explained,

I rank it [negotiation skill] as number 8 *(pause)* well, being that you have to

cooperate with others and so forth, I don't think that is of a *(pause)* very, very

important soft skill that is required, we didn't do much negotiating.

While negotiation skills were ranked the least important, next in line was decision

making; the same theme emerged as the computer students discussed the low rating they

assigned to decision making. For example, Participant 4 claimed, "…decision making

was ranked at 10; I ranked it at 10 because basically I was on work experience, so I didn't

have to make any major decisions. They were mostly made for me." This sentiment was supported by Participant 6, who declared,

> But decision making is rarely up to you, you're going to, you might, you might have to come up with a quick a decision on certain small matters, but when it is really matters, most times your employer or senior manager or someone else is going to do that serious decision making for you.

According to Participant 5, decision making is not up to one person, so it is not as important as other soft skills that need individual attention; he explained "…number 9, I chose decision making, decision making because many things are done within a group, decision making, you might strategize a way out, but that way out might lead you into more problems." He shared an experience where he made a decision single-handedly and regretted it. He illustrated,

> At a previous organization, a government organization came to the organization to purchase some products, and I was there for a month and I never dealt with any of transaction before, they had to void the bill, and do back over the transaction…and it cost me, and that's the reason I put it at number 9.

Theme 2: Dependent on job description. Most business students agreed with the computer students, that they did not use negotiation skills, but their main argument was that negotiation skills are only required for specific job description or nature of business. For instance, Participant 1 rated negotiation at number 9, and stated, "…sometimes, depends on the line of work, you need to negotiate with another party either to sell or buy product or good." Another student, Participant 2 said, "…we don't negotiate

everyday…in the business it depends, it comes down to the business as it relates to negotiation." This common view continued as Participant 9 explained,

> What I think is that, negotiation, most organization does not involve ahm workers, most workers to be involving in certain decision of the organization where, for instance, the marketing department of the organization wouldn't involve everybody within the organization, only the persons who are involved within the marketing department, so I would say an external worker wouldn't be involved with, involving in the negotiation, where that is concerned.

Participant 9 further stated, "…negotiation…that didn't come out on my work experience…I haven't done that before." Two other computer students agreed with the business students that negotiation skills are required by all categories of workers; Participant 3 stated, "It is important, yes, but not all work situations really call for you to negotiate." Similarly, Participant 5 added, "…Reason for saying that is, negotiation will take place in a different department where transaction of money and so for this to be done."

The conclusion that negotiation and decision making skills were the most prominent soft skills that students reported were underused during their experiences in the workplace. The students agreed that their job description and entry-level positions did not facilitate the use of the negotiation and decision making skills.

Research Question (RQ) 2

What are the most important soft skills employers perceive as relevant in their selection and recruitment processes? The researcher interviewed 7 employers to

ascertain their perspectives in response to RQ 2. The interview questions asked by the researcher were: (a) What are the relevant soft skills that you look for in prospective employees? (b) How would you rank the soft skills in terms of importance? (A pre-prepared typed soft skills rating list with the top 10 soft skills found in literature was provided for employers to rate from 1 to 10; 1 being the most important, and 10 being the least important).

Throughout the researcher's discourse with the employers as they shared their perspectives on the most important soft skills that are relevant in their selection and recruitment process, two broad categories were derived. The first category is criteria for soft skills, from which two common themes emerged. The first is the level of entry and nature of job/industry. The second category identified was scale of importance, which generated four themes, namely interaction with others, avoiding micromanagement, identifying problems, and least significant soft skills. Table 3 illustrates a summary of the themes that were derived for RQ 2.

Table 3

Summary of Themes Emerged for RQ 2

Broad Themes	Sub-Themes
Criteria for determining soft skills	Level of entry Nature of job/industry
Scale of importance	Interaction with others Avoiding micromanagement Identifying problems Least significant soft skills

Criteria for determining soft skills requirements. When interviewing and

selecting new employees, it is important to assess the degree to which potential recruits possess relevant soft skills. Most employers noted that during the interviewing process one way to determine the interviewees' soft skills competence is through scenarios or situational questions (Employers 3, 5, 6, & 7). Determining which soft skills to evaluate will certainly be a critical consideration; the employers concluded that when determining the nature of soft skills that new recruits need to possess, two criteria must be considered, the first is the level of entry, and the second is, the nature of the industry or job.

Theme 1: Level of entry. The employers, in responding to the interview questions stated above were careful in establishing the premise that the level of entry of the new employee will determine the nature of soft skills. In the context of the project study, employers were advised to consider the soft skills in relation to entry-level positions, as community college students pursuing an associate degree would be qualified to fill entry-level jobs. Consequently, Employer 3 noted, "…when you're having the interview, it all depends on the level person that you are recruiting." Employer 4 agreed that there is a difference in the nature of the soft skills required based on the level of position, she noted, "Well, the fact that you have clarified to say particularly the entry level jobs, which would be more like clerks, clerical positions, key soft skills would be interpersonal skills, planning and organizational skills, communication skills and team work." Similarly, after asking, "This is at an entry-level, right?" Employer 5 later responded, "…at that level too, I would say your interpersonal skills." To support the view point of the other employers that the entry level is a key criterion for determining the required soft skills, Employer 7 stated, "The relevant soft skills that I would look for in entry level

employees are team working skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, *(short pause)* and emotional intelligence;" she elaborated, "Based on the level there that employee would be, ahh, would be assigned, those are just what I think would be important for them to, on a day-to-day basis relate to their team members and their supervisors."

Theme 2: Nature of job/industry. As in the previous theme, employers expressed that the nature of soft skills will also be dependent on the nature of the job description. For example, Employer 1 said, "I like someone who has problem solving skills, certainly in my field [Information Technology], problem solving skills is perhaps the most important skill to have." Likewise, Employer 3 noted, "…the soft skills that we look for…I must point out that it varies depending on the, the job." Employer 2 shared a similar sentiment when she responded, "We are in the service industry and so, it is very important to interact with our clients." Employer 5 outlined, "This is an entity that is customer service based, so even if you're not even the customer service representative, you should be able to communicate well orally." Similarly, Employer 7 responded, "Due to the nature of the work that they are doing, those [team working skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and emotional intelligence] would be in my mind a requirement." To elaborate on the principle that a new employee may need to possess certain soft skills to fill a given job, Employer 6 cited an illustration:

> And in our case, it also depends on the department; you have certain departments
> who *(pause)* where they, we interact with people from outside. Some of us don't,
> some departments go out and meet people, and it's almost like sales, like they are

selling our product. So, you might not be an account executive that go out and sell, but you go with the team. We have booths at various locations, and ahm, people will come up to you and ask you about our company's product, and if an account executive is not there, you as the junior person, who might be a clerk in the department, you are expected to be able to speak on the company's product. Or if you don't know it, you should have the 'present of mind' to say, "Let me get somebody to help you."

Scale of importance. Initially, the employers noted that when recruiting entry-level workers, the most important soft skills they consider are communication, interpersonal, teamwork and attitude; other skills mentioned but were not identified by all employers include initiative, problem solving, self-management, taste (dress–ability to represent organization), emotional intelligence (maturity level, ability to deal with negative feedback), self-confidence, planning, and organizing. However, the landscape changed when the employers were offered the pre-prepared soft skills rating scale with the 10 most common soft skills found in literature. Based on their responses to the rating scale (1 being the most important, and 10 being the least important), a broad category captioned 'scale of importance', emerged; under this category, four themes were derived–interaction with others, avoiding micromanagement, identifying problems, and least significant soft skills.

Theme 1: Interaction with others. The employers rated communication as the most important soft skill; to function in their jobs, the entry-level recruits must possess written, nonverbal, and oral communication. Regardless of the nature of the job or the

industry, interacting with customers, colleagues, and superiors was a critical function that every employee must execute effectively. For example, Employer 4 explained,

> You have to have good communications skills. Regardless of which area you work in, communication is critical. As you know, the clerks here, usually they have to type form letters…basic letters, so communication skills, both oral and written; and of course, you have to interact with persons, so that is important.

Employer 2 clarified, "Client interaction is very important, so you must be able to write, as well as, speak to the client in a *(pause)* nonconfrontational way, right. So, whether it is by telephone or face-to-face conversation, so communication skill is very important."

Employer 3 also ranked communication at 1 [most important] because as she stated,

> You have to look at communication. Can they communicate? Alright, and that is the first thing, because you don't want persons to be in your organization and you can't communicate with them, as it relates to their work. So, communication is number 1 as it relates to that.

In the same manner, Employer 7 responded,

> Communication is the bridge that keeps, ahm; lines open and allow persons to know what is happening and what is not happening. So, where action needs to be taken or decision needs to be made, then it allows for that. So, for me communication is very critical, hence the reason I gave it 1.

Although Employer 1 did not rate communication as the most important, he noted,

> I don't read minds; can't read minds. I like to read expressions, but I don't, I don't want to, right. So, therefore, it is important that, that what you have in your

head, you can convey to me, so you know communication for me is very

important, but not as important as 1 and 2 [problem solving and self-

management].

> ***Theme 2: Avoiding micromanagement.*** The second highest important soft skill

as rated by employers is self-management. The general consensus is that employers want

employees who are capable of managing on their own; employers are not interested in

micromanaging their workers, not even new recruits. Employer 1 defended his rating of

self-management at 2,

> Secondly, I have self-management, ahm, for me it's important, because I don't
>
> like to micromanage. As a supervisor, I don't like to micro manage. In fact, ahm,
>
> in my organization IT professionals are held to a certain standard, we don't want
>
> *(pause)* if I come, if I come in to work at 8 O'clock in the morning and I am here
>
> until 10, and I don't see anybody show up, I am not calling and going, "Where is
>
> everybody?" I need to see you here as my staff. I have confidence that they are
>
> out there doing what needs to get done, and ensuring that they are working
>
> towards output. I only care about output, and for me, self-management is
>
> important, you know.

Employer 2 agreed,

> So, I am not supposed to be micro managing you; if I tell you you're supposed to
>
> be working for 7½ hours, and I assign you job, make sure you do it. Don't make
>
> when I walk pass, I'd seeing you minimizing Face book, and minimizing internet.

As Employer 4 described,

We'd want to know that ahh clerk coming in has good, good self-management as

a soft skill. You know the ability to plan, execute and monitor their activities and

goals. As much as clerks do require supervision, you must be able to manage.

The need to avoid micromanagement was also expressed by Employer 5, she illustrated,

I personally don't have a supervisor hanging over my back, and you know you

come in here and see me working, not everybody has that skills. And I think that

is very important in an organization, because in this day and age, no one has to be

standing over you for you to work. You should be able to manage, because with

this entity, we do have areas where it's just you; there is no supervisor. In the

rural areas, it's just you running that little area, and you are, you should be able to

self-manage, you should be discipline enough to know that you go on time even

though you don't have a supervisor coming like probably two, three times for the

month. You should be able to know that, you, you discipline enough to know that

you get to work on time, even if you're not going to be at work you call that

supervisor, who is miles away to let them know beforehand what is happening.

Or even if it is something that you wake up, and you should be able to put in that

worth of work on a given day without even stealing time, or even if you choose to

take an hour off, you make up back for that hour in any event. So, I am thinking

that that is one of the most important, even when you're even working on site.

Because you find that most, if you're not discipline to come and do your work,

there will be no work. There will be no production. Self-management, I think is

one of the most important.

Potential recruits have a responsibility to convince the employers that they can execute

their duties on their own whether the work is being completed individually or in teams.

Theme 3: Identifying problems. Even though, all the employers did not rate

problem solving as most important, overall, problem solving was considered the third

most important soft skill that employers seek in entry-level recruits. Particularly, in the

IT (computer) field, Employer 1 argued,

> In my field [IT], you're currently challenged, you're consistently challenged with
>
> things that no one's ever done before; the essence of IT is: 'There is a problem,
>
> what's the solution?' So, that's to me, that's the most important part of IT,
>
> problem solving.

In the context of business career paths, the employers noted that the entry-level recruits

might not be asked to solve problems on their own, but they must be able to identify that

a problem exists, and generate possible solutions. Employer 4 argued that entry-level

recruits may be required to handle little problems' she noted, "Clerks must have the

ability to, when little problems arise, you are able to not all the time you should be

running to supervisor, but you're able to solve little problems on your own, and come up

with solutions." From another perspective, Employer 5 justified,

> As it relates to problem solving, even at the entry-level, you have to be able to
>
> identify problems, and find solutions. Even if you yourself can't find the solution,
>
> you should be able to point it out to your supervisors say, "Having a problem with
>
> this," or you should be able to know that this thing what you have been asked to
>
> do is not correct or it's not right. So you are, you should be able to, to know when

you reach that door, that there is something, something is not right, so we need to

take care of that.

Employer 3 supported the need for problem solving skills by sharing a scenario,

Somebody is there, who not pulling their weight, or not doing what is assigned to

them. How do you get them to do that job that they are supposed to do? Is there

issues? What are the issues? Is it coming from home? Whatever it is, how

you're going to get them *(Pause)* sit to find out what's causing them not to be

performing and get the job, ahm, you know, job done. What is it that you're

going to put in place in order to get the job done? You know those types of

solutions. It can be anything at all; right. It could be somebody, ahm, come in

and creates, coming from another department create problems; we want to see

how is it that that new employee gonna deal with that situation.

Theme 4: Least significant soft skills. While in some instances the soft skills that

were considered least requirement for entry-level employees differed among employees,

overall, negotiation, self-confidence, and decision making were the least important. The

rationale given for ranking negotiation and decision making at the bottom of the scale of

importance, is that entry-level employees are usually not required to apply these skills.

As noted by Employer 7,

Yes, all persons at some point in their work day or work life will have to make

decisions and use information to make decisions; but for me, ahm, for entry-level,

it's not so critical, because the decisions making is usually, ahm, would be at the

supervisory level, ahm, and at another level other than the entry-level.

She later added,

> The last one on my list is negotiation; and it is "using power tactics to arrive at agreement or compromise; cooperating with others." It's last on my list, ahm, as I said before, it's because for this level, entry-level, ahm, that employee will not be expected to do a lot of negotiation, ahm, since the nature of their job functions might not require them to be, arrive at agreements with, with others, cause they, most of their activities will be at a kind of day-to-day operational activities.

Based on Employer 4,

> I don't see our clerks doing much negotiation; decision making too. While everybody has some level of autonomy, in terms of making decisions, but you don't really make high-level decisions as a clerk. But to some extent, you still have the autonomy to know when to go to supervisor from when to decide.

> Self-confidence was the second lowest ranked soft skill relevant for employment; however, its low rating did not mean it was not important. Some of the employers believed that self-confidence is interrelated with other skills; Employer 1 equated high self-confidence with knowledge, as he elaborated,

> What I have found is that self-confidence comes hand-in-hand with knowledge. You, especially in my field [IT], you, ahm, once you know what you are doing, you, you, you definitely have more self-confidence. Self-confidence will increase as, as your experience and your knowledge increases.

Another employer, Employer 2 noted,

But then you have to have all these things [negotiation, self-confidence, interpersonal and communication skills] coming together to culminate in that ability to do it [function effectively as an employee]. 'Cause you can't negotiate if you don't have self-confidence, you can't interact, you can't communicate.

Employer 5 went further to clarify why she ranked self-confidence at the bottom of the scale even though she expected interviewees to display confidence at interviews. She justified her perspective:

Because it helps me to assess the person, ahm, *(pause)* how, how the person will answer the questions, and ahm, if the person will speak up in the interview, but in the job itself *(pause)* especially when you come into this level position, ahm, but you need some level of self-confidence in order to project yourself and answer properly at the interview. But it would, if the person is shy in the interview, it wouldn't let me 'right them off' [deny employment]. It's, it's *(pause)* low because as it relates to the job, entry-level workers can be taught.

The opposite was also of concern to employers, too much confidence can reflect negatively during the interview. According to Employer 3, "Then, some persons tend to be too confident, and then it's *(pause)* too overpowering. They come and it is like, oh, you know, they are there already [already have the job], and it throws off the panelists." Likewise, Employer 2 agreed "Some [students] have over-confidence in what they think that they are doing, but some level of confidence is there." Therefore, self-confidence must be tempered in the right proportion to be considered an asset.

In summary, the responses to RQ 2 indicated that the top three most important soft skills for entry-level workers were communication, self-management, and problem solving. On the lower end of the scale of importance, lower level employees are not required to make critical decisions or be involved in negotiations, and they need not possess a high level of confidence to obtain a job. Therefore, negotiation, decision making, and self-confidence were the lowest ranked soft skills employer considered when recruiting and selecting new entry-level recruits, such as associate degree community college students. Table 4 displays a comparison of the overall rating of soft skills in terms of importance as reported by students and employers.

Table 4

Comparison of Employers and Students' Rating of Soft Skills

Rating	Employers' Perceptions	Students' Perceptions
1	Communication	Communication
2	Self-management	Work ethic
3	Problem solving	Problem solving
4	Interpersonal	Teamwork
5	Work ethic	Critical thinking
6	Teamwork	Self-confidence
7	Critical thinking	Interpersonal
8	Decision making	Self-management
9	Self-confidence	Decision making
10	Negotiation	Negotiation

Key: (Rating 1–10; 1 is most important & 10 is least important)

Table 4 summarizes the soft skills rating scale for the 10 most common soft skills found in literature. The rating is on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the most important and 10 being the least important.

Research Question (RQ) 3

What are the relevant soft skills for employment that students and employers perceive that community college students possess? Both employers and students' perceptions were considered when addressing RQ 3. This research question solicited respondents' perspective by utilizing interview questions, such as (a) "Based on the soft

skills you believe that students should possess, which of these soft skills you would say that you and/or your fellow students possess?" and (b) "Based on your interaction with the community college students, do you believe they possess the relevant soft skills?" To fully understand the participants' view-points, and in keeping with the format of the semistructured interview format, follow-up questions were also used. For example (a) "How do you know you possess these soft skills?" (b) "Can you share and example of how you demonstrated that you are a team player?" (c) "How did you draw the conclusion that your colleagues possess communication and teamwork skills?" and (d) "What soft skills do you and your colleagues need to improve?"

The data revealed that students' perceptions of the most relevant soft skills required for entry-level employment were the same ones they believed they possess. Communication and teamwork skills emerged as the top skills that students were confident they honed. The next skill that was noted was interpersonal, followed by time management, and finally work ethic. Other skills noted by 3 or less students were critical thinking, initiative, flexibility, patience, problem solving, positive work attitude (willingness to learn and to work), self-confidence, punctuality, and decision making. A similar trend was revealed when students discussed their perception of the soft skills their colleagues possessed. Interestingly, the data revealed that the opinion of students and employers differ in relation to the nature of soft skills that the community college students possess. In the context of the skills that need improvements, both students and employers shared some similar thoughts. As a result, two broad categories of themes emerged:

1. Soft skills honed–from which I identified five other themes: (a) Students' perception
    on communication, (b) Prioritizing and time management, (c) Employers' perception
    on professionalism and work attitude, (d) Employers' views on self-confidence, and
    (e) Ability to work in teams.

2. Soft skills to be improved–four themes emerged: (a) Communication problem, (b)
    Confidence in self, (c) Critical thinking challenges, and (d) Ability to negotiate.

A summary of the themes that emerged throughout the analysis of data for RQ 3 is

presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Themes Emerged for RQ 3

Broad Themes	Sub-Themes
Soft skills honed	Students' perception on communication Prioritizing and time management Employers' perception on professionalism and work attitude Employers' views on self-confidence Ability to work in teams
Soft skills to be improved	Communication problems Confidence in self Critical thinking challenges Ability to negotiate

Soft skills honed. The students discussed the soft skills they believed they have

developed prior to participating in the work experience program. The employers'

responses were based on their assessment of the students' performance while on work

experience. There were similarities and differences in the views of the students and

employers in relation to the soft skills students possessed.

Theme 1: Students' perception on communication. Although 9 of the 12 community college students interviewed claimed they possessed good communication skills, the employers' responses did not support the students' perspectives. On one hand, a summary of the students' responses is captured by what Participant 4 confidently cited, "I know that I possess communication skills definitely, because, I communicate well in, in not only within the work setting, but on a, on a general level," Participant 11, also stated, "Well, personally, I possess communication, have good, good communication skills," Participant 5 mentioned, "I communicate well with my peers, I'm easy to talk to, an active listener," Participant 10, in relation to the skills his colleagues possess, he noted, "We also know how to communicate well with each other and write well also." Participant 2 concurred with his colleagues, he noted, "When it comes down to communication I think that is one of the stronger ones," similarly, Participant 3 stated, "they did have communication skills because we were all able to speak to each other, speak to our boss and everybody else," and Participant 6 elaborated, "They have great communication skills. Nowadays, people are really having no problems really communicating with each other, delivering messages. I have seen a group of persons communicate how to avoid the boss at some point." On the other hand, employers did not cite communication as one of the students' strengths. For example, Employer 2 reported,

> Their communication skill is very important. Listening to some of the oral skills,
>
> oral communication, you wonder if it is a 'texting' thing you are doing, instead of

an interview you are doing. So, that is also important, you say, "Ok well, you

have to work on that area once it is that they start."

The researcher will elaborate on the employers' perception of students' level of

communication skills under the subsection dealing with soft skills to be improved.

Theme 2: Prioritizing and time management. Some of the students reported that

they possessed time management skills. The students expressed how their turnaround

time for completion of assigned tasks was excellent, thus prompting attention from their

supervisors. For example, Participant 3 stated,

> Time management, every task that we have, that we got we got them, we did them
>
> to the best that we could and in the quickest time that we could. And *(pause)*
>
> well, than to say that we had excellent time management, because when we got
>
> the work *(respondent speaking in a happy tone)* and we went back he, ahm, our
>
> supervisor was saying that maybe we should go a little slower *(respondent*
>
> *laughs)* 'til he could something else to give us when we are finished.

This view was repeated by Participant 5, who said, "I try with each task at hand to

complete them in a time, time limit, I give myself that time limit, so that I can work and

try and complete the task that is given." Participant 8 shared her experience on the job

when he demonstrated excellent time management; she illustrated,

> Well, I think I have excellent time management, because I'm sitting at my desk
>
> and they would come and one person said to you, "Get this done" and other
>
> person is like, "I need help with this," and then a third person would come and
>
> say, "I need to get this done by X and X time." I will say, "Okay, the third person

said they need it within half an hour, I'll try and get that one finished first." And

probably the second task I got they say, "I need it by the end of the day," so I will

slowly work on that one. Like I put in bits and pieces, and then the first job I got,

they like "I need this lunch time," so I work on half an hour and got that done,

started on the one that I, they need by the end of the day. *(Pause)* So, I got the

half an hour job finished first, started working on the one they need by the end of

the day, and I got, I finish that half way, then I would start and get the one, the

second job that they need by mid-day and finish, and when I send that off, then

I'll go back to the one I need to finish at the end of the day, and send that off

before the end of the day.

Theme 3: Employers' perception on professionalism and work attitude.

Generally, the employers felt that the community college students displayed good work

attitude and work ethic. As Employer 1 highlighted,

I mean the soft skills that I have seen that are common between them, definitely

work ethic. They have a certain work ethic that *(pause)* I, I can appreciate, and it

certainly made it easier to bring out a level that they were usable.

As it relates to work attitude, Employer 3 stated,

They are willing to learn, they have the right attitude. Because, even now there

are persons who we have employed, who have come on work experience and we

have employed them. Because, they have just the right attitude; they listen, right.

Theme 4: Employers' views on self-confidence. While only two students
reported that they were comfortable with their own level of confidence, three students felt
their colleagues had strong self-confidence. As in the case of Participant 8, who stated,

> They [colleagues] have confidence, because a lot of my classmates they are very
>
> sure of what and how they can do things, while I would have to go to them for
>
> assistance *(respondents uses a jovial tone)*, because I am not so sure I can do like
>
> in networking class that wasn't my strong point. But all the males in my class,
>
> they are very confident, they say, "Yeah, I can get it done, I can get it done." So,
>
> I would just go to them because I see the confidence they have in themselves, I'm,
>
> like, confident in getting help with them. I know that if I get help from them, I
>
> will pass.

Interestingly though, the employers reported that the students displayed adequate self-
confidence. For instance, Employers 2 said that students generally displayed self-
confidence, even though some students were just too confident. She exclaimed, "Some
have over-confidence in what they think that they are doing *(interviewer laughs and
respondent smiles)*, but some level of confidence is there." Likewise, Employer 6
concurred that the students exhibited self-confidence when she reported, "Yes. Ahm,
(pause) and, therefore, if interpersonal is present, usually self-confidence it goes with
interpersonal."

Theme 5: Ability to work in teams. The students also reported that one of their
strengths, in terms of soft skills, is teamwork; Participant 2 outlined, "So if it were to
probably come down to percentage, if 3 persons were placed at one place, just call it say

80% of these persons are strong team players". This perspective was similar to

Participant 3, as she responded, "And work in teams…we all worked in teams and we

were able to do that effectively." Participant 4 noted, "I also possess teamwork as I work

well with others in teams in order to get work done." Likewise, most of the employers

agreed that the students had developed good teamwork. Employer 2 noted,

> I see, in terms of team work, they will be willingly, work as a part of a team.
>
> Because they will be just coming out of a school environment, so I think putting
>
> them in a team environment is not very difficult for them to do.

Employer 5 believed that the students she interacted with possessed communication,

work ethic, and teamwork; she added,

> To be honest with you, as it comes on to the soft skills, I actually don't have a
>
> problem, I have never spoke, I've never seen one that I have to speak to more than
>
> once. The work attitude is there, they [students] come on time, they're early, they
>
> work by the rules, and actually to be honest, never had one that gave me a
>
> difficult time.
>
> In response to RQ 3, the researcher concluded that students' view of their soft

strengths were different from those recognized by employers. While some students could

not categorically state the nature of soft skills their colleagues possess; however, based on

their assessment of their colleagues during classroom and work experience interactions,

they assumed that their colleagues were also excellent team players and good

communicators.

Soft skills to be improved. Employers and students agreed to a great extent on

the soft skills that students were lacking. As in the previous category, students and

employers shared differing views on the nature of soft skills that students needed to

improve. For example, students felt they possessed communication skills, while

employers disagreed; students agreed they needed to improve self-confidence, but the

employers were satisfied that students displayed self-confidence.

Theme 1: Communication problem. Although the students felt they had good

communication skills, some students highlighted aspects of communication that needed

improvement. For example, Participant 6 said, "What me and my colleagues I think

would need are well, break it down, the, the ability to like just talk to your boss as an

entry level employee." Another student, Participant 11, noted, "Well, communication

definitely, because I am not really…I'm kind of a shy person and I don't really interact

much with people." She agreed that she needed to improve communication "To get rid of

being shy."

Additionally, while students felt they had good communication skills, only 1 of

the 7 employers indicated that the community college students had demonstrated

communication skills. The one employer, Employer 5, later recommended additional

training in "the way you communicate." The other employers in both fields, computer

and business studies, shared their views that the students need improvement in

communication skills. For instance, Employer 1 noted, "Their communication is

average, and needs improvement"; Employer 4 agreed, "With the exception of the area

that I find that could be improved on, is, ahm *(pause)* communication, they [the trainees'

supervisors] just give a general comment to say, 'Student needs to improve written skill

or oral communication'." Additionally, as the interview discussion progressed, Employer 4 acknowledged,

> I think in most instances like, when you get feedback from managers, when they talk about lack of communication, it's particularly the written skills. You find that students they speak well, fairly well, but the writing is terrible. And it's not unique to your organization; it's across the board.

Without hesitation, Employer 6 stated categorically that most students, not just from the community college, but other postsecondary institutions, lacked the relevant soft skills. She said,

> No, I find them lacking in particularly in communication; ahm, particularly written communication. They will speak well, but written communication is poor, and ahm I find that I have and I don't know if it is *(short pause)* young people."

She later added, "It's poor, which is communication, written communication, you know…It is always surprising that letters [application letters] like that are coming from someone at the community college level."

Theme 2: Confidence in self. Another contrast in opinion was evident when students agreed that they needed improvement in self-confidence, for instance, Participant 3 confessed, "My self-confidence, as I said before, even though it had improved to a point, I still think that I can push myself more," as in the case with Participant 5, who also said,

> The reason for saying self-confidence, ahm, since being a toddler, every time I hear the word like when they are going to do some research or they are going to

participate in an interview or so forth, I like start drawing myself away, I just get

away from the shyness and start being more confident in how I present myself and

being more creative, and so forth.

Participant 8 shared her personal experience on the job, she elaborated,

Well, I, the soft skill I really need improvement on is my confidence, because, for

example, I was called into my head of department's office this morning, and he

said, "You need, I need this answer within a certain amount of time." And I am

thinking "what am I going to do to get any result, 'cause I can't give you my

answer in 20 minutes, 'cause I have no idea of like, it's stuff that happened

months ago and I just came in, so I don't know how I'm going to answer that

question in 20 minutes." So, I need to work on that.

However, as noted in the previous theme, employers generally agreed that students had

adequate self-confidence. Employer 4 believed that the students who have been assigned

to her organization for work experience displayed most soft skills including confidence.

Theme 3: Critical thinking challenges. Both categories of respondents,

employers and students, agreed that students need to improve their critical thinking skills.

According to Employer 4, she believed that the students possessed the basic soft skills,

with the exception of critical thinking. This was supported by Employer 1 exclaimed,

"Can I say what was lacking? Definitely critical thinking was lacking. They asked some

questions that *(pause)* like you really have to stop and go 'did you hear that'; so definitely

that was lacking." The students also pinpointed their critical thinking skills were below

par; for instance, Participant 10 confessed,

Well, for me, critical thinking, but sometimes, sometimes you think of things, but a next time, your mind would probably would be just like blank, you don't know what to do. So, I guess I need to improve on that.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Participant 4,

I definitely could improve on critical thinking, as I feel that there will be some point in time where I have to think critically and do it effectively as well. That is one that I could definitely look into and do better in.

Participant 12 supported the view point, when she noted that her colleagues lacked critical thinking skills. She is quoted as saying,

The other one THEY *(respondent emphasized the word 'they')* need to work on is critical thinking. They just like, they don't analyze certain things before they put it into before they execute it. As I said, they don't normally want to; most of them don't normally want to engage in the planning part, which is one of the main parts in it. So, when they, they need to think about certain things, the things they say before they say it or reason it out before they say it. So, critical thinking is one other for them.

Theme 4: Ability to negotiate. Another similarity in opinions is the need for negotiation skills. One of the students, Participant 2, believed he needed to improve his negotiation skills; most students, as established in RQ1, believed that negotiation skills were irrelevant for entry-level employees. The employers in the computing field, for example Employer 1, noted that students lacked negotiation, but he added, "They [students] don't need it per se, negotiation part." The business employers had a similar

point of view, for example, Participant 4 noted, "Depending on the job, they needn't be required to display this [negotiation skills]"; in the same way, Employer 2 rated negotiation on the lowest end of the scale of importance (10th). She agreed, "Negotiation–you have to work on it." Another employer, Employer 6, who facilitates students from both computer and business studies for work experience, reported, "Ahm, negotiation comes with communication, and because the communication skills are poor, so it [negotiation skill] lacks there." Table 6 depicts a comparison of the nature of soft skills that students possess as indicated by employers and students.

Table 6

Comparison of the Nature of Soft Skills Students Possess

Students' Perception	Employers' Perception
Possess communication skills	Poor communication skills
Self-confidence needs improvement	Possess self-confidence
Possess teamwork skills	Possess teamwork skills
Poor critical thinking skills	Poor critical thinking skills
Poor negotiation skills	Poor negotiation skills

Research Question (RQ) 4

How do students and employers' perceptions of relevant soft skills for employment differ? Based on the responses of employers and students to RQ 1, the researcher was able to determine the contrast in perceptions of the relevant soft skills for employment. As a result, the responses to interview questions 2 and 3 of the students' interview protocol, and interview questions 1 and 2 from the employers' interview

protocol provided the data to address RQ 4. The broad theme representing the finding

from the data relating to RQ4 is disparity in views on relevant soft skills, from which

three sub-themes emerged: work ethic, interpersonal skills and self-management. Figure

2 summarizes the themes derived from the data in response to RQ 4.

Figure 2. Themes derived for Research Question 4. Summary of the theme and sub-themes derived from the data analysis representing Research Question 4, which sought answers to how students and employers' perceptions of relevant soft skills for employment differ?
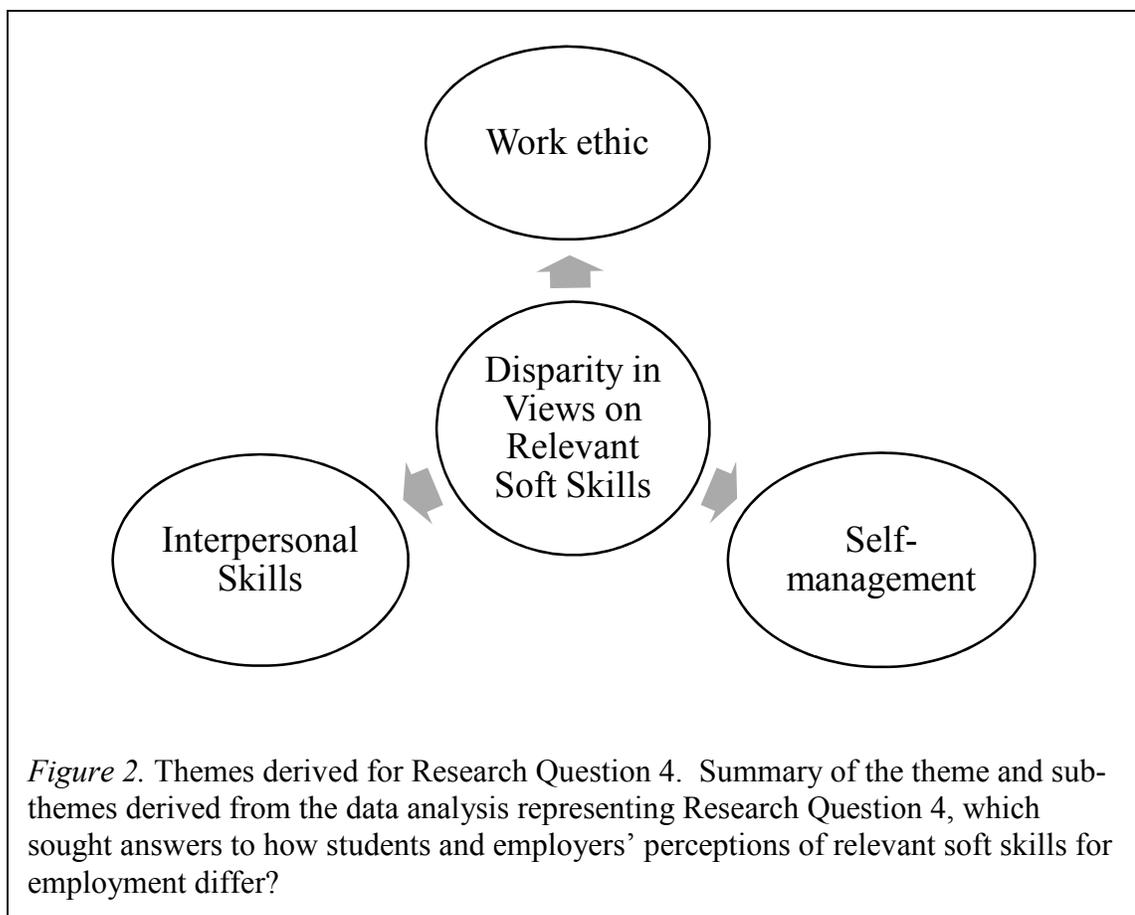
Disparity in views on relevant soft skills. The results of the study indicated that

soft skills are valued and considered relevant by both community college students and

employers in the business and computer fields. The findings that communication skills

were the top rated soft skills was supported by both categories of participants. Students

and employers also agreed that problem solving skills were the third most important soft skills relevant for employment.

Theme 1: Work ethic. One of the differences found with the perspectives of employers and students of the relevant soft skills for employment is the rating of work ethic. For students, work ethic was rated as the second highest relevant soft skills, while work ethic was ranked fifth by employers. According to Employer 3, work ethic is necessary, but during interviews the relevant soft skills are evaluated; she noted,

> Because like work ethic can…you can work on the person with regards to that… once you see that they have the potential, because you can teach them how to be a professional, you can teach them how to walk, how to dress, how to speak, you understand? So that can come…*(pause)* the work ethic you can build on it. Once they have the good interpersonal skills, and work as a teams, and you know they have the right attitude, you can work on the professionalism.

However, Participant 9 opined that during one of her job experiences she discovered poor work ethic, and its impact on the quality of work, therefore, emphasis needs to be placed on work ethic as a relevant soft skill. The students' rationale for ranking work ethic as very important is summarized by the response of Participant 7 in her declaration, "I put work ethic at second, because you have to know how to behave in a professional manner, no matter whatever the job is, you just have to know how to behave in a professional manner."

Theme 2: Interpersonal skills. Another context in which the students and employers views differ was in the value placed on interpersonal skills. Employers

believed that interpersonal skills belong in the top five most important soft skills category (fourth), while overall students considered interpersonal skills to be in the lower ranking (seventh). On one hand, employers agreed that all job positions require the ability to interact with customers, superiors, and peers, simply because employees do not accomplish organizational goals independently. For example, Employer 4 noted, "You have to interact with persons at various levels, so, ahm, our clerks must have good interpersonal skills." Similarly, Employer 1 stated, "Working in an environment where no man is an island, alright, it doesn't matter whether you're in IT, business, sweeping the road, don't matter. You have to be able to communicate …to link…with other individuals." Additionally, Employer 6 explained, "You have to be able to get along with the team, *(short pause)* and you're not, there is no, we have no position where you work on your own." On the other hand, according to the students, interpersonal skills are important, but not as important as the other higher ranked skills. Participant 5 argued that "Interpersonal skills are of an importance, because you need it for team work. How I rank it so low, team work and communication takes over the interpersonal."

Theme 3: Self-management. Although the students and employers were in agreement that negotiation skills were the least important soft skills (ranked 10th), and also that decision making was among the least required soft skills, the order did not correspond. Students rated decision making at ninth and employers ranked decision making at eighth. The degree of disparity in the level of importance of the soft skills was evident in the rating of self-management. The students did not rank self-management in the top five most important soft skills; instead they ranked self-management at eighth.

Self-management, according to the employers, was ranked second most important; and deemed valuable than work ethic. Based on the students, self-management is a personal issue, and as Participant 2 noted, "Because everybody execute at a different level. Everybody does things on their own time, probably some people catch things faster than some, but at the end of the day some… all of us can get it". Another concept purported by Participant 7 why self-management was rated at the bottom of the scale, was that other skills were needed before self-management can be developed. She noted "eighth is self-management, and doing all of that [communication, work ethic, self-confidence, interpersonal and other soft skills] you would now learn how to manage yourself, manage your time, manage your work."

The employers generally concurred that self-management is very important because employers should not require micromanagement and ability to manage on the job. For instance, Employer 3 reported, "We want to see if you're able to do the job on your own. Is it that persons have to be behind you for you to get the job done?" Employer 5 also responded, "You should be able to manage, because with this entity, we do have areas where it's just you; there is no supervisor." Employer 7 noted,

Self-management I gave 3…I think it's very important, ahm, because planning and organizing oneself is critical in executing the, the activities, especially if it is that, ahm, persons work alone and are, even if they work as part of a team, persons have to be responsible to carry his or her role because each, each activities are inter-dependent, and somebody else want, ahm, output is somebody else's input in activities.

A summary of the findings relating to how students and employers' perception of relevant soft skills for employment differ is depicted in Table 7.

Table 7

Disparity in Views of Students and Employers on the Relevant Soft Skills

Soft Skills	Level of Importance	
	Students' Views	Employers' Views
Work ethic	2nd	5th
Interpersonal skills	7th	4th
Self-management	8th	2nd

Key: (Rating 1–10; 1 is most important & 10 is least important)

Research Question (RQ) 5

What can the community college do to help students develop relevant soft skills? To respond to RQ 5, the students responded to two interview questions: (a) Does your current academic course of study help you to develop the soft skills you need for employment? (b) How would you recommend that the community college help students develop the relevant soft skills? The employers also responded to the latter interview question in their face-to-face interview. After analyzing the data for RQ 5, as shown in Table 8, I derived two broad categories, from which I generated 3 themes:

1. Effectiveness of course to impart soft skills–categorized as two themes: (a) Integration of soft skills in some courses, and (b) a professional development seminar.

2. Recommendations for developing entry-level soft skills–categorized as five themes: (a) Professional development training courses, workshops, or seminars; (b) Simulation activities and practical assignments; (c) Mentorship and/or coaching programs; (d) Faculty involvement and discourse; (e) Improvement of current courses.

Table 8

Summary of Themes Emerged for RQ5

Broad Themes	Sub-Themes
Effectiveness of course to impart soft skills	Integration of soft skills in some courses Professional development seminars
Recommendations for developing entry-level soft skills	Professional development training courses/workshops/seminars Simulation activities and practical assignments Mentorship and/or coaching programs Faculty involvement and discourse Improvement of current courses

Effectiveness of course to impart soft skills. In relation to the interview question students responded to regarding whether their current course of study helped them to hone the relevant soft skills needed for employment, 9 of the 12 students agreed that their program of study was instrumental in helping them to develop soft skills. Two students felt the program provided partial opportunities for soft skill development, but they believed there is room for improvement through direct impact. Only one student did not believe that the course offered by the community college was assisting her to develop the relevant soft skills, as she related that what is being taught is theoretical and lack practical

applications. Since the majority of the students shared the common belief that their courses of study helped them with soft skill development, the researcher has established two themes to represent their thoughts and experiences, which include integration of soft skills in some courses, and a professional development seminar.

Theme 1: Integration of soft skills in some courses. The common idea generated from the data is that soft skills are generally integrated in some courses, for example, oral communication, customer service, business ethics, entrepreneurship, a special course named, Personal Professional Development Course (PPDC), and the work experience program helped students to develop soft skills such as communication, teamwork, time management, and work ethic.

The students who indicated that their communication skills improved as a result of the oral communication course because of the assignments that were given. For example, Participant 5 noted that oral communication helped in "being more professional in my delivery, and communicating well with my peers." Participant 9 also stated that "Doing a speech, we are taught how to make the correct posture and gesture when speaking, and how to speak, so that's, that's where communication will fall in." Participant 1 also commented,

> Some of them [courses] you would have to go up in front of the entire class and present, so *(pause)* communication because for me I was not that of a out-spoken person, or would like to talk in front of a general crowd, so that had helped boost my communication.

Another soft skill that students believed they developed was teamwork. The students were of the opinion that teamwork was inevitable as most of their courses involved work in teams. As Participant 3 noted,

Well, first let me say the soft skills it has *(pause)* helped me to develop. That is working in a team…because most of what we get is group project and we, well I was able to work in a group and we were able to dissect everything and say, "Ok, you get this to do, and I get this to do" and at the end of it we were able to all come together with our individual pieces and say, "Ok, this is the final project, I did what I was supposed to do and nothing else."

A similar concept was shared by Participant 8, who said,

Yes, it does. Ahm, teamwork for one, because every class you're forced into groups to work and you complete an assignment that is really important to your final grade, so you have to learn how to work with people.

Theme 2: Professional development seminar. The business students identified a professional development seminar that was held in the latter part of the final semester, which they felt made a difference for them. However, they recommended that this seminar be made mandatory as a means of improving students' attendance. Participant 2 remarked:

In the last part of me being at school, they had a seminar. And the seminar really opened up a lot, a lot of persons were very excited because, a lot of persons did not, like certain things they were not used to, so they wanted to get a feel, for me

too, I was excited about it. A lot of persons did not show up, but I think it should

be mandatory.

Participant 7 was also concerned that the seminar could have benefited the students had

they attended and also recommended that seminars of a similar nature be held regularly.

She remarked:

They had a professional seminar, and I think that helped, that helped me a lot;

because I was learned how to conduct myself at a in a professional manner at a

like a dinner or something of that sort. And persons gave you advice on how to

dress, how to react, how to communicate. They teach you stuff; I learned a lot

from that seminar, but it was, it's sadly that it was poorly attended. Because most

of the persons that really needed that session, was not there, as opposed to the

persons who didn't need it was there. So, I think keeping more of that for the

students would help them a lot.

The responses of the students indicated that the community college has

implemented strategies to help students to develop relevant soft skills; however, these

initiatives must be consistent and mandatory. Based on employers' responses addressing

RQ 3 in particular, the community college and by extension other learning institutions

need intentional focus on helping students to hone soft skills. Therefore, with these

concepts in mind, I classified the data under the category, recommendations for

development of entry-level soft skills; I identified five themes that support the data

analysis findings: (a) Simulation activities and practical assignments; (b) Mentorship

and/or coaching programs; (c) Professional development course, workshops, or seminars; (d) Faculty involvement and discourse; and (e) Improved current courses.

Recommendations for development of entry-level soft skills. The general consensus from employers and students is that emphasis is needed on soft skill development. All participants, students and employers, proposed suggestions that they believe the community college could implement to address the challenges some students have with the lack of or inadequate soft skills. The recommendations reported were numerous and varied, however a synthesis of the most common suggestions provided to enhance the development of soft skills, particularly at the entry-level are discussed under the five themes outlined above.

Theme 1: Professional development training courses, workshops, or seminars. The most common response to how the community college could assist students to develop relevant soft skills was to introduce mandatory training course, workshops or seminars. According to the respondents, the training course, workshop or seminar could range from 2 days to 1 semester. I found that 9 of the 12 students and 4 of the 7 employers promoted the idea of training program. From the students' perspectives, a training course, workshop or seminar was strongly recommended as excellent strategies to target students' weak soft skills. As Participant 4 stated, "They could probably offer a course that focuses specifically on these soft skills that are not portrayed in other courses, in order for students to get a grasp of all the soft skills." The idea of a training seminar surfaced again when Participants 7 and 8 responded that the college had attempted a professional development seminar that was poorly attended, but was very beneficial to

her and would have been valuable to most students who really needed the advice provided. Participant 3 also agreed that workshops would be effective in helping students unlock the relevant soft skills, she said, "Well, they could have workshops really." Similarly, Participant 10 suggested,

> I don't know if they'd be willing to do it. But I think they could just have like a course that teaches us those stuff, so we can know how to behave and so forth when we going out in the working world.

Participant 8 suggested, "Have professional workshops more than once a year; that could work, and make it mandatory as well. Like personal and professional development, that need…they need to know that course or that session is really important to them." In support of his colleagues, Participant 11, after much contemplation, responded, "Well, I believe that they should, *(pause)*, teach it as a course actually."

As indicated earlier, the employers' perceptions mirrored those of the students that some form of professional development training outside of the regular curriculum is crucial to help students develop key soft skills. Without hesitation, Employer 2 noted,

> Have a training course on professional development or how to, ahm, going into the work place or you need, you need, you need a part of it, even if it's just a 1-class or a 2-class; it's not may be for the entire curriculum, not for the entire thing, but they need to have it [training course] preparing them.

Employer 6 agreed, "I think you should have courses in, in, in, you should have not only people come in and speak to them, but it should be a class." She believed the college could consider a social etiquette class or something similar. Employer 4 also suggested,

"I am suggesting is some developmental course on professionalism in the workplace, particularly dress code and work ethic."

One of the issues cited by some employers is that some of the students, based on their socio-economic and/or educational backgrounds are not aware of soft skills or the importance of soft skills. As Employer 4 said, "Maybe it goes back to the whole thing about socialization." Employer 6 also stated, "And you will find that children who go to certain school or come from a certain background, they have it; but others who come from certain schools and certain backgrounds don't." Again, Employer 4 noted, "Sometimes, they really don't know how to behave professionally"; likewise, Employer 6 declared, "Some of them came straight from university with a first degree, and we have to be sending them to classes–communication speech, etiquette, how to dress, what is, what is appropriate in the office." She added later, "It needs to be taught because some people live it, and accept it and take it for granted and some don't have a clue…Some of them are not even aware." Employer 3 agreed,

> You will have some persons, not just your organization, but you will have persons say, "You know they don't tell me anything about those things" *(respondent changes tone to imitate a typical student's tone).* And then some of them really don't know, some of them don't know how to put themselves nicely together for work, right. Some of them definitely don't know what to …what to wear.

Therefore, soft skills development strategies cannot be subtle; it cannot be within a hidden curriculum because they [soft skills] may not be recognized. As Employer 6 shared her own experience with a trainee-employee from another learning institution,

"We sent him on a course that, that taught them how to dress, and he came back and "I didn't know so many things went into choosing a tie." As a result, she expressed, "It [soft skills training] can't be subtle. You have to 'hit them [students] over the head with it'." Participant 8 puts it candidly, "I don't think they know that they need to develop soft skills."

Theme 2: Simulation activities and practical assignments. The suggestions to introduce simulation activities and practical assignments were strongly supported by the employers; two students also support the idea of having practical lessons. The concept is to have students involved in practical activities that will reflect work settings; the activities maybe in the form of mock interviews, professional dress assessment, demonstrations of soft skills, written assignments and presentations. As Employer 2 noted, "Give them different scenarios, how would you act out in something like that? So, it's different things, different scenarios that you would do." Similarly, Employer 6 agreed that the students should be exposed to scenarios that would take place in organization so, they will have hands-on experience. Participant 3 also supported the idea of utilizing scenarios to help students unearth skills such as decision making and problem solving.

Hosting mock interviews was another idea suggested by some participants. Employer 2, in particular, expressed her views clearly:

I think we still need to have the mock interviews…I think the mock interviews are very, very relevant, and the students learn a lot, and you get to meet with them

and tell them and coach them what it is that they do wrong or what they have

done right during an interview process.

While Employer 6 endorsed the introduction of a social etiquette course; part of her

emphasis was on practical, hands-on learning experiences. She suggested,

Where if it is an actual course, not somebody comes in and speak one-off, where

they physically go through the motion of interviews, preparing the, the J, the CVs

and letters, and physically going through and critique each other, I think it is, and

they dress for it and you know.

She argued that the use practical activities to build soft skills such as confidence, she

concluded,

Have a dress-up day, where they actually dress-up, make presentations, and have

dinner, like I think that is important; I think a lot of the young persons are scared

of going in a restaurant or go in a formal place and sit down and eat with knife

and fork; and that helps to build confidence.

To endorse the dress assessment, Employer 2 stated, "You need to have a professional,

who comes and… you asked them to put on their work environment clothes, and you

criticize them."

Participant 3 believed that workshops would be valuable, but the workshop should be

practical and demonstrative, for example, she said,

Well, they could have workshops really and not just have persons come to us and

tell us that we need these types [communication, problem solving, and decision-

making skills], but ex, really explain to us or have demonstrations… they

[presenters] put you in a scenario and say how you would, how you would, ahm, go about doing this or making a presentation based on whatever scenario and say, "Ok, this is probably a way that you could do it, this is a way, a way that you can do it," to say that when whoever is really watching you could say, "Oh, since you do it like that may be they could do it this way."

The passion with which Employer 6 responded, clearly suggested that she had confidence in using real life settings to teach soft skills. She referred to her own son's experience as a professional football player; she recalled,

I remember my son plays professional football, and the, the club brought in somebody to the club and taught them how to dress, how to go to an award function and sit at a dinner table, and what utensils to use, which wine glass to use, how to give an, an appropriate thank you speech. If somebody calls on you impromptu to say, or to give the vote of thanks…what to say and not to say, you know...I think schools need it.

One of the suggestions the employers made regarding addressing the communication problems that students have, was to provide multiple written assignments and oral presentations. For example, Employer 2 recommended, "Because they can do all different things from the oral skills to the communication, the writing–give them something to write." Employer 4 suggested, "Maybe more presentations. You know, giving them an opportunity to present orally and also, 'cause when you do, some instances when you do oral presentation, you have to present the written paper, or more written papers."

Theme 3: Mentorship and/or coaching programs. Another recommendation made by the respondents to foster the development of relevant employability skills for new recruits was the idea of mentorship and/or coaching programs. The program could take the form of professional advisors, as Participant 6 suggested. He stated, "We have academic advisors, and we have our deans, and all these people; we do not have anyone to say, 'okay…you have some flaws that you need to work on'…we need some mentors." He felt that these mentors would provide accurate feedback on students' weaknesses and help them improve. Participant 6 believed that professional from industries should visit the college and provide advice to the students. The rationale for using an 'outsider' to mentor or coach students was clearly articulated by Participant 7, "They [students] need persons outside where students have to, have to respect that person, because they don't know where they are from and they don't know what they can, what can happen for them from that person." A similar concept was shared by Employer 7, when she suggested,

> I would probably say external, reason being…for you to mentor or coach someone they must be willing to self-disclose and to be vulnerable to you. And in my mind, I don't know that somebody would want to be vulnerable to somebody who also plays, is playing another role in their life, like a teacher.

According to some employers, the mentorship or coaching program can be approached by inviting professionals to give motivational talks and exposing students to actual work setting. Employer 2 recommended, "Try for the final year students to have some type of interaction with professionals, so, they understand going out in the work environment…you can have persons come in and giving a talk, for a motivational talk."

Additionally, she noted, "Just invite them [students] into the work world." Employer 1 also recommended exposure to the work world. He noted that the current work experience program was inadequate, and students need "More exposure to the work world."

Theme 4: Faculty involvement and discourse. Throughout the interviews and data analysis, as noted earlier, the employers in particular, theorized that students display poor soft skills because they are not familiar or exposed to such training at home or school. Interestingly, one student also agreed that some lecturers, themselves, have no idea what soft skills are. Participant 3 declared,

> So, they [the college administrators] need to get the teachers more involved and what are those soft skills that they need, because some of them, I don't think they even know what soft skills are *(respondent using a cynical tone)*, so, they need to get the teachers more on board with that and speak more about soft skills with their …with their students.

The concept is when lecturers are involved in a concerted effort to model soft skills behaviors in their interactions with students and their colleagues, the students can emulate them. For instance, Participant 1 declared, "Well, it is not really teach it, but like demonstrate some of them, show staff working together as one, being confident, dress properly or, attire properly for class." Participant 7 puts it this way, "It's really the communication between the students and the teachers." Participant 3 concluded, "So, they need to get the teachers more on board with that [focusing on soft skills] and speak more about soft skills with their, with their students."

The students felt that the lecturers can become involved by engaging students in discussions on soft skills that are deemed important for the workplace. Participant 10 puts it uniquely, "Each lecturer should be able to like, even if it doesn't really relate to the, the, ahm, the class itself, but still like 'chip in' one and two things about it, so we can get a better understanding of it for when we go off in the work." In other words, the lecturer should provide guidance on soft skills even if they are not responsible for teaching about soft skills. Participant 7 explained that the college hosts "Something in the, in the hall, where students can give their opinions, and lecturers, they're, are all there go give their opinions." On the same principle, Participant 3 argued, "I guess during, during classes really you, you [the college] can have the, the teachers there speaking to students."

Theme 5: Improvement of current courses. This recommendation was a common trend with the students; some students felt that the college has the right approach that can facilitate students' development of relevant soft skills; for instance, Participant 9 responded:

> I don't think there, there, there is something to be done, because they are already doing their best…they are playing their part in terms of introducing course where students could develop soft skills or improve on their soft skills that they already have.

However, some students opined that the college needs to place deliberate emphasis on soft skills. They also suggested in addition to the other strategies mentioned above, that

modifying current courses such as Personal Professional Career Development (PPCD) course could make a difference. As Participant 10 recommended:

> Well, PPCD, I think. I think will help, but it doesn't really like go in-depth with all of it. It just like probably like 'scratch the surface' to me at least. So, I think if they could like go in-depth and teach them more about…more soft skills, I think it would be best.

Participant 8 agreed, "Bring it [PPCD course] off in a different way so then the students could realize that 'Okay, professional, personal professional career development session is important to us.' And let it affect them in some certain way." Likewise, Participant 11 expressed,

> Even though there is a course already called 'Personal Professional Career Development', I believe that they should be more in depth with PPCD and make it a bit longer than 1 semester, because it was kind of short in the first semester.

The same sentiments were expressed by Participant 12 and other students also supported the idea of strengthening PPCD, and also other courses such as Customer Service, Business Practice and Entrepreneurship.

The overall findings of the phenomenological project study imply that employers and community college students considered soft skills as important for employment. Although it may be difficult to assess when recruiting new employees, employers do use scenario-type interview questions to determine the extent to which applicants possess the relevant soft skills. From the findings, I have concluded that soft skills that new recruits

are expected to possess differ based the level of entry and the nature of the job or industry.

Both students and employer rated communication skills as the most important soft skills that new recruits should possess; similarly, negotiation skill was rated by both students and employers as the least required soft skill. There was a disparity among the perceptions of students and employers regarding the soft skills that the community college students possess. In fact, while students believed they had a good command of communication skills, employers cited communication, particularly the written format as one of the areas students need to improve.

Several recommendations were provided that the community college may implement to promote the enhancement of students' soft skills. Some of the employers deduced that some students have challenges with displaying certain soft skills because their life experiences limited their exposure to these soft skills; a level of unawareness of the relevant soft skills stem from the students' socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Some of the recommendations from the employers were made in the context that students need to be presented with the soft skills in a direct, rather than subtle way.

The employers' suggestions included mandatory professional development training. In this case students may be enrolled in a formal, mandatory training course that is tailored to promote soft skills development. Students could also be assigned practical tasks and simulation activities mirroring workplace assignments. Another recommendation by the employers was to facilitate mentorship or coaching programs

with professionals from the relevant industries. By doing so, the students will respect the same values taught by teachers when the outside professionals support the same concepts about soft skills. The students, in particular, recommended that faculty involvement and discourse as a strategy that can promote students' soft skills development. When students have discussions with lecturers regarding soft skills and they observe lecturers modeling the relevant soft skills, there is a tendency for students to adopt and display soft skills. Another concept expounded by the students as a recommendation for addressing deficiencies in students' soft skills level was the improvement of current courses that aimed at developing soft skills, for example, Personal Professional Career Development, Customer Service, Business Practice, and Entrepreneurship. The current courses should focus on practical activities that are deliberate in assisting students to hone soft skills. All participants concluded that employers seek to employ individuals who possess the right blend of soft skills, because their success in the workplace depends on their ability to function effectively with others.

Conclusion

In this phenomenological project study, I explored the perceptions of students and employers of the nature of relevant soft skills as employability skills. The participants included students from a selected local community college, as well as, employers who participate in the work experience program coordinated by the college. A qualitative approach was appropriate to gather the required data; the data collection involved semistructured face-to-face interviews with students and employers. I employed codes and themes in the data analysis process. I also used the codes and themes to guide the

presentation of the findings of the study, which used a narrative description format. Appendix J represents a sample of the students' interview transcript. Appendix K depicts a sample of the employers' interview transcript.

I established the nature and design of the project study based on the findings of the project study. Based on the data derived from the investigation, I suggest that a potential project as an outcome of this project study will be a 3-day professional development course geared toward addressing the soft skills needs of the community college students. This 3-day professional development course is based on the existing challenges pinpointed in the face-to-face semistructured interviews of employers and students of a community college in Jamaica. The course is expected to assist students to improve and/or develop relevant soft skills that will enhance their level of employability. I, therefore, recommend an integration of the 3-day professional development course with the current work experience program organized by the college.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Throughout Sections 1 and 2 of this project study, I identified the problem being addressed, and the methodology used for data collection and analysis. In this Section, I outline the details of the selected project as a solution to the problem outlined in Section 1. This selected project was developed based on the literature review, and the results of data collected during the project study. Based on these data analysis results, the selected type of project is a 3-day professional development workshop, with special emphasis on the soft skills associated with job seeking, job maintenance, and personal development skills; communication skills; interviewing skills; and professional etiquette and attire. Therefore, I refer to the workshop as Job Readiness Workshop (Appendix A).

In the first part of this section, I provide the description and goals of the Job Readiness Workshop. I delineate how the project addresses the problem I identified in Section 1. The rationale of the Job Readiness Workshop is discussed next. In the rationale segment, I outline how the 3-day professional development workshop is related to the results obtained in Section 2. I have also provided the rationale for choosing the 3-day professional development workshop as the appropriate measure for addressing the problem.

The literature review follows the rationale segment. In the literature review, I discuss the literature that informed my choice of the 3-day professional development workshop as the project to address the problem. I then outline the implementation and evaluation procedures for the 3-day Job Readiness Workshop. Throughout the

implementation procedures, I elaborate on the resource needs, the potential barriers, implementation timetable, and the role and responsibilities of the key stakeholders. I present the type and nature of evaluation that is appropriate to assess the effectiveness of the project. In the next subdivision, I elaborate on the implications for the 3-day professional development workshop. The implications include how the workshop addresses the learners' needs, and the overall significance to the key stakeholders in the project. The implications for social change are presented next followed by the concluding comments regarding Section 3.

Description and Goals

The selected project is a 3-day professional development workshop, captioned the Job Readiness Workshop, which addresses the soft skills that community college students show as weaknesses. Based on the findings of the study, as I outlined in Section 2, one of the soft skills lacking is communication. Throughout the recommendations offered by the respondents, particularly the employers, the idea of mandatory professional development workshops or seminars emerged as a tool for fostering the development of relevant soft skills for employment. The respondents promoted the need to incorporate communication skills and professional etiquette (table manners and professional dress) in addition to interviewing skills in this mandatory professional development workshop. As a result, I designed the 3-day professional development workshop for community college students to focus on three areas: job seeking skills, job maintenance skills, and personal development skills. I designed the 3-day professional development workshop to facilitate each area on 1 day each. For example, in Day 1 of the workshop, students are coached in

job seeking skills; on Day 2 the students are introduced to job maintenance skills; and on Day 3, the focus is on personal development skills.

The Job Readiness Workshop is a standalone program; however, it is integrated with the current work experience program conducted by the community college. The workshop is be conducted prior to students' involvement in the work experience program. The work experience program allows the students to apply the lessons learned in a real, rather than simulated work setting.

The fundamental goal of the 3-day professional development Job Readiness Workshop is to address the soft skills needs of community colleges students; the workshop is aimed at the following outcomes:

1. Increase students' awareness of the relevant soft skills for entry-level employment.

2. Develop and/or improve written and oral communication skills of students, especially in the preparation of the résumé and application letter, articulate professional and personal attributes on job interviews and interactions with coworkers.

3. Equip students with the skills needed to display acceptable business etiquette (formal company dinner/other formal function).

4. Develop the art of appropriate business/professional attire.

At the end of the workshop it is my aim that the students experience professional transformation, as purported by Mezirow (1996). The simulation activities that mirror real-life work settings form the experiences for transformation in the students'

professionalism and employability. Although I am the chief facilitator, employers,

particularly human resource personnel from related industries/business organizations,

form a complement of expert presenters, thus integrating Daloz's (as cited in Galbraith,

2004), mentorship theory proposed in Section 1.

Rationale

The Job Readiness Workshop targets the weaknesses that the community college

students display in their job seeking and job maintenance experiences. The workshop is

an appropriate approach to the problem described in Section 1, which has been supported

by literature and confirmed by the results of the study. The 3-day professional

development workshop was chosen as the results of the data analysis supporting a

mandatory professional development course/workshop/seminar. The students and

employers who participated in the study believed that the students benefit with the

intervention of external coaches/mentors from the work environment; therefore, the

workshop incorporates the industry expertise through the involvement of employers in

the business and computer fields. Throughout the data analysis the students'

recommendations corroborated with the employers' views of a program that runs from 1

day to 1 semester, hence the decision to propose a 3-day workshop. The concept of the

workshop is that the participants are involved in practical simulation activities and are

incorporating the recommendations of the participants to have students introduced to

workplace assignments and settings.

The rationale for selecting the professional development approach was supported

by the data analysis and was corroborated by literature. Doren, Flannery, Lombardi, and

Kato (2012) concluded that professional development had the potential to achieve

postsecondary goals in individual education program. Professional development

programs support improvement in instructional techniques in teacher and students'

inquiry science learning experience (Gerard, 2011). According to Hadar and Brody

(2013), professional development for teachers provides the condition for "learning

opportunities that foster desirable professional dispositions" (p. 158). According to

Davis et al. (2012), professional development has many formats which include

professional workshops. Therefore, the selected Job Readiness Workshop qualifies as a

form of professional development strategy as it aims to facilitate the environment and

learning opportunities that students' professional growth and development can be

enhanced. Hence, the professional development genre, in the form of the Job Readiness

Workshop, is the best option to address the soft skills needs of students as recommended

by employers.

The data analysis results supported the 3-day professional development workshop

format for the project, but the contextual framework within which the project was

administered was also a significant factor in its consideration. Although some scholars

such as Doyle (2011), recommended integrating soft skills in current curricula as best

practices, in the case of this project study, integrating soft skills in current curricula is not

ideal as it is impractical in the community college arena in Jamaica for me to accomplish

this. For instance, the curricula for community college courses are planned and designed

by expert subject-based personnel and coordinated by the Council of Community

Colleges of Jamaica (CCCJ). As the researcher, I am not able to influence this change at

that level, although on a long-term basis, this approach could be considered. Curriculum

plan and design is a core function of the CCCJ; CCCJ is responsible for disseminating

curricula across all community colleges in the region for individual colleges to

implement. However, the current work experience program course outline needs

modification to incorporate content related to work settings. The Job Readiness

Workshop adds the relevant content and focuses on improving job performances. CCCJ

should consider the recommendations from the work experience coordinator who has

been actively involved in the program for over a decade at the oldest and largest

community college in the region. The aim of my project is to make an impact on the

employability of the students at the community college of focus in the study, and in the

long run, other community college students. The work experience course is the flexible

aspect of the associate degree program of study that could accommodate the integration

of the direct development of relevant employability soft skills. Additionally, as the

students noted in the interviews, some faculty need to be trained in soft skills as well for

them to effectively assist students in honing soft skills. After consideration of the factors

discussed above, I believe the 3-day professional development workshop (Job Readiness

Workshop) is appropriate in the environment within which the project is being

implemented.

In the Job Readiness Workshop, the students are coached through the rigors of job

seeking; job maintenance skills; and work etiquette skills, which incorporated the

students' communication challenges as identified by the employers. The workshop also

integrated other soft skills, such as problem solving, interpersonal, self-management,

work ethic, and teamwork skills. Although the data analysis results showed that the community college students were weak in critical thinking and negotiation skills, based on the entry-level positions for which they are being recruited, these two skills are not of primary importance in the solutions I present in this project study. The participants agreed that critical thinking and negotiation skills are relevant for higher level positions, and supported the belief that junior employees develop these skills over an extended period of employment.

At the end of the workshop students are expected to become aware of soft skills as relevant skills for employment and develop the art of writing, speaking, dressing, and displaying professional business etiquette to impress prospective and current employers. With the incorporation of external coaches/mentors, the students are encouraged to develop an appreciation for honing relevant soft skills. In the literature review segment, I have discussed further the strategies that may be implemented to foster the development of soft skills in students. Additionally, I have presented a scholarly review to support the choice of the professional development genre.

Review of the Literature

The literature review represents a peer-reviewed and scholarly analysis relating to the use of professional development workshop for students' soft skills development. The literature includes a thorough review of the acquisition of soft skills, approaches to teaching soft skills, integrating soft skills in formal curriculum, teaching soft skills through life experiences, challenges with teaching soft skills, professional development as a method of teaching soft skills, and the theoretical concepts applied to the selected

project. The information is a reflection of thoughts from diverse perceptions obtained by utilizing online libraries of Walden University and printed texts. The literature review of key terms employed extensive databases searches included, but not limited to EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, and primarily SAGE Premier. The key terms included *soft skills development, professional development, career development, lifelong learning, teaching soft skills, mentorship and professional growth, internship and soft skills development, transfer of learning to work settings, teaching soft skills, assessing soft skills, integrating soft skills in curriculum, best practices in teaching soft skills, program evaluations, and soft skills training programs*. The use of connected key words using Boolean operator "and," "or," and "not" limited, extended and narrowed the searches.

Acquisition of Soft Skills

The need for soft skills is relevant to the success of higher education graduates. Pukelis and Pileicikiene (2010) revealed that students lack generic skills (working under pressure, time management, negotiation skills among others) relevant to employers' needs. Similarly, the employability skills identified by Rao et al. (2011) were similar to the descriptions of soft skills found in literature, and include problem solving, teamwork and self-confidence. In addition to the other skills reiterated in literature, Adams (2007) recommended that educators teach communication and thinking skills. Overall, the most salient skills identified in literature represent communication and problem solving (Maxwell et al., 2010).

The findings of this study indicated that employers are interested in employees with technical competence and the ability to schedule time and work well with others. Since current students are lacking in some key soft skills, it is relevant to introduce a program that addresses these weaknesses. According to Pukelis and Pileicikiene (2010), and Mitchell (2008) higher education institutions should design programs of study that meet the needs of labor force effectively; soft skills are to be included in those programs. Facilitating the development of soft skills is an on-going process and I must emphasize that soft skills are not acquired in a vacuum; individuals do not acquire soft skills instantaneously. The process of acquisition is gradual. As Nilsson (2010) agreed, soft skills can be developed throughout one's professional career. Sometimes, the process may include mentorship, training, integration into curriculum, and practical exposure to work environments. Therefore, the most effective soft skills training program must incorporate the involvement of related industries. Kazilan et al. (2009) recommended that industries collaborate with technical and vocational educational departments to produce higher quality employees. A growing concern in literature is whether integration soft skills into core courses is the most appropriate approach to help students hone relevant soft skills.

Whether soft skills are integrated into existing curriculum or taught separately, the fact is that, students can be taught soft skills. A study conducted by Kraiger and Kirkpatrick (2007) suggested that interpersonal skills can be taught. Kraiger and Kirkpatrick evaluated the effectiveness of three training programs and found that the three programs (Social Style, DiSc and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) contributed to the

transformation of knowledge and behavioral skills of participants. Although the Social Style Model proves effective, the salient point is that learners have the opportunity to improve interpersonal skills through training (Kraiger and Kirkpatrick, 2007). Weber, Finley, Crawford, and Rivera (2009) agreed that the professional must be trained to acquire the relevant soft skills for employment. Soft skills training programs help to prepare students for successful careers in the workplace (Adams, 2007; Westray, 2008). Although the concept of teaching students soft skills resonates with many scholars (Devadason, Subramaniam, & Daniel, 2010; Idrus, Dahan & Abdullah, 2013), the debate is ongoing about the most appropriate approach to teaching soft skills; whether soft skills should be integrated in current curricula or taught separately (Kelley & Bridges, 2005). Therefore, it is appropriate to make a comparison of the common approaches recommended for teaching soft skills.

Approaches to Teaching Soft Skills

Throughout the project study, there has been corroboration that soft skills must be taught to students to develop employability skills. Davis (2009) noted that some education institutions have incorporated the teaching of soft skills in their culture and philosophy. According to Remedios (2012), soft skills can be acquired through two traditional methods: formal training or self-training. Based on the nature of the project study, and the educational context within which the project study was conducted, the self-training method is not discussed in the literature review. The discussion involves formal training methods of developing students' soft skills.

The formal method of teaching soft skills can be viewed from many approaches. Adnan, Ramalingam, Ilias, and Tahir (2014) and Beard, Schwieger, and Surendran (2008) among other scholars purported that soft skills can be taught using an integrated/embedded approach. Additionally, Makasiranondh, Maj, and Veal (2011) concluded that soft skills must be taught in a face-to-face context, and can employ either an embedded format or separate units. Makasiranondh et al. further recommended that team-based projects as a teaching strategy for soft skills is of significance. Teaching soft skills through life experiences is another strategy recommended by Weber et al. (2009). Barnett (2012) inferred that meaningful internships through career development programs are appropriate to help students hone soft skills. The use of internships to teach soft skills is also supported by Fatoki (2014). Although Green and Farazmand (2012) felt that live-case projects prepared students for employment better than internships; they agreed that internships had academic value. Service learning, based on Calvert and Kurji (2012), is a good approach to teaching soft skills, particularly when integrated with other courses. Through the service learning approach, in a managerial accounting course, students were able to address soft skills needs such as communication, professional ethics, and practice (Calvert & Kurji, 2012).

Other best practices for teaching soft skills include professional or career development in one form or another. For example, Clark (2005) evaluated 'The Business Profession' program that was developed by Xavier University, and concluded that the program could be modified to meet the needs of institutions as community colleges because the program was effective in improving students' performance in job interviews

and other work contexts. Other forms of professional or career development program purported in the literature included work-integrated learning with career development learning (Reddan & Rauchle, 2012).

Integrating Soft Skills in Formal Curriculum

The integration of soft skills in current curricula has been adopted by some learning institutions. Beard et al. (2008) recommended that the colleges, universities, and other learning institutions focus on integrating soft skills in their accounting, IT, and other business-related programs of study. In a study conducted on entry-level employability skills and postsecondary success, Pritchard (2013) pinpointed best practices in soft skills development adopted by some postsecondary institutions including community colleges. From this study, Pritchard reported a combination of strategies, one of which included the integration of communication, teamwork and accountability in many classes across all disciplines. One recommendation from Omar et al. (2012) is that institutions should integrate soft skills into the curriculum if their students are to develop relevant employability skills. Similarly, Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim, and Raphael (2011) recommended that institutions need to embed communication, time management, decision making and other soft skills in the curriculum and to develop strategies to assess these skills. Pritchard stated that some colleges incorporated this integration process by facilitated students' interaction with community professionals.

Integrating soft skills training into curriculum is definitely a common practice in higher education. However, as noted earlier, there are other approaches that some institutions implement to foster the development of soft skills in their students. An

option of teaching soft skills includes the use of life experiences. These life experiences may be addressed through different and varied formats.

Teaching Soft Skills through Life Experiences

Another approach to helping students develop soft skills, according to Weber et al. (2009), is through life experiences. Life experiences in the context of soft skills nurturing refer to practices such as student engagement (Pritchard, 2013); service learning (Calvert & Kurji, 2012); mentorship programs (Rekha & Ganesh, 2012); Soft skills acquisition through the teaching-learning process is not an easy process, but the return on investment is worth the effort to prepare accountants for the future (De Villiers, 2010). To bridge some of these challenges, educational institutions and students need to seek to forge relationships with work environments to assist students in the acquisition of relevant soft skills. As suggested by Kee, Ahmad, Ibrahim and Nie (2012), communal relationships with the publics (students, employers, and universities) have the potential to generate certain soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork.

Challenges with Teaching Soft Skills

Kechagias (2011) argued that it is confusing to educators which methodology to adopt when teaching soft skills. In fact, whatever strategy learning institutions employ to impart relevant soft skills to students, there is a certainty of advantages and disadvantages. As Makasiranondh et al. (2011) contemplated the benefits and drawbacks of the dedicated nontechnical units; a concern for the dedicated nontechnical units is the ability to recruit qualified instructors with the relevant skill sets.

One of the concerns with the integrated approach, as supported by the data analysis in Section 2, was whether students actually identify and acquire these soft skills embedded in other courses. Additionally, as Remedios (2012) argued, embedding soft skills into the teaching of hard skills require an ideal way of lecturing, and many educators questions whose responsibility is it to help students hone soft skills. Remedios further postulated that while integrating soft skills in hard skills courses is an excellent idea, the already overloaded course creates little room to facilitate and provide adequate attention to soft skills. In support of Remdious, Makasirnondh et al. (2011) noted one of the drawbacks for using a technical context is the constraints on curriculum.

Another concern emerging from the data analysis, and supported by Remedios (2012), was that some faculty may have challenges with soft skills themselves. In fact, some respondents stated that their current courses integrated communication skills; yet, the analysis of data indicated that communication skills were considered the most lacking in students. Devadason et al. (2010) argued that there is little evidence to prove that integration of soft skills in formal curriculum actually works. Literature supports the conclusion that since students had a low appreciation of soft skills suggested a need for a new strategy for better integration of soft skills (Adnan, Ramalingam, Ilias, and Tahir, 2014; Devadason et al., 2010)**.** To suggest a project study that promotes the idea of embedding or integrating soft skills in current hard skills curricula for the community college students is a matter of re-inventing the wheel. Additionally, according to Remedios, much effort would need to be concentrated on re-thinking and re-planning existing hard skill courses. Consequently, to address the problem posed in this project

study and in collaboration with the recommendations from the employers and students, another approach to acquiring soft skills should be explored. Using life experiences to teach soft skills is the appropriate method of helping the community college students to hone relevant soft skills for employment. With the Job Readiness Workshop, students integrate soft skills development with the work experience program. The Job Readiness Workshop plans to integrate the expert knowledge of industry employers, which satisfies the recommendations of Idrus, Dahan, and Abdullah (2013) for universities to recruit lecturers with industry-related experiences. The integration of the employers in the Job Readiness Workshop involves employing employers as guest lecturers, mentors and work experience supervisors.

Remedios (2012) corroborated with this concept of the integrated approach from all stakeholders (students, faculty, educational institutions and the industry) in enhancing soft skills in students. Employers and education institutions must corroborate their efforts to evaluate the degree to which students possess the relevant soft employability skills before they graduate from their programs of study. As in the case of the selected Job Readiness Workshop, the mentorship, training, and practical exposure to work environments employed addresses the soft skills needs of students. The Job Readiness Workshop is a theoretical component of the work experience program. Therefore, professional development in the form of the Job Readiness Workshop is an excellent approach to helping students hone soft skills. Green and Farazmand suggested that internship is usually integrated with one course. Therefore, the selected Job Readiness Workshop meets the integrated feature suggested through the literature, as it is integrated

with the existing work experience program at the community college. The selected

project is a type of professional development.

Professional Development

One of the approaches that employ a deliberate and overt method of teaching soft

skills is career development courses. Through the literature review, I found that most

authors viewed professional development in the field of education from the perspective of

the teacher; there is an absence in adequate literature on professional development for

students. The main focus of professional development is in the context of career

development.

Davis et al. (2012) stated that professional development has many formats which

include professional workshops. Professional workshops in the context of this project

study include any career-based programs. Based on Doyle (2011), career development, a

form of professional development, focuses on facilitating the career needs of students.

Barnett (2012) posited that career development programs through seminars should be

designed to provide pre-internship (work experience) preparatory training for students.

The selected Job Readiness Workshop mimics the goals and objectives of some career

development programs, and is appropriate for this project study. The selected Job

Readiness Workshop incorporates the mentorship approach to learning as supported by

Daloz (in Galbraith, 2004).

Mentorship is considered a significant aspect of career growth and development.

Rekha and Ganesh (2012) concluded that mentors learnt key soft skills (interpersonal,

leadership, rapport, and trust) as a result of a mentorship program. Simms and Zapatero

(2012) noted that the failure rate of entry-level accountants would be minimized if mentors in the profession were providing guidance.

Application of Adult Learning Theoretical Concepts

The objective of the project is to help students hone key soft skills that make them competitive in the job market. Currently, the students are lacking in awareness of the value of soft skills, and specifically, need improvement in communication skills. The Job Readiness Workshop is a response to the soft skills needs of the community college students. The workshop is a 3-day intensive professional development program and is a prerequisite for the work experience program. The Job Readiness Workshop is designed to address the soft skills needs through the application of the transformational theory as outlined by Mezirow (1996) and Daloz's (1999) mentorship theory.

The Job Readiness Workshop applies the transformational theory through the four main components of the learning process. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) explained that the transformational theory 10-phase involves four components: "experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action" (p. 134). Andragogical learning theories assume that adult learners bring to the learning process their own body of experiences that will impact their view of how the world works (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). With this view in mind, and based on the findings of the project study, community college students' life experiences limited their exposure to soft skills. For example, on Day 1 of the Job Readiness Workshop the facilitator attempts to address the limited life experiences of students by exposing students to the concept of soft skills and the value employers place on certain soft skills. Merriam et al. (2007) purported that

simulation activities can bring learners to the process of critical reflection. Similarly,

Bhatti, Battour, Sundram, and Othman (2013) argued that transfer of training requires

practical exposure to the learner. The Job Readiness Workshop in many facets integrates

the application of practical scenarios that the learners can identify with; throughout the

workshop, the facilitator(s) use icebreakers, simulation, games, and role-play activities

that guide the students to the critical reflection process. For example, on Day 2 of the Job

Readiness Workshop the facilitator(s) engage students in practical written

communication exercises through the preparation of job application documents (résumés

and cover letter). The use of simulation activities are consistently reinforced on Day 3

with the problem solving scenarios included in the aspect captioned: "Typical Day at

Work". Throughout the three days of the Job Readiness Workshop a similar approach is

applied by the presenters, and Day 3 culminates with the formal banquet and awards

ceremony that integrates the composite of soft skills that students need to hone as

indicated by the project study results.

The use of reflection and journaling provides the students with another

component of the transformational learning theory. Merriam et al. (2007) described this

reflection as a process of examining beliefs, assumptions that determines the meaning of

experiences. At the end of each day in the Job Readiness Workshop, students are

allowed to engage in this reflective process. One aspect of the reflection involves sharing

of lessons learned with peers at the beginning of Day 2 and Day 3, and an overall

reflection of the Job Readiness Workshop. The process adopted in the Job Readiness

Workshop equates with the concept of critical or reflective thinking purported by

Brookfield (2010). Dunlap (1998) espoused that critical reflection in journals and in class settings enhances the learning process as students are encouraged to express emotions and experiences. Engaging in reflective discourse is achieved through sharing journal reflections with peers, and also by engaging with industry professionals. The chief facilitator has embedded both activities throughout the duration of the Job Readiness Workshop.

The Job Readiness Workshop also incorporates the opportunity for students to take action, the final component of the transformational learning theory. For example, engaging students in preparing a professional portfolio, engaging in professional attire assessment, participating in mock job interviews, establishing professional networks, fostering a mentor-mentee relationship, and ultimately participation in the formal banquet and awards ceremony form a significant initial stage of action stressed by the transformational theory. At the end of the Job Readiness Workshop students are also engaged in a work experience program that provides a practical, real-life setting to implement further actions toward transformation.

In addition to the Mezirow's transformational theory (1996), the Job Readiness Workshop applies the mentorship perspective purported by Daloz (1999). The incorporation of industry professionals, in particular human resource managers, as mentors, also creates the environment that is conducive for transformation. Daloz noted that mentors are especially important at the initial stage as well as critical moments of a career journey of the mentees. The Job Readiness Workshop promotes this concept, as it seeks to forge relationships with students (mentees) and industry professionals (mentors);

the mentors provide guidance to the mentees as they transition from being students to employees. Daloz also noted that as students enter higher education, they enter a changing environment; similarly, when the student enters the work environment, they enter a changing environment. Through the mentors' experiences and shared stories, they provide the support that mentees need to transition to the changing environment.

Merriam et al. (2007) proposed that relationships, based on trust and support, are important in the transformational process. The mentor-mentee relationship is one that is based on trust and support, and the Job Readiness Workshop capitalizes on this component. Bhatti et al. (2013) advocated that supervisors play a key role in helping trainees facilitate transfer of skills and knowledge acquired in training. The Job Readiness Workshop emphasizes the relevance of establishing a network of professionals, and fostering relationships with industry professionals and other support persons as incorporated in Day 1 and Day 3 of the workshop. Brookfield (2010) referred to 'helpers' in a similar context; helpers provide the mirror to help the learner interprets ideas from a new point of view through critical thinking process. This is achieved in the Job Readiness Workshop in Day 2 when students' professional attire and mock job interviews are assessed by a team of human resource managers.

Implementation

After the completion of this project study, the recommendations could be made to the college administrators as a proposal for addressing the needs of the participants of the study. The project could be initiated in the subsequent school term/semester as students prepare for work experience placements and/or permanent job offers. The 3-day Job

Readiness Workshop can be conducted over three weeks (one day per week) or three consecutive days (8 hours per day between 8:30 am–5:00 pm).

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The concept of soft skills as employability skills has become a trend in the education and industry arenas; therefore, college administrator, faculty, employers and students support the implementation of Job Readiness Workshop. The students and employers who participated in the study considered soft skills training valuable and mandatory. This indicates that students and employers support the idea of Job Readiness Workshop. The program's success depends on the support of the college administrators and faculty.

Potential Barriers

One of the potential barriers to the implementation of the Job Readiness Workshop is obtaining three 8-hour days on the students' schedule. As it stands, students are scheduled for a weekly 1-hour period for work experience preparation extended over one month. It is uncertain whether all faculty members are willing to forego their class time to facilitate the program. However, the potential for the program to benefit faculty as well, may generate their support. Additionally, the 3 days could be spanned over a time period where each faculty is required to forego only one scheduled class time.

The other potential barrier is accessing external professionals; however, during the interviews of the employers, some employers have already pledged their willingness to accept invitations to be involved in a program to help students hone relevant soft skills. The employers have indicated their willingness to volunteer their services without cost.

A potential barrier is the students' willingness to participate; however, because the workshop is a mandatory requirement of the students' work experience course, students are expected to participate. To further strengthen the interests of the students, I suggest that students be certified for each day's session, for example, award each students with a certificate of achievement for their participation in the workshop on "mastering the job interview".

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

As indicated earlier, I will make the proposal for the Job Readiness Workshop to the college's administrators as a recommendation based on feedback from students and employers. The workshop is geared towards the second year associate degree students in business and computer schools. The workshop can be scheduled for the last month of the first or second semester of the school year, that is, November or April respectively. Based on the feedback from the faculty and administrators, it will be decided whether the workshop will run 3 consecutive days or 1 day per week over a 3-week period. Each day's program runs from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

I take the primary responsibility for the development and implementation of the workshop. I have developed the objectives and materials for the training, and have incorporated the input of the external professional presenters where necessary. For example, I have created the goals and objectives for the external human resource coaches to use when conducting mock job interviews. I plan to supervise the delivery of the

external professionals to ensure that the objectives are met for the workshop. The evaluation documents and procedures are also my responsibility to provide.

The students are responsible for active participation in the workshop. They must demonstrate lessons learned through the delivery of vote of thanks to presenters, involvement in mock interviews, dress assessment, preparation, and maintenance of a professional portfolio. The students are also responsible for completing the evaluation documents in a timely manner. The employers who are guest presenters are responsible for engaging students in appropriate workplace-related scenarios. The employers' are also responsible for evaluating students' performance in simulation activities during the Job Readiness Workshop, and eventually, the work experience performances. Additionally, the role of mentorship forms a significant part of the employers' responsibilities; the employers who participate in the workshop along with other employers who participate in the work experience program coordinated by the community college are being invited to act as students' mentors.

Project Evaluation

To ensure that the professional development workshop is meeting its objectives, it is vital that relevant evaluation procedures are implemented. Pritchard (2013) noted that one college incorporated the assessment of soft skills in their peer learning assessment model. The college stressed mastery instead of grades. The effectiveness of the workshop is determined through formative and summative evaluations. Suskie (2009) defined formative evaluation as the type of evaluation that takes place during the learning process. Through a series of formative evaluations the facilitators conduct assessment of

students' strengths and weaknesses during the some sessions, for example during the mock job interviews and professional attire assessment (Appendices A10 and A12).

The summative evaluations occur in two stages. Kechagias (2011) referred to summative evaluation as an assessment of learning, which takes place at the end of the learning process. Suskie (2007) defined summative evaluation as the "kind that occurs at the end of a course or program" (p. 23). The first phase of summative evaluations will be conducted by the students at the end of each session, day, and the end of the Job Readiness Workshop (Appendices A1 and A18). The second phase of the summative evaluations occurs at the point when students have completed the work experience program that follows the Job Readiness Workshop. The students' supervisors/employers evaluate the students' overall performance during the work experience program (Appendix A19). The employers also provide feedback to students on the extent to which they displayed the relevant soft skills during an exit interview.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

The Job Readiness Workshop has the potential for improving students' job seeking and job keeping opportunities. Some students are lacking in relevant soft skills; with the relevant preparatory work, the students can master job interviews. For example, well-written cover letters and résumés, proper grooming and attire, and improvement in their interaction with superiors, colleagues and customers, and overall professional etiquette, students can obtain and retain jobs. The students' involvement in the Job Readiness Workshop guarantees better preparation for a competitive job market. Since

the workshop involves a collaborative effort with employers, who are acting as students'

coaches/mentors, the students forge professional networks and partnerships that serve to

benefit them personally and professionally.

Far-Reaching

Although the results of this study are not generalizable to the wider population,

and other learning institutions, based on the responses of the employers' interviews, it is

evident that the soft skills challenges students face are not limited to the community

college involved in the study. Other learning institutions produce graduates who

demonstrate similar concerns to employers. Therefore, the results may be applicable to

other students, educational institutions, employers, and the society at large. With the

potential to improve employability of community college students, the benefits of the

workshop are far reaching beyond the students of the given community college.

Employment opportunities contribute to productivity, positive personal socio-economic

status and economic growth of country. The end result is beneficial to the students and

by extension, the college, employers, and the society in general.

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Conclusion

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The aim of the project was to establish a structured approach to assist students of

a local community college in the development of relevant soft skills to meet industry

needs. The project targeted key soft skills, for example communication skills,

professionalism (dining etiquette and professional attire). The project also applied the

mentorship and transformational adult learning theories supported by Daloz (in Galbraith,

2004), and Mezirow (1996) respectively as key elements through the integration of

mentorship and networking components in the project. The effective implementation of

the Job Readiness Workshop can expand students' awareness of soft skills relevance and

facilitate students' ability to hone key soft skills.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The rationale behind this project was to address the employability status of the community college students I facilitate through the work experience and/or job placement programs offered by the college. Employers were concerned about the need for improvement in the development of students' soft skills. In this section I present my reflections about the project strengths and limitations in addressing the problem, recommendations for alternative approaches to solving the problem, lessons learned and my professional development of scholarship, project development, leadership, and social change. This section also incorporates a reflective discussion on the importance of the work, implications, applications, and directions for future research and concludes with the key essence of the study.

Project Strengths

I adopted a phenomenological approach to explore the relevant soft skills that employers expect community college students to possess in order to meet entry-level job requirements. The conceptual theories supporting this study were Mezirow's (1996) transformational theory and Daloz's mentoring (as cited in Galbraith, 2004). The project I developed as a result of the findings was a 3-day professional development program for students called Job Readiness Workshop.

The strength of the project is based on the candid perceptions of participants' experiences as they relate to job experiences and the relevant soft skills required for entry-level work assignments. The students and employers were comfortable discussing

their experiences and expectations through the face-to-face individual semistructured

interviews. The format of the interviews allowed participants to share their

recommendations for helping students hone relevant soft skills. Additionally, the project

was developed based on the findings and/or recommendations of both employers and

students. The participants' responses generated five ideas for addressing the problem; the

Job Readiness Workshop integrated the three most common combined recommendations

of the employers and students. The Job Readiness Workshop is not an ultimate solution

in addressing the problem cited in this project study, and has its own limitations.

The limitation of the project was the limited research related to the problem in the

local setting. The evidence of the problem in the local setting was derived mainly from

anecdotes of personal communication from employers who facilitated students for work

experience or engaged students in job interviews. Despite the paucity of literature on the

problem in the local setting, the methodology and findings were supported by literature in

other territories. Another limitation of the project is the 3-day Job Readiness Workshop

did not incorporate all of the relevant soft skills that students are required to possess for

entry-level jobs; instead, I focused on the soft skills that students needs to improve from

the perspectives of employers and students. Although there were some differences in the

views of the students and the employers on degree of importance of soft skills, I

developed the project with an integrated approach of the key skills that most students and

employers deemed important.

Another limitation of the project relates to the target population. While the results

can be applied to other community colleges and universities, I examined the problem

from the perspective of one learning institutions. Additionally, only two categories of

students were included as participants–associate degree final year business and computer

students. The use of the qualitative approach automatically limited the sample size, and

further limited the ability to generalize results. Therefore, the project designed targets the

population used in the study, but is applicable to other college and university students in

related fields of study.

Another limitation of the developed project is that the Job Readiness Workshop

involves employers as external facilitators and mentors. Although there are advantages

associated with using the employers as facilitators and mentors, potential challenges may

arise if the employers' job expectations and demands hinder them from attending the Job

Readiness Workshop on any given day. The effectiveness of the Job Readiness

Workshop is dependent on the input of the employers who have consented to give

voluntary service as presenters and mentors. There is also a possibility that the

employers may experience job changes that can affect their involvement in the program.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

The limitations of the qualitative approach could be improved by using a mixed-

method or quantitative design. If I had used either the mixed-method or the quantitative

approach, I could have also integrated the perspectives of faculty and a further expansion

of the sample size by including all community colleges in the region. However, this

method would have proven too time-consuming and a huge undertaking, pushing the

limits of my expertise and time constraints.

From the perspective of the Job Readiness Workshop, another approach would be to integrate the soft skills in current courses offered to the community college students. The integrated curriculum was recommended in literature (Adnan et al., 2014; Beard et al., 2008; Makasinranondh et al., 2011); however, of the seven employers interviewed, six employers recommended a remedial program that was not subtle or hidden. Besides, one of the students also voiced concerns that some faculty had little knowledge of soft skills too. The use of integrated curriculum, which is the design of each syllabus with an integration of the relevant soft skills, would become the alternative approach on a long-term basis. The integrated curriculum would then be approached from the Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica in a wide-scale curriculum redesign and development.

In relation to the involvement of employers as presenters and mentors, the Job Readiness Workshop plan would need to establish a memorandum of understanding with the organizations from which the employers are employed. In this way, the employers and their organizations can have other key personnel assigned to represent them should the employers become unavailable. The role of mentors is not threatened as employers can still maintain their mentor-mentee relationship even if they change jobs

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

This project study expanded my view of research beyond the quantitative design, which I had become familiar with for years. My experiences with this project study enhanced my research skills particularly as a qualitative researcher. The differences between the quantitative and qualitative research method are distinct; the most significant differences being the methods of data collection and analysis. Some consider qualitative

research as second-rated research, but as Bluhm, Harman, Lee, and Mitchell (2011)

noted, the strengths of the qualitative research lie within its methodology.

My exposure to qualitative research was limited, but I have learned that

qualitative research allows the investigator to present clear, rich description of

participants' view of a problem through the use of interviews, observations, and

document reviews (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011). I adopted the phenomenological

approach; I learned that the phenomenological researcher explores the lived experiences

of participants by delving deeply into their own experiences without inputting personal

biases (Creswell, 2012). In the phenomenological study, the focus is never on the

researcher, but the participant; the researcher key role is to understand the experiences of

the participants and be able to articulate distinctly the participants' experiences (Merriam,

2009).

The literature searches provided the background on which I built my rationale for

the study and shaped the direction of the project study. For example, throughout the

literature review, I discovered that students generally did not place much value on soft

skills as they did with hard/technical skills (Tholen, 2014); as Robles (2012) concluded,

employers and students had different expectations as they relate to employability skills.

Conducting the literature review taught me the value of exploring a phenomenon from

the different approaches, and I learned the value of employing other researchers'

recommendations.

During the research process, I discovered the challenges involved in soliciting

participants for the study and the impact of volunteerism on the ethical considerations of

conducting research. For example, after selecting and sending an e-mail to potential recruits for the study, I had to allow the participants the option to respond to the e-mail at their own freewill. I have also become aware of the external factors affecting the data collection process; for example, participants schedule can alter appointment dates for data collection. Thus, the timeline for data collection and by extension, the completion of the research is rather flexible, so the researcher must make preparations to accommodate these eventualities.

The qualitative data analysis process proved to be lengthy and time-consuming because I had to include direct quotations of the participants' views to avoid misrepresentation of their thoughts. I understood the principle that Merriam (2009) described as epoch, which involves the researcher removing his/her own opinions and perspectives as the participants' own experiences take central focus in the data collection and analysis processes. Throughout the research process from the data collection stage, I ensured that the confidentiality and other ethical considerations were maintained. For example, all consent forms, audio and written transcripts were kept in lockable file cabinet at home. My scholarly skills and practices were enhanced by adhering to the ethical guidelines associated with conduction research with human subjects stipulated by the National Institute of Health.

During the project development phase, I learned the value of relevance of a project. The project must meet the needs of the participants personally and professionally. For example, the project is aimed at adult learners, and adults are interested in learning what they consider relevant to their needs (Knowles et al., 2011). I

understood that the project must reflect what the adult learner finds useful to his/her

professional development. The process of project development is difficult and time-

consuming as it is designed to meet the needs of adult learners. Similarly, the problem

being addressed by the project study requires transformation of adult learners to adopt

soft skills for entry-level jobs. I gave special consideration to the learners as well as the

presenters of the Job Readiness Workshop, and subsequently, discovered how the

presenters can influence the learners through their transformational process by adopting

the role of mentors. Adult learners will be interested in applying the concepts of the Job

Readiness Workshop, if they see how these concepts improve their job readiness and

performances.

     As a scholar-practitioner, my critical thinking skills, open-mindedness, and

respect for the views of others have been enhanced. I have discovered that the

transformational theory (Mezirow, 1996) that I implemented as the theoretical framework

for this study has also had a transformational effect on my own development. For

example, I have become conscientious with my own students as it relates to scholarly

work. I have also developed concern about the impact of my work and the extent to

which it brings social change. The application of the adult learning theories supported by

Daloz (1999) and Mezirow (1996) to this project study has influenced the teaching

strategies I implement in my class settings; my focus has shifted from merely meeting

objectives outlined in the curriculum to becoming student-focused as well. I have also

adopted the practice of inclusion of industry professionals to help students grasp

practical, hands-on industry-related knowledge and skills that go beyond the theoretical

framework of my courses.

The project study was an important medium through which I uncovered the

impact of educators and industry professionals as change agents. The leadership role

assigned to college administrators, educators/faculty, and industry human resource

managers determine the extent to which students will function in their career fields. The

need for deliberate collaboration of educational institutions and business organization in

the creation and design of relevant curriculum has become clear to me through this

doctoral project study. Therefore, the curriculum development process is ongoing; as the

needs of the industry change, as the learners' focus differ from the employers, as colleges

and universities expand their offerings, and as technology advances, the curriculum must

be modified to reflect the current trends. As Joo and Lim (2013) concluded, that as

business environments change and jobs become challenging, the human resource

professionals have a role to play in helping employees improve job satisfaction. The

curriculum must be a tool through which educators facilitate change in the personal and

professional lives of students. Theoretically and practically, in the context of this project

study, educators and human resource managers function as transformational leaders.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

This project study concentrated on the soft skills that students and employers

consider relevant employability skills from the context of a local community college.

While some students were considered equipped with the requisite combination of soft

skills employers need for entry-level jobs, other students were not as equipped. The

community college had attempted to help students hone the relevant soft skills, but the employers were still dissatisfied. Hence deliberate efforts needed to be implemented to bring students to the level where they were competitive. The findings and recommendations presented in this project study formed the background for the development of a project that can be implemented to improve the soft skills competency of the community college students.

The importance of this work is viewed from the perspective of the students, who will improve their chances of obtaining and retaining entry-level jobs. The recommended Job Readiness Workshop will increase students' awareness of soft skills, and foster their development of these soft skills, particularly communication skills. The college administrators can use the recommendations to forge a collaborative effort with industry professionals to help students better prepared for the world of work. Through the Job Readiness Workshop employers can establish mentor-mentee relationships with the college students who are also potential employees, thus transforming the quality of recruits available on the job market. Employees who are equipped for the job market can contribute to productivity and profitability.

From a wider scope, this project study on soft skills as employability skills adds to the literature that is already inadequate in the region. Although the findings are not generalizable to other colleges and universities, this model can be tweaked to address the needs of students from other learning institutions.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

This study directly affects positive social change by enhancing the quality of soft skills for future employees that enter the local work force. Students become empowered and confident to face the world of work, because they possess the eclectic blend of relevant soft skills. The Job Readiness Workshop is an intervention that can help students to improve employability, improve the recruitment of a skilled workforce, promote improved economic status, and by extension, increase community and country status.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The aim of the Job Readiness Workshop designed was to address the inadequate soft skills components of a local community college. The goal was to help students hone relevant soft skills that employers expect from new entry-level recruits. Firstly, the implementation of the workshop will be done at the local community college targeting the final year students pursuing the associate degree in computer and business studies. Secondly, its implementation could expand to other departments based on its success. Thirdly, the implementation could also be extended to other community colleges through collaboration with the Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica. This means a modification of the current work experience syllabus to incorporate the Job Readiness Workshop component. It is also my intention to publish the project study in professional development journals, thus expanding the body of literature on the subject matter.

The limitations of the project study noted earlier present several directions for future research. The qualitative approach used limited the sample size to 19 participants

(12 students and 7 employers); the population focused on only two schools of a selected community college. Further research could adopt a quantitative or mixed methods approach to expand the population to include other schools/departments and other community colleges. Additionally, the population could also include the perspectives of faculty, instead of students and employers. Future research could also explore a comparison of the effectiveness of the integrated curriculum with dedicated soft skills training. Other studies could also examine the extent to which community college or other tertiary faculty is equipped to provide instructions on relevant soft skills for employment.

Conclusion

This project study explored, from a phenomenological approach, the perceptions of students and employers of the soft skills that are relevant employability skills. The aim of investigating this problem was to establish a solution that would help students to hone the relevant soft skills for business and computer entry-level positions. The results indicated that key soft skills, for example, communication skills were the most relevant, and the skills most students needed to improve. Although other skills–negotiation and critical thinking skills–needed improvement, they were not as crucial at the entry-level status suitable for the community college students. Consequently, the project for solving the soft skills needs of the students focused primarily on the entry-level skills employers reiterated, for example, oral and written communication skills (job interview skills, public speaking, preparation of application letters and résumés), professional etiquette (professional dress and dining etiquette). A 3-day professional development project, Job

Readiness Workshop, was designed to meet these soft skills needs. Even though the scope of the study is limited and lacks generalizability, its implementation has the ability to meet the needs of the local community college.

During the process of this project study, I discovered the value of scholarship and ethical principles governing research practices, particularly during the data collection process. As a result of this intense research process, my knowledge in the field of soft skills, as well as my expertise in qualitative research methodology, has expanded significantly. Adult learning theories, in particular Daloz' (1999) mentorship and the transformational theory of Mezirow (1996) were fundamental in establishing the framework of this project study. The transformational and mentorship theories are excellent approaches through which educators and other key stakeholders of higher education can achieve positive social change as students experience personal and professional growth and development. Community college education should focus on facilitating this positive social change for students.

Soft skills are just as important as technical skills; soft skills complement the technical skills. Higher educational institutions need to help students to hone the relevant soft skills as employers place significant importance on soft skills. Soft skills training strategies should be tailored to meet the needs of students and employers.

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Appendix A: The Project

Part 1: Job Readiness Workshop Guidelines

Purpose

The aim of this project is to facilitate a 3-day professional development workshop, Job Readiness Workshop, for final year associate degree students from the schools of business and computing. The workshop is geared toward improving employability through the development and/or improvement of soft skills such as communication, self-management, professional etiquette and attire, and interviewing skills. The Job Readiness Workshop is organized to facilitate–Job Seeking Skills, Job Maintenance Skills and Personal Development Skills.

The approval and implementation of the Job Readiness Workshop facilitate the preparation of students for employment in the job market; this effort is designed to strengthen the involvement and relationships of human resource managers, work experience/placement officer and the students. The effectiveness of the program is determined by students' evaluation of each session, and the employers' evaluation of students' attitude and communication skills in a work setting (work experience). The continuation of the program is dependent on the support of students, faculty, and employers, as well as, the degree of effectiveness.

Materials

The materials needed for proper implementation of the Job Readiness Workshop are itemized below:

1. Equipment and office furniture: laptop, multimedia projector, telephone, desks, and chairs.

2. Facilitator's manual: power point presentations, sample documents, and case studies/scenarios (Appendix A Part 2).

3. Students' manual: workshop materials such as handouts, sample documents, case studies/scenarios, and evaluation forms (Appendix A Part 3).

4. Miscellaneous stationery: markers, pens, pencils, paper, and index cards, etc.

<div align="center">Timeline</div>

Day 1: Job Seeking Skills 1

Morning Session:

Target Skills: Soft Skills Awareness and Communication Skills 1–Oral & Nonverbal

      Communication Skills

8:30 Welcome and Ice breaker/Introductions (Chief Facilitator)

9:00 Goals of Job Readiness Workshop (Chief Facilitator)

9:20 Presentation–"The importance of Soft Skills" (Chief Facilitator)

9:50 Break

10:00 Presentation–"Communication as the Most Relevant Soft Skill" (Guest

    Presenter/Employer)

- Incorporates listening skills

- Body language

- Public speaking tips

- Group activity–Ask students to group in pairs; ask students to role-play scenarios demonstrating nonverbal and verbal communication in work settings; prepare and present short (2 minutes) presentation on a given topic. Use peer assessment and feedback.

11:20 Break

11:30 Presentation–"Building a Professional Portfolio"–Chief Facilitator

12:00 Lunch

Afternoon Session:

Target Skills: Communication Skills 2–Written Communication Skills (Cover Letter & Résumé) and   Target Skills: Networking Skills/Interpersonal Skills (Interaction with peers and employers)

1:00   Presentation–"The Cover Letter and Résumé as Communication Tools"–Part 1 (Guest Presenter/Employer)

1:40   Break

2:00   Presentation–"The Cover Letter and Résumé as Communication Tools"–Part 2 (Guest Presenter/Employer)

3:00   Writing Sessions (Students' Activities–supervised by the guest presenter/employer and chief facilitator)

(1) Preparing the Cover Letter and Résumé

Activity (20–25 minutes)–based on job advertisements from internet and newspapers, ask students to select one job advertisement and prepare the cover

letter and résumé. Have students exchange cover letters and résumés for peer

assessment and review (chief facilitator provides advertisements.

Writing session continues (Student Activity–supervised by guest

presenter/employer and chief facilitator)

(2) Building the Professional Portfolio (5 minutes)

4:00   Break

4:10   Mentorship and Networking with Industry Professionals

4:50   Day 1 Wrap-up

- Assignment–Ask students to prepare typed-written application letter and

  résumé; design professional portfolio; prepare for mock job interview

  (based on job advertisement selected in writing assignment), and

  professional attire assessment

- Evaluation Exercises (Appendix A1)

- Reflections/written journal–form provided by facilitator. (Appendix A7)

Day 2: Job Seeking Skills 2 & Job Maintenance Skills

Morning Session:

Target Skills: Work Ethic Skills–Professionalism (Professional Attire)

8:30   Welcome and Icebreaker–Chief Facilitator

8:45   Reflections (Ask a sample of 5 students to provide a 2-minute reflection of Day 1

        lessons learned)

9:00   Overview of Day 2 Goals–Chief Facilitator

9:10   Presentation–"Tips from Head to Toe" (Guest Presenter/Employer)

10:10   Break

10:40   Dress Assessment–Student Activity–Have employers and chief facilitator evaluate

students' professional attire (Appendix A10 for sample assessment form)

Appropriate Business attire for various functions

- Business Formal

    1. Interview
    2. Regular workday
    3. Formal office function (Awards Banquet, etc.)

- Business Casual

    1. Dress-down/Casual workday
    2. Office party

12:00   Lunch

Afternoon Session:

Target Skills: Communication/Job Interview Skills

1:00   Presentation–"Mastering the Job Interview" (Guest Presenter/Employer)

2:30   Break

3:00   Practice Makes Perfect–Simulation Activity/Role-play/Mock Job Interview

Invite panel of employers to interview the students. (Appendices A11 and A12

for sample interview questions and assessment form respectively).

4:30   Day 2 Wrap-up

- Evaluation Exercises (Appendix A1)

- Reflections (Written journal; have a sample of 5 students provide a 2-minute reflection of Day 2 lessons learned)

- Assignment–complete portfolio

Day 3: Professional Day (Professional Development)

Morning Session:

Target Skills: Work Ethics Skills (Business Etiquette), Problem Solving, Interpersonal,

       & Teamwork Skills

8:30   Welcome and Icebreaker–Chief Facilitator

8:45   Reflections (Sample of students provide a 2-minute reflection of Day 2 lessons

       learned)

9:00   Overview of Day 3 Goals–Chief Facilitator

9:10   Presentation–"A Typical Day at Work"

- Case studies/Problem solving scenarios (Appendix A14)

10:00 Break

10:20 Presentation–"Modeling Professionalism in the Dining Room" (Guest Presenter)

- Dining/Table Manners/Etiquette (Simulation/Role-play Activities)
- Evaluation Exercises (Appendix A1)

11:30 Mentorship/Networking/Students' Interaction with Employers

12:00 Lunch

Break & Preparation for Formal Banquet

Afternoon Session: Formal Banquet & Awards Ceremony

Target Skills: Public Speaking Skills & Professional Etiquette Skills (Dining/Table

       Etiquette)

1:30   Banquet and Awards Ceremony

- Preliminaries–Welcome, Prayer, etc. (5 minutes)

- Guest Speaker–"Succeeding in a Global Market" or "When Employers Stop Recruiting" (30 minutes)

- Dinner–Students given opportunity to display appropriate table manners/etiquette (1 hour)

- Student Speakers–Reflections (Sample of 7 students' perspectives on the Job Readiness Workshop. Allow 35 minutes–5 minutes per student)

- Distribution of Awards and Certificates. Allow 30 minutes. (Appendix A17 for a sample certificate)

  ✓ Award each student-participant a Certificate of Achievement

  ✓ Special Awards (Outstanding display of relevant soft skills during the Job Readiness Workshop)

    o Teamwork

    o Communication

    o Interpersonal

    o Most cooperative/involved

  ✓ Presentation to Employers

- Vote of Thanks–Presented by a student. Allow 5 minutes

- Mentorship/Networking/Students' Interaction with Employers (30 mins.)

- Evaluation Exercises–completed by students; allow 5 minutes. (Appendix A18)

5:00   Closing Exercises and Departure

Appendix A: The Project

Part 2: Job Readiness Workshop Facilitator's Manual

Workshop Overview

The data analysis results of a study conducted on soft skills as relevant employability skills from the perspectives of students and employers in the associate degree program at a community college revealed that employers are seeking entry-level recruits with a composite of technical (hard) and soft skills (nontechnical). The soft skills refer to the nontechnical skill sets such as communication, teamwork, work ethic, among other people skills.

The criteria for determining soft skills requirements are narrowed to two factors– the level of entry and the nature of job/industry. Based on the feedback from employers participating in the college's work experience program, the key entry-level soft skills that students need to improve include communication (written and oral), self-management, and interview skills. The employers' recommendations supported the introduction of a mandatory training program that targets the soft skills needs of the community college students. As a result, the Job Readiness Workshop was developed to help students to hone the relevant soft skills to meet employers' entry-level requirements.

The workshop is scheduled for three days and runs three consecutive days at the end of the first semester of the second year of the associate degree program. The workshop is designed to provide preparatory work for students prior to the work experience program which commences just after the first semester examinations and concludes at the end of the first month of the second semester. The Job Readiness Workshop focuses on the following areas:

1. Job seeking skills
2. Job maintenance skills
3. Personal development skills

Workshop Objectives:

The objectives of the Job Readiness Workshop are to:

1. Build students' awareness about soft skills.
2. Prepare students for work through prerequisite soft skills.
3. Support job seeking, procurement, and retention.
4. Facilitate professional develop through professional business dress and etiquette.

Job Readiness Workshop Timeline

The workshop is designed for three consecutive days. The workshop caters to 80 participants. Each day targets different skills and incorporates the involvement of industry experts. The schedule of the workshop is as outlined below:

Day 1: Job Seeking Skills 1

Morning Session:

Target Skills: Soft Skills Awareness and Communication Skills 1–Oral & Nonverbal

   Communication Skills

8:30   Welcome and Ice breaker/Introductions (Chief Facilitator)

9:00   Goals of Job Readiness Workshop (Chief Facilitator)

9:20   Presentation–"The importance of Soft Skills" (Chief Facilitator)

10:00 Presentation–"Communication as the Most Relevant Soft Skill" (Guest Presenter/Employer)

- Incorporates listening skills
- Body language
- Public speaking tips
- Group activity–Ask students to group in pairs; ask students to role-play scenarios demonstrating nonverbal and verbal communication in work settings; prepare and present short (2 minutes) presentation on a given topic. Use peer assessment and feedback.

11:20 Break

11:30 Presentation–"Building a Professional Portfolio" (Chief Facilitator)

12:00 Lunch

Afternoon Session:

Target Skills: Communication Skills 2–Written Communication Skills (Cover Letter & Résumé) and Networking Skills/Interpersonal Skills (Interaction with peers and employers)
1:00   Presentation–"The Cover Letter and Résumé as Communication Tools"–Part 1 (Guest Presenter/Employer)

1:40   Break

2:00   Presentation–"The Cover Letter and Résumé as Communication Tools"–Part 2
       (Guest Presenter/Employer)

3:00   Writing Sessions (Students' Activities–supervised by the guest
       presenter/employer and chief facilitator)

       (3) Preparing the Cover Letter and Résumé

       Activity (20–25 minutes)–based on job advertisements from internet and
       newspapers, ask students to select one job advertisement and prepare the cover
       letter and résumé. Have students exchange cover letters and résumés for peer
       assessment and review (chief facilitator provides advertisements.

       Writing session continues (Student Activity–supervised by guest
       presenter/employer and chief facilitator)

       (4) Building the Professional Portfolio (5 minutes)

4:00   Break

4:10   Mentorship and Networking with Industry Professionals

4:50   Day 1 Wrap-up

       • Assignment–Ask students to prepare for mock job interview and
         professional attire assessment
       • Evaluation Exercises (Appendix A1)
       • Reflections/written journal–form provided by facilitator. (Appendix A9)

Day 2: Job Seeking Skills 2 & Job Maintenance Skills

Morning Session:

Target Skills: Work Ethic Skills–Professionalism (Professional Attire)

8:30   Welcome and Icebreaker (Chief Facilitator)

8:45   Reflections (Ask a sample of 5 students to provide a 2-minute reflection of Day 1
       lessons learned)

9:00   Overview of Day 2 Goals (Chief Facilitator)

9:10   Presentation–"Tips from Head to Toe" (Guest Presenter/Employer)

10:10   Break

10:40   Dress Assessment–Student Activity–have employers and chief facilitator evaluate students' professional attire. (Appendix A10)

Appropriate Business attire for various functions

- Business Formal
  4. Interview
  5. Regular workday
  6. Formal office function (Awards Banquet, etc.)

- Business Casual
  3. Dress-down/Casual workday
  4. Office party

12:00   Lunch

Afternoon Session:

Target Skills: Communication/Job Interview Skills

1:00   Presentation–"Mastering the Job Interview" (Guest Presenter/Employer)

2:30   Break

3:00   Practice Makes Perfect–Simulation Activity/Role-play/Mock Job Interview
        Invite panel of employers to interview the students. (Appendices A11 and A12
        for sample interview questions and assessment form respectively).

4:30   Day 2 Wrap-up

- Evaluation Exercises (Appendix A1)
- Reflections/Written journal; ask a sample of 5 students to provide a 2-minute reflection of Day 2 lessons learned. (Refer to Appendix A13)
- Assignment–complete portfolio

Day 3: Professional Day (Professional Development)

Morning Session:

Target Skills: Work Ethics Skills (Business Etiquette), Problem Solving, Interpersonal,
        & Teamwork Skills

8:30   Welcome (Chief Facilitator)

8:45   Reflections (Sample of 5 students provide a 2-minute reflection of Day 2 lessons
        learned)

9:00   Overview of Day 3 Goals (Chief Facilitator)

9:10   Presentation–"A Typical Day at Work"

- Case studies/Problem solving scenarios (Appendix 14)

10:00 Break

10:20 Presentation–"Modeling Professionalism in the Dining Room" (Guest Presenter)

- Dining/Table Manners/Etiquette (Simulation/Role-play Activities)
- Evaluation Exercises (Appendix A1)

11:30 Mentorship/Networking/Students' Interaction with Employers

12:00 Lunch

Break & Preparation for Formal Banquet

Afternoon Session: Formal Banquet & Awards Ceremony

Target Skills: Public Speaking Skills & Professional Etiquette Skills (Dining/Table
        Etiquette)

1:30   Banquet and Awards Ceremony

- Preliminaries–Welcome, Prayer, etc. (5 minutes)
- Dinner–Students given opportunity to display appropriate table
  manners/etiquette (1 hour)
- Guest Speaker–"Succeeding in a Global Market" or "When Employers
  Stop Recruiting" (30 minutes)
- Student Speakers–Reflections (Sample of 7 students' perspectives on the
  Job Readiness Workshop; allow 35 minutes–5 minutes per student)
- Distribution of Awards and Certificates; allow 30 minutes. (Appendix
  A17 for a sample certificate)

✓ Award each student-participant a Certificate of Achievement
✓ Special Awards (Outstanding display of relevant soft skills during the Job Readiness Workshop)

    o Teamwork
    o Communication
    o Interpersonal
    o Most cooperative/involved

✓ Presentation to Employers

- Vote of Thanks–Presented by student (5 minutes)
- Mentorship/Networking/Students' Interaction with Employers (30 minutes)
- Evaluation Exercises–completed by students; allow 5 minutes. (Appendix A18)

5:00   Closing Exercises and Departure

Students' Expectations:

Each participant must understand and adhere to the following expectations in order to successfully complete the Job Readiness Workshop:

- Punctuality: Each day's program commences promptly at the designated time. Everyone should be present at that time.
- Attendance: Each participant is expected to attend all sessions in order to receive the certificate of participation. Students must affix their signature to a daily register. Each student must affix his/her own signature; no other student must sign for another at any given time.
- Communication: Open, honest, and respectful sharing of thoughts, ideas, and questions are encouraged.
- Personal goals: Each participant is expected to set personal goals for each session, and how he/she intends to perform on the job.
- Personal responsibility: Each participant must accept responsibility for his/her own participation and learning.
- Respect: Each participant must display respect for self and others (peers & facilitators)

Workshop Notes

The workshop notes are organized by the daily schedule and the skills targeted. The objectives for each session are also outlined in the workshop materials.

Day 1: Job Seeking Skills 1 (Morning Session)

Target Skills: Soft Skills Awareness and Communication Skills 1 (Oral & Nonverbal)

Presentation 1:

Topic: The Importance of Soft Skills

(Duration: 30 minutes)

Objectives: At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. define soft skills.
2. identify soft skills relevant for the nature of jobs/position they qualify to fill.

Content:

Icebreaker: Who Am I?

Purpose: Have students articulate who they are based on things they like; express to others who they are; and work as a team.

Group students in teams of five and issue index cards to students. Have students write their names on index cards provided. Under their names, each participant must draw three favorite things (no words allowed)–sports, hobby, and food. For each thing, write two traits needed to enjoy that thing. (For example, if I drew the image of netball as my favorite sport, I write flexibility and teamwork as the traits needed to enjoy playing netball). Ask students to share information they have written on their card with their group members. At the end of sharing within groups, have each group present the most interesting response and say why they chose that person's response.

What are Soft Skills?

Soft skills are also known as nontechnical skills and are defined as the "interpersonal, human, people or behavioral skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace" (Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera, as quoted by De Villiers, 2010, p. 2). Soft skills are categorized as being related to human issues, such as communication, teamwork, leadership, conflict management, negotiation, professionalism and ethics (Azim et al., 2010). These skills facilitate the positive interpersonal relationships and eventually improved job performances. Soft skills can be applied to a wide array of settings and job situations.

Examples of Soft Skills:

- Communication skills–verbal and nonverbal (oral, written, body language); listening skills
- Teamwork skills
- Decision making skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Self-management skills
- Work ethic skills
- Problem solving skills

Importance of Soft Skills:

Soft skills are just as important as hard or technical skills. Employers expect their employees to possess soft skills to enhance job performances. The importance of soft skills has not be given the attention it deserves and not much training programs exist that focus on soft skills. However, employers are selecting their recruits based on soft skills acquisition in addition to hard skills. Similarly, there is an increasing trend in academia that efforts must be placed on guiding students through soft skills development process.

Individuals who possess soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills tend to function better in work setting than other individuals who need improvement or lack these key people skills. The findings of this study indicated that the most important soft skills include communication skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and work attitude skills. The employers in particular, incorporated the need for improvement in oral and written communications, for example in application letters, résumés, and job interviews. The significance of soft skills is the rationale behind this need for this Job Readiness Workshop. The workshop is a deliberate effort to promote the development of relevant soft skills that employers seek in entry-level recruits. These skills can be honed through different approaches.

Are Soft Skills Inherited or Learned?

Soft skills are not inherited. It may appear that individuals are born with soft skills; however, an individual's socio-economic (home and educational) backgrounds aids in hindering or fostering the development and practice of soft skills. Some individuals have limited exposure to soft skills, and are therefore unaware of the relevance of soft skills. Soft skills are learned or developed through adequate exposure and consistent reinforcement of the importance of these skills in everyday life situations (personal and professional settings).

Best Practices for Learning Soft Skills:

Research findings suggest that soft skills can be learned through different strategies. The eclectic learning styles of students confirm that some students learn soft skills at different

stages and methods. Generally, soft skills experts suggest that students learn relevant soft skills through lived experiences, simulation exercises, and mentorship programs. The Job Readiness Workshop integrates the best practices for learning soft skills; the workshop is a prerequisite or preparatory phase for the work experience program.

Group Activity:

Ask students to revisit the icebreaker activity completed at the beginning of the workshop. Ask students to complete a similar activity, but this time have students list their ideal entry-level job and then identify and list the relevant soft skills their employer would look for in an ideal candidate/employee. Have a sample of students share their responses. Entertain feedback from peers and chief facilitator.

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation. (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

(End of Session 1)

Presentation 2:

Topic: Communication as the Most Relevant Soft Skill

(Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes)

Objectives: At the end of the communication skills 1 (oral and nonverbal communication skills) session, the students will be able to:

1. identify communication challenges that hinder career progress.
2. develop the art of communicating with peers and superiors.
3. learn the messages of their nonverbal communication.
4. prepare a speech on a given topic.
5. present a short public speech on a given topic.

Content:

What is communication?

"The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said"–Peter Drucker (Anderson & Bolt, 2013).

Communication skills are the skills that people use to share (give and receive) information.   Communication has many forms:

1. nonverbal (body language, posture, facial expressions, gestures, etc.)
2. verbal (using words and sounds)
3. written (letters, text messages, e-mails, etc.)
4. visual (posters, pictures, diagrams, symbols, etc.)

Nonverbal Communication:

Nonverbal communication represents all forms of communication that do not include words. That is, communication via eye contact, facial expressions, nodding, and body positioning (Anderson & Bolt, 2013).

Body language is an important aspect of speaking because it enhances the message that is being communicated. The use of gesticulations can help to eliminate nervousness, but too much gesticulation can be distracting. Body language must be used in a smooth and natural way to convey the intended message.

Student Activity 1: Gestures

Have students play a game of gestures to convey the idea of how nonverbal communication can be misinterpreted, difficult to understand, and at the same time, effective in supplementing verbal communication.

Gestures Game–Appendix A2 (Case, 2010)

Verbal Communication:

Verbal communication refers to the use of words to send messages. It is important to select the proper words that send the message you intend for the receiver. Wrong choice of words and tone can distort the message. In this session, the presenter focuses on oral communication as a form of verbal communication. Oral communication refers to the spoken words or sounds.

Student Activity 2:

Ask students to role-play scenarios depicting the use of verbal communication skills. Each scenario includes at least two persons (supervisor and subordinate). Allow actors to improvise the role-play. After the role-play, facilitate participants' feedback to the following questions:

What messages were communicated in this scenario? Was there anything either party could have done differently?

Scenario 1: John has been approached by a superior, Jade, to complete a given task that is urgently required. John is already engaged in other tasks assigned by another superior, and simply beckons that Jade leaves the work on his desk. Jade feels disrespected and reports John to the CEO and asks for his removal. She noted that this is a regular practice by John.

Scenario 2: Maxine is placed on her first work experience at a company for 4 weeks. By the end of the first week, Maxine's attitude declines because she is dissatisfied with the degree of records management duties. When her supervisor expresses concern, Maxine becomes angry and tells her it was not her choice to be at the company doing their dirty work.

Scenario 3: Tamar has been working for an accounting firm for 6 weeks, and her supervisor, Mr. Johnson, is impressed with her work attitude and overall performance. He offers some positive feedback that customers have also expressed.

Listening Skills:

 "The best way to understand people is to listen to them"–Ralph Nichols (Wood, 2012).

Icebreaker:

This listening icebreaker activity was adapted from United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (n.d.).

Provide each participant with one sheet of paper, offer the following directions, pausing after each instruction to give the group time to comply (complete the activity yourself using your own sheet of paper).

1. Pick up your sheet of paper and hold it in front of you.
2. Close your eyes and listen carefully to
    my directions. The rules are: (a) no peeking and (b) no questions.
3. The first thing I want you to do is to fold your sheet of paper in half. (Pause)
4. Now, tear off the upper right hand corner. (Pause)
5. Fold the paper in half again and tear off the upper left hand corner of the sheet. (Pause)
6. Fold it in half again. (Pause)
7. Now tear off the lower right-hand corner of the sheet. (Pause)

After all tearing is complete, say: Now, open your eyes and unfold your paper. If I did a good job of communicating and you did a good job of listening, all of our sheets should look exactly the same! Hold your sheet up for everyone to see. Ask participants to compare their sheets. Ask why no one's paper matched yours exactly? *(Expect probably responses such as, "You didn't let us ask any questions!" or "The way you gave us directions wasn't clear!")*

Introduce the importance of the two-way process of communication, the value of giving instructions and listening.

Listening is an active process, and involves more than just hearing. Listening involves being aware, physically receiving, selecting, organizing, interpreting, and responding to information (Wood, 2012). An important aspect of listening is the ability to recall or remember the information that has been communicated.

The following techniques indicate to the speaker that you are listening and paying attention (Velsoft Training Materials Inc., 2013):

1. Nonverbal signs such as eye contact, nodding of head, and use of silence.
2. Verbal signs include using phrases such as, "Yes, I understand", "Really!", and "Then what?"
3. Asking questions such as "Do you want me to send that information to you now?"
4. Summarizing statement to reiterate what you think the speaker is saying.

Barriers to Effective Communication and/or Listening:

Wood (2012) proposed the following barriers to effective listening:

1. Information overload: Trying to provide too much information can become a challenge to the senders and even to the recipient.
2. Complex information: The ability to listen attentively can be a problem if the information being communicated is difficult to understand, if the instructions are hard to follow or remember.
3. Distractions: Distractions such as noise, use of other devices (cell phones, beepers, IPAD, etc.), preoccupied thoughts, stereotype, and prejudgment can interfere with the ability to listen to information or to pass on information.
4. Lack of interest: The ability to listen to information can be very difficult if the recipient has no interest in the information being shared.

Communication as the most important soft skill

Several research studies have ranked communication skills as the most important soft skills that employees need to possess to function effectively in their jobs. Employers in

particular, consider communication skills as the highest ranked soft skill they expect from potential employees. During job interviews, employers evaluate potential recruits' ability to share information, relate or interact with others (peers, superiors, and customers), listen attentively, process information, write an error-free application letter and résumé, follow instructions, and use understandable appropriate language. Employers want to recruit employees who are conscious of their nonverbal cues, for example, eye contact, posture, facial expressions and hand signals).

Anderson and Bolt (2013) noted that communication involves informal and formal channels. Informal channels include outside of the structured lines of authority and occur among individuals at all levels; it may be referred to as grapevine (lacks full accuracy, does not contribute negative information, clarifies inaccurate information, and make no assumptions). Informal communication also deals with gossip, that is usually targeting the personal lives of individuals, inappropriate negative information about others with the intent to hurt others, show disrespect to others, use to defend peers, and also to clarify misinformation (Anderson & Bolt, 2013).

Formal communication channels occur within the formal lines of authority. Formal communication includes horizontal and vertical channels. Horizontal channels include communication across same or close levels of authority, and vertical channels focus on up or down (top-down or down-up) levels of authority as outlined on the organization chart (Anderson & Bolt, 2013).

The art of Public Speaking:

 "There are three things to aim at in public speaking: First, to get into your subject, then to get your subject into yourself, and lastly, to get your subject into the heart of your audience"–Alexander Gregg (Wood, 2012).

Public speaking is a key aspect of the professional life of some occupations, but not as important for others. Nevertheless, public speaking is one of the assets that employers consider as part of the communication package they want in employees. Employers are impressed with employees who are able to present ideas to others whether in a small or large group.

Not everyone is effective at public speaking, however, like other communication skills, the art of effective public speaking can be learned and mastered with practice and commitment. Rattenborg, Simonds, and Hunt (2010), and Wood (2013) agreed that an effective public speaker takes the following guidelines into account:

1. Selecting and narrowing a manageable topic: Determine the purpose of the speech and write a thesis statement that reflects the topic and speech.

2. Analyze the audience: Determine the role of the audience in the speech, gather information about the audience (find out their beliefs and attitudes), and base message based on the audience analysis.
3. Research the topic to integrate support materials: Find suitable sources or references, analyze the materials, and be sure to evaluate the reliability and credibility of support materials.
4. Organize the ideas for the speech: Arrange information relating to the speech in terms of chronological, spatial, topical, and/or causal. Use transitional statements to connect points.
5. Structure the presentation: Prepare an outline for the speech that guides the presentation of the speech.
6. Prepare a creative/attention getter introduction: It is important to capture the listeners' attention. A creative attention getter encourages listeners to engage interest in the speech and presenter. The presenter may use, for example, rhetorical questions, story, humor, quotation, and reference to current events, etc.
7. Include an effective conclusion: Incorporate a conclusion of the speech that summarizes the speech, and inspire the listeners to remember the speech.
8. Consider the appropriateness of the choice of language to use when presenting the speech: Use clear, accurate, understandable, and appropriate language that the listeners appreciate. Avoid racial and discriminatory language.
9. Prepare relevant presentation aids: Aids/props help make the presentation interesting. The presenter may use visual aids (pictures, videos, slideshows, PowerPoint presentations, and dramatizations, etc.)
10. Make the presentation: After several practice sessions, deliver the speech with confidence. It is appropriate to use a variety of voice volume, rate, pitch, and pauses. The speaker may also incorporate gestures and other nonverbal communication strategies.

Student Activity 3:

Ask students to prepare a 2-minute self-introductory speech. Ask the student to introduce himself or herself to his colleagues and give them information about his or her background, interests, and ambitions. The student must make eye contact and use relevant gesticulations.

Ask students' peers to provide assessment and feedback. (Appendix A3 for public speech assessment guide).

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.

3. Collect the evaluation forms.

(End of Session 2; Break for 10 minutes)

Presentation 3:

Topic: "Building a Professional Portfolio"

(Duration: 30 minutes)

Objectives: At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. know what a professional portfolio is.
2. know the value of the professional portfolio.
3. speak about himself/herself in a descriptive manner.
4. design a professional, personalized portfolio.

Content:

What is a professional portfolio?

The portfolio is a professional tool that job applicants use to sell their skills and abilities. The portfolio is a compilation of sample work, résumé, application letter, and other documents that illustrate the applicant's strengths (Velsoft Training Materials Inc., 2013; Guildford Technical Community College, n.d.). The portfolio must be updated to reflect an accurate status of the individual. The portfolio gives employers valuable information that cannot be captured in the application letter and résumé. As you design your portfolio consider the following:

- what you have to offer to an employer
- description of yourself
- your strengths and skills

The Portfolio Content:

Your portfolio is a personalized tool; however, Guildford Technical Community College (n.d.) recommended the following checklist as an excellent guide to ensuring your portfolio contains the relevant documents.

- ✓ Table of Contents
- ✓ Career Summary
- ✓ Goals
- ✓ Personal Philosophy and Mission Statement

- ✓ Résumé
- ✓ Accomplishments
- ✓ Work Samples
- ✓ Research, Publications, and Reports
- ✓ Testimonials and Letters of Recommendation
- ✓ Awards and Honors
- ✓ Conferences and Workshops
- ✓ Transcripts, Degrees, Licenses, and Certifications
- ✓ Professional Development Activities
- ✓ Volunteering/Community Service
- ✓ References

The portfolio should be attractive and creative; proofread all materials well to avoid errors, and provide relevant, up-dated information, for example contact information (name, address, telephone, and e-mail contact). Use a professional e-mail address instead of those reserved for friends and family. Include information that is relevant for the position you are applying for. Remember that your portfolio reflects your organizational skills and attention to detail (Guildford Technical Community College, n.d.) .

Student Activity 4: (Description of Self)

Ask students to complete the self-description form found in their manual [Appendix A4 (i)]. For assistance in using appropriate descriptive verbs [Appendix A4 (ii)] (Commonwealth Corporation, 2010)

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

(End of Session 3; Break for lunch–1 hour)

Day 1: Job Seeking Skills 1 (Afternoon Session)

Target Skills: Communication Skills 2–Written Communication Skills (Cover Letter & Résumé)

Presentation 4:

(Duration: 40 hours)

Topic: "The Cover Letter and Résumé as a Communication Tools" (Part 1)

Objectives: At the end of the communication skills 2–Written Communication (Cover Letter) session, the students will be able to:

1. identify the features of an application letter
2. compose an application letter

Content:

Written Communication:

In a previous session you have explored the use of verbal (oral) and nonverbal communication, in this session the focus is on written communication. Written communication involves either printed, handwritten or electronic (soft copy) formats of letters, memoranda, text messages, and e-mails. These media are very important tools in communicating information within the workplace. As it relates to written communication, two of the most important tools used in job seeking endeavors are the application letter and résumé.

The application letter and the résumé help the applicant communicate to the employer what he/she has to offer to the organization. The employer examines the application letter and résumé to determine whether the applicant has the requisite skills the employer needs.

The Application Letter

The application letter is also known as the cover letter and is a formal letter that introduces the résumé (Anderson & Bolt, 2013). It is important that the application letter is prepared well, as it is the first impression of the application for the employer. The tone of the application letter must be professionally written with carefully selected words.

Anderson and Bolt (2013) recommend the following guidelines for preparing the application letter:

✓ typed-written on white paper with black ink
✓ write to a specific person
✓ error-free (no typographical or grammatical errors)
✓ include basic features of a business letter–return address/personal letterhead (contact information), date, inside address, salutation, body of the letter, complementary close, signature, signatory, and enclosure
✓ avoid negativity
✓ short and simple (1-page)

✓ request interview
✓ do not replicate the résumé (briefly include qualification)
✓ avoid "I" statements
✓ refer reader to the résumé
✓ indicate how you learned about the job offer
✓ be honest–do not lie or exaggerate facts

Appendix A5 illustrates a sample format of an application letter (Anderson & Bolt, 2013).

Presentation 4 Cont'd:

(Duration: 1 hour)

Topic: "The Cover Letter and Résumé as Communication Tools" (Part 2)

Objectives: At the end of the communication skills 2–Written Communication (Résumé) session, the students will be able to:

1. identify the components of a résumé
2. write career objectives
3. prepare a résumé

Content:

The Résumé:

The résumé is a written formal profile of an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities that is presented to potential employer(s). No employer wants to waste time reviewing a résumé to determine suitability of an applicant, the résumé must be well-written so that the employer can quickly identify the skills and experience of the applicant. Anderson and Bolt (2013) recommended the following guidelines for preparing a good résumé:

1. Establish clear career objective/personal profile
   a) Both statements are used on résumés to relate to target career, target employer, introduce key skills, and express interest in a position.
   b) Career objective: Used for individuals with little or no work experience
   c) Personal Profile: Used for individuals with extensive career experience

2. Gather relevant information & create draft document with six key headings
   i) Education
   ii) Skills (technical and soft skills)
   iii) Employment

       iv) Languages
       v) Honors and Awards
       vi) Professional/Community Involvement

3. Select a proper layout
   a) Functional résumé layout (usually for entry-level positions; 1-page)
   b) Chronological résumé layout (usually for higher level positions; two or more pages)
      i) Both résumé layouts present employment history and education in reverse time order
      ii) Be consistent in layout, dates, and tense
      iii) Avoid the use of résumé templates

4. Prepare the final draft of the résumé
   a) Check for information that is frequently forgotten or not presented appropriately
   b) Information heading: personal contact information–avoid personal information such as photographs, birth date, and marital status
   c) Use a professional address)
   d) Use easy to read font and size–black ink, 12–14 point Times New Roman or Arial
   e) Do not list "References Available" on résumé

Appendix A6 illustrates a sample résumé with functional layout (Anderson & Bolt, 2013)

Student Activity: Application Letter and Résumé Writing

Writing Session 1:

(Duration: 20–25 minutes)

Based on job advertisements from the internet and newspapers (provided by facilitator), ask students to select one job advertisement and prepare a draft copy of the application letter and résumé.

Student Activity: Building Your Professional Portfolio

Writing Session 2:

(Duration: 5 minutes)

Have students begin building their professional portfolio; include copy of application letter and résumé. Ask students to complete a typed-written copy of the application and résumé and work on the design of the portfolio for assignment.

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

(End of Session 4; Break for 10 minutes)

Presentation 5: (This session focuses on helping students to establish networks with employers from industries).

Topic: "Mentorship and Networking with Industry Professionals"

(Duration: 40 minutes)

Target Skills: Networking Skills

Objectives: At the end of this session students will be able to:

1. define professional mentorship and networking
2. create a professional network and identify at least one mentor

Procedure for facilitating the professional network session:

1. The facilitator introduces the concept of mentorship and professional networking so that students understand what professional networking is and the value of mentors.
2. Ask employers to introduce themselves to the students publicly.
3. Ask students to interact with employers on an individual basis or in groups
4. Encourage students to share contact details with employers and establish mentorship/networking relationships.

Content:

Mentorship:

What is Mentorship?

Mentorship is a partnership that builds a relationship with an experienced person with a less-experienced individual with the aim of fostering personal and professional development for the mentor, the mentee and related organizations. A mentor is sometimes referred to as a role model, and serves as a motivation to the mentee. The mentee is the less-experienced person who is being mentored.

Benefits of Mentoring:

To the mentor:

1. The opportunity to share knowledge and skills to help others develop personally and professionally
2. An understanding of the challenges or issues that others face in a contextual framework
3. Builds leadership and interpersonal skills developed through coaching and relating to others
4. Helps to define acceptable professional behavior for inexperienced mentees

To the mentee:

1. The avenue or source to discuss or talk about concerns, problems and issues related to professional and personal goals
2. Obtain insight into the culture, practices, and expectations of organizations through mentors
3. Establish network with organizations and create opportunities for employment
4. Builds interpersonal skills and other soft skills
5. Fosters career advancement

To related organizations:

1. Improves staff retention
2. Improves customer service and satisfaction–skills transferred help new recruits to model
3. acceptable behaviors
4. Reduces recruitment expenses and meet recruitment goals
5. Communicates the mission, vision, and goals of the organization to potential/current employees
6. Provides a practical application of knowledge-based learning

Role of the Mentor:

Mentors function as:

- **Career counselors**: Help mentees to understand the skills, values and attitude required for specific careers; help them to plan and implement strategies toward career goals; provide support for challenges and feedback on performance. Mentors also function as liaison with other key individual who may provide further assistance to mentee.

- **Coaches:** Share experiences and insight into the expectations of organizations and guide the mentee in how to achieve career goals and professional development in general. Mentors may also provide hands-on learning exposure for mentees to apply learning to practical settings.
- **Agents:** Act as advocates in the professional affairs of the mentee and act as links in the network of influential individuals.

Professional Networking:

What is Professional Networking?

Professional networking is the act of establishing and maintaining professional relationships with industry and education personnel. The persons in a professional network include peers (friends and/or coworkers), superiors/supervisors, instructors, and family. There is no limit to the number of persons that can be included in the network. These individuals are available for advice and assistance in the pursuit of professional goals. One can use social media, face-to-face, and/or telephone to contact individuals in this professional network.

Tips for establishing a professional network:

✓ Display confidence
✓ Initiate introductions
✓ Have personal business cards available
✓ Offer a professional handshake
✓ Be willing to share information electronically, but cautiously

Opportunities for Networking:

✓ Professional association meetings
✓ Trade association meetings/shows
✓ Entertainment events–sports, parties, music events
✓ Volunteerism–nursing, children's homes, and other facilities
✓ Religious meetings
✓ Social clubs–toastmaster, Key Club, Kiwanis Club, etc.

Anderson and Bolt (2013) suggested the need for network partners to share the following contact details:

✓ Name
✓ Address
✓ Telephone number(s)
✓ E-mail address

✓ Face book/website access

Activity: Ask students to engage in interaction with employers–identify at least one mentor and establish a professional network with employers. (Appendix A7 (i), Appendix A7 (ii) for mentors and mentee's information forms (Design Ignites Change, 2010), and Appendix A8 for professional network form).

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

(End of Session 5)

Reflections:

Have students prepare a written journal of the lessons learned during Day 1 of the Job Readiness Workshop (Appendix A9 for sample journal)

Assignments: Professional Portfolio and Interview Attire

Ask students to complete their professional portfolio to be presented to the interviewer(s) on Day 2 at the mock job interviews. Encourage students to select and bring with them their attire for the professional attire assessment on Day 2.

(End of Day 1 of Job Readiness Workshop)

Day 2: Job Seeking Skills 2 (Morning Session)

Target Skills: Work Ethic Skills–Professionalism (Professional Attire)

Welcome and Icebreaker–(The chief facilitator engages students in the following icebreaker and reflection activities)

Icebreaker Activity: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

In this icebreaker, each of the five volunteers is asked to look in a full-length mirror provided and describe who is looking back at him/her in the mirror. The volunteers cannot give their names as a response. Facilitate feedback from the other students/participants.

Reflection Activity:

Ask a sample of 4 students to share their journal that was prepared at the end of Day 1 of the Job Readiness Workshop (allocate 2 minutes for each students).

Overview of Day 2 Goals: (The chief facilitator shares with students an overview of the goals of Day 2 of the Job Readiness Workshop).

The aim of Day 2 of the Job Readiness Workshop is to help students to:

- Understand that an individual's dress code communicates much about the person.
- Understand the importance of making the right impression on others, particularly potential employers through dress.
- Learn how to appropriate attire for different occasions in the work settings.
- Prepare for the job interview.
- Learn the art of mastering job interviews.
- Continue building their professional portfolio.
- Learn through reflection (Journaling).

Presentation 1:

Topic: "Tips from Head to Toe"

(Duration: 1 hour)

Objectives: At the end of the presentation, the students will be able to:

1. state the impact of dress on the perception of others of the individual.
2. demonstrate appropriate professional attire for the work place, formal business functions, office party, and casual day at work.

Content:

PART 1:

Icebreaker: What not to wear

The facilitator projects on screen the images of individuals and asks participants to determine the appropriateness of the attire for the workplace. The participants must tell why the attire is appropriate or inappropriate for the workplace.

Dress as a means of communication:

Nonverbal communications is important in the decision-making process for employers when hiring new recruits. Most first impressions are based on your visual appearance. A handshake, clothing and grooming, among other things convey in a subtle way, many things about an individual. In most instances, people make assumptions about others just by the way they dress. First impressions last. Many people do not forget their first impression of you based on the choice of attire. How you look also impact how you perform on the job.

Most organizations have a dress code that outlines the organization's policy on attire, make-up, jewelry, and hairstyle. Based on the nature of the job and/or industry, the dress code may differ to facilitate health and safety issues. Maintain a dress code that conforms to the company's policy and match your style and taste.

Types of attire:

Harvey (n.d.) described two types of business attire:

1. Business Formal–this type of attire is suitable for:
   a. Interview
   b. Regular workday–Work uniforms or clothes that are worn to work only.
   c. Formal Office function (Awards Banquet, etc.)–Special occasions such as awards banquet, launch of product/market/company, and other functions require attire that is formal than regular workdays. A black-tie affair with black suit, gowns (long for evening and short for morning and afternoon), or formal skirt/pants suits.

2. Business Casual–this type of attire is usually a balance between business formal and street wear. This type of attire may vary according to organizations and territories; therefore, it is best to consult with the organization's dress code.

   a. Dress-down/Casual workday–Days when the dress code is relaxed and less formal. The attire must still be appropriate for work.
   b. Office party

Examples of unacceptable attire:

- Torn, stained or washed-out clothes (jeans, shirts, etc.)
- Shirts or blouses that have offensive images or words
- Flip-flops/slippers/sneakers
- Colored hair–red, orange, purple, pink, and other unnatural hair colors may be seen as inappropriate for the office.
- Caps
- T-shirts

- Revealing clothes
- Clothes that do not fit well

NB: Different territories may have specific guidelines for professional dress, for example, plaited-hair for males is not acceptable in the Jamaican context.

Tips from Head to Toe:

Select clothing, fragrances, hairstyles, and jewelry that maintain a professional image.

- Avoid body piercings, more than one pair of earring, flashy chains, bracelets, etc.
- Hide visible tattoos
- Clothes should be clean and neatly ironed.
- Wear clothes that fit–not too tight or loose.
- Shower daily and use mild fragrances.
- Maintain well-groomed hands, nails, and hair
- Maintain good oral hygiene (fresh breath and daily care of teeth)
- Wear comfortable and clean shoe in good condition.

Special Tips for Women as cited by Harvey (n.d.):

- Makeup should be for day wear
- It is not acceptable to wear suggestive clothing
- Wear skirts of knee-length or longer
- Tailor pants suits only if pantsuits are worn
- Avoid long colored nails

Special Tips for Men as noted by Harvey (n.d.):

- Shave and/or trim facial hair, including nose and ear hair
- Shirts should be tucked in
- Hats should not be worn inside buildings except for religious purposed
- Avoid socks that are not dark blue, black or gray
- Belt should match shoes and hold pants on the waist
- Avoid pants below waist that show undergarments
- Strictly no earring

(End of Part 1 of Session 1; 10 minutes break)

PART 2:

Student Activity: Professional Attire Assessment

(Duration: 2 hours 15 minutes)

Ask all students participating in a dress assessment; the chief facilitator and have a panel of employers to evaluate the appropriateness of the attire for various functions–job interview, regular work day, casual day, office party, and formal function–Awards Banquet, etc. (Appendix A10 for professional attire assessment form).

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

(End of Part 2 of Session 1; Lunch break for 1 hour)

Day 2: Job Seeking Skills 2 (Afternoon Session)

Target Skills: Communication Skills/Job Interview Skills

PART 1:

Presentation 2:

Topic: "Mastering the Job Interview"

(Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes)

Objectives: At the end of the communication skills 2–Written Communication (Cover Letter & Résumé) session, the students will be able to:

1. prepare for a job interview
2. know the different types of interview questions
3. know how to answer the different types of interview questions
4. communicate effective at the interview
5. learn how to solicit feedback after the interview.

Content:

The Job Interview:

The job interview is a formal meeting at which the employer evaluates whether an applicant possesses the relevant hard and soft skills their organization is looking for at a

given time. The meeting is not about the applicant per se, but about the needs of the organization and how the applicant can help the organization meet these needs. Although the job market is competitive and positions are scarce, the applicant can also use the interview to determine whether the organization is the right one for him/her.

The employer is evaluating what you say, as well as how you say it. The interviewer is looking at your communication skills (are you well-spoken; grammar, clarity, etc.), and also your attitude. It is very important to understand the purpose of the interview in order to make it for to your advantage. In essence, the employer needs to know five things about the applicant:

1. Why you want to work for the organization and not elsewhere?
2. What you can offer the organization?
3. Who are you, and how will you fit in the culture and structure of the organization?
4. How better are you than the other applicant(s)?
5. Can the organization afford your services?

When an individual obtains a job interview that in itself is an accomplishment, as the employer initially perception of the person is favorable. The job interview process can be very stressful and it is normal for the interviewee to become nervous. However, because the applicant has only a few minutes to convince the employer that he/she is the right person for the job, it is important to display confidence and poise during the interview. Mastering the interview takes preparation and practice.

Preparing for the Job Interview:

The following tips are important guidelines prior to, during, and after the interview.

a) *Prior to the Interview:*

1. Gather information about the organization (its mission, vision, goals, current projects, goods and services, etc.)
2. Prepare and have someone else (mentor, etc.) vet your professional portfolio
3. Have your portfolio ready and located where you will not forget it
4. Conduct mock interviews with mentors to get adequate practice
5. Purge personal social network of inappropriate images and other messages
6. Identify the shortest transportation route to the interview
7. Prepare clothing and other necessaries the night before
8. Set alarm clock or other device for the appropriate time that will make you ready early
9. Have a proper breakfast the day of the interview
10. Have a bath/shower and maintain proper oral hygiene
11. Know exactly who and where you will report to when you get to the interview

12. Practice good manners to everyone in the organization (even the auxiliary staff)
13. When you arrive at the interview location, turn off all electronic devices (cell phone, pager, tablets, etc.)

b) *During the Interview:*

Student Activity: Ask sample of students to demonstrate each point as they are presented

1. Greet interviewer(s) with a smile and firm handshake
2. Take a seat only if offered
3. Maintain positive eye contact, pleasant and friendly attitude
4. Remain attentive (even if the interview takes longer than planned)
5. Speak clearly and audibly
6. Use appropriate language (no slangs, fowl and
7. Ask for clarification of questions you may not understand
8. Take deep breathe (subtly) if you feel nervous
9. Ask appropriate questions when the opportunity is offered

c) *After the Interview:*

Immediately following the interview:

1. Stand, offer a firm handshake and thank the interviewer(s) for taking time for your interview
2. Express your interest in the job and your anticipation of feedback of the interview
3. Ask whether you should make contact or wait for a response from the organization and when is the best time to expect this feedback

Day(s) after the interview:

1. Send a thank you letter. Express thanks for the time taken for your interview and your anticipation of a response
2. Keep your cell phone line available (if contact is to be made by telephone), or check e-mail as is necessary
3. If you were told to make follow-up contact, do so at the agreed date and time
4. If an offer is made, indicate your acceptance or rejection politely
5. Obtain follow-up information on when to report and to whom (if you have accepted the job offer)

Additional Tips for a Great Interview (Harvey, n.d.)*:*

Do's:

- Arrive 10–15 minutes early
- Answer questions thoroughly
- Write a thank you note/letter within 48 hours
- Pause and think about answers before you respond

Don'ts:

- Chew gum
- Give one- or two-word answers
- Smoke prior to interview
- Look at watch during the interview
- Interrupt the interviewer
- Talk poorly about former/current employer

Job Interview Questions:

Having knowledge of the nature of questions to expect from the interviewer is very critical for a successful interview. The interviewee is better able to provide adequate responses to satisfy the interviewer's curiosity. It is important to review and practice the responses, but the idea is not to have mechanical responses to the interview questions.

The interviewer may give the interviewee the opportunity to ask questions also. The questions that the interviewee asks may influence the interviewer's decision to hire or not to hire. Ask questions that show that you are interested in the goals of the organization and not just a paycheck. Appendices A11 represents sample job interview questions for interviewer and interviewee (Harvey, n.d.).

Guidelines for Responding to Popular Interview Questions:

- Tell me about yourself:

  The interviewer wants to find out the assets you possess for the particular position/job. Respond with your educational and work experiences that highlight your strengths that make you the best candidate for the job.

- Why do you want to work with this organization?

  The interviewer wants to determine what you know about the organization and if your career goals correlate with the goals of the organization's goals. Demonstrate that you did your research about the organization and that you have the skills to help the organization to solve problems and meet its goals.

- Do you have any questions?

> Seize the opportunity to ask at least one question; the question should not be about remuneration and benefits. (Refer to Appendix A11 for suggestions).

(End of Part 1 of Session 2; 15 minutes break)

PART 2:

Student Activity: Practice Makes Perfect (Simulation Activity/Mock Job Interviews)

(Duration: 1 hour 50 minutes)

Based on application letter and résumé writing activity completed in Day 1, ask students to participate in a mock job interview for the position they had prepared their letter and résumé for.
Ask a panel of expert human resource managers and other managers to conduct and evaluate students' performance on the mock job interviews. Each interview must last 10 minutes and conducted privately or publicly (depending on the number of employers attending). (Appendices A11 and A12 for interview questions and mock job interview assessment form respectively).

Ask the panelists to provide feedback to each student privately (if the interview is conducted privately). If the interview is conducted publicly, provide feedback on each interview and a summary of the overall feedback to the participants in general. Have students share their experience and feedback also.

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

Student Activity: Reflection/Personal Journal

Reflection: Ask students to complete the written journal based on the activities of Day 2 (Appendix A13).

Assignment: Professional Portfolio

Assign students the task of completing their professional portfolio as home assignment.

(End of Part 2 of Session 2)

(End of Day 2 of Job Readiness Workshop)

Day 3: Professional Day (Morning Session)

Target Skills: Work Ethic Skills (Business Etiquette), Problem Solving, Interpersonal, & Teamwork Skills

Welcome–(The chief facilitator engages students in the following icebreaker and reflection activities)

Reflection Activity:

Ask a sample of 5 students to share their journal that was prepared at the end of Day 2 of the Job Readiness Workshop (allocate 2 minutes for each students).

Overview of Day 3 Goals: (The chief facilitator shares with students an overview of the goals of Day 3 of the Job Readiness Workshop).

The aim of Day 3 of the Job Readiness Workshop is to help students to:

- Know how to react to work-related challenges occurring in any typical organization
- Develop problem solving skills
- Build team work skills
- Build interpersonal skills
- Communicate with peers and superiors
- Dress for a formal function
- Practice basic table manners - how to use a knife and fork, proper posture at the dining table, appropriate conversations to engage in, etc.
- Know how to behave professionally at a formal business function such as an Awards Banquet
- Speak at a formal function (build public speaking skills)
- Expand professional network
- Fortify mentor-mentee relationship

Presentation 1:

Topic: "A Typical Day at Work"

(Duration: 1 hour)

Objectives: At the end of the session, the students will be able to:

1. solve every day work-related problems individually and as a team.
2. know how to react in given work-related situations.

Content:

A Typical Day at Work:

The nature of the industry and your job description means your daily tasks may vary on a daily basis. Having a good work attitude involves understanding that every work day will not be positive or negative. Some days you experiences challenges, some days your experiences are pleasant, some days you are tired, some days you feel energetic, etc. The keys to survival in the workplace are to be flexible and apply coping skills especially when problems arise.

In this session, I want you to examine one of the examples of a typical day and respond to the questions related to each scenario.

Instructions: Divide the participants in groups of 4 and have each group select one of the scenarios. Each group member will think about and record his/her solution to the problem. After 2 minutes, he will then pair with one member of the group and share his/her response and decide on a solution together. After another 2 minutes, the four group members share their response to the problem and make a final proposal how they would solve the problem. Ask each group to share with the wider group the solution to the problems they chose, and the dynamics of solving problems individually compared to solving problems as a group.

Here are the scenarios:

Scenario 1: New Strategy versus Old Strategy

After 6 months on the job as a customer service/receptionist at a popular bank, you have developed self-confidence and you are enjoying your job. You believe that you are meeting your job description and you are good at what you do. Your supervisor just informed you of a new set of instructions on how to meet the needs of customers. You are confused with the new instructions, and your colleagues, who have been long-standing employees at the company, advised you to ignore the new instructions as they are irrelevant. When you inform your customers about the new instructions, they are dissatisfied and want you to continue what you were doing. What do you do?

Scenario 2: A Friendly Supervisor

Your boss is very warm and easy to talk with. She shares excellent advice on how to get your job done efficiently and effectively, as well as career counsel. She is very open

about her life experiences and career journey; and often provides details about her personal life. You feel uneasy when she gives details about her love life and her medical checks. She considers herself your friend and expects you to share the same information with her; so you spend too much time in her office listening to her life story which you find unwelcomed. How do you deal with this situation?

Scenario 3: Office Supplies

You work in a position that allows you access to the internet and printing facilities in your office. No one has ever said publicly that the company's resources/machinery should be for office use only; no log of resource usage is required. Your son has an assignment that is due the next day and e-mailed you his project to be printed. You have paper at home that you can replace the office supplies you may use. You can use your break period to print your son's work. What is the professional thing to do?

Scenario 4: The Uncooperative Customer

The company you work for is a lending agency, and one of its policies is that customers must use salary deductions to make repayments. The company facilitates over-the-counter and other flexible payment options in special cases. There are many benefits to both the agency and the customer to facilitate salary deductions. You are responsible for getting customers on the salary deduction plan. One customer refuses to go on the salary deduction plan although his case does not meet the requirements for special consideration. He is simply doesn't want his employer to know his personal business. You have the authority to effect the salary deduction anyway. What do you do?

Scenario 5: Shrewd Supervisor

You worked very hard at developing a computer program that will help the company monitor the job performances of its employees. You presented the idea to your supervisor and she was extremely impressed. Two weeks later she approached you for permission to present the idea at a business conference, but you have an inclination that she will take credit for the work and walk away with a huge promotion or monetary benefit. What do you say to the supervisor?

Scenario 6: Login Time

One of your coworkers has an early morning doctor's appointment the following day, but refuses to ask the supervisor for the time. Her brilliant idea is that you login her time card on her behalf and she will report later without anyone knowing she was late. She has agreed to assist you with the reports you are having challenges with if you do this one favor for her. What do you do?

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

(End of Session 1; 10 minutes break)

Presentation 2:

Topic: "Modeling Professionalism in the Dining Room"

(Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes)

Objectives: At the end of the session, the students will be able to:

1. know how the appropriate use of dining tools
2. know appropriate conversation when dining
3. display proper posture at a dining table

Content:

Professionalism goes beyond the confines of work setting or office space; professional behavior is expected in the lunch room, the rest room, and other work-related settings. Sometimes, the employee is required to attend business dinners and other formal functions onsite or offsite, for example office parties, awards banquets, conferences, etc., and need to act in professionally in such settings. A good grasp of acceptable professional business etiquette for dining is an asset. Here are some general tips for dining in company:

Basic table setting:

Appendix A15 depicts a pictorial display of a basic table setting (Lininger, *Etiquette Scholar*, 2011)

✓ Forks and butter plate on the left
✓ Spoons, knives, cups/glasses on the right
✓ Napkin (may be on plate, table, or in glass)
✓ Dessert utensils may be above the place setting or served with dessert
✓ Plates in center

Using the utensils:

- ✓ Use the utensils from the outside in (except for when dessert silverware are placed above plates)
- ✓ Knife is held with the right hand and fork is held with the left hand
- ✓ Drink from the side of a soup spoon

Basic table manners:

- ✓ Do not talk with mouth full
- ✓ Cut only enough food for the next mouthful
- ✓ Take small bites
- ✓ Chew with your mouth closed
- ✓ Food is served from left and plates are cleared from the right.
- ✓ Use napkin often; do not use as tissue
- ✓ Men should rise when a woman leaves the table
- ✓ Be polite to the serving staff
- ✓ Cross silverware across the plate when finished; keep napkin in your lap
- ✓ For soup, dip into the soup from the edge of the bowl to the middle moving away from you; to avoid spills, do not full spoon; tip the bowl slightly away from you to access all the soup
- ✓ Place hand in lap or place wrist on the edge of the table if you are not eating. Do not place your elbow on the table
- ✓ Sit upright with back straight; do not bend over the table

AVOID:

- ✓ Making slurping and other sounds with your mouth
- ✓ Asking for a 'doggie bag'
- ✓ Blowing on food if it is too hot
- ✓ Turning your glass upside down to decline wine/water/drink
- ✓ Smoking at the table
- ✓ Getting drunk
- ✓ Wave silverware during conversation
- ✓ Controversial/distasteful discussion topics–politics, religion, racism, gossip, etc.
- ✓ Tasting someone else's food
- ✓ Licking utensils or fingers

Additional tips for business dining Etiquette (For business dinner/lunch), (Adapted from University of Delaware Career Services Center, n.d.):

Pre-dinner etiquette:
- ✓ Determine who will pay for the meal
- ✓ Arrive early
- ✓ Call your dinner partner(s) or the restaurant if you know you will be late

✓ Wait 15 minutes before checking up on the status of your dinner partner(s)

Sitting down:

✓ Do not place anything (bag, cell phone, briefcase, etc. on the table
✓ Gently unfold dinner napkin and place dinner napkin in your lap (folded in half with folded edge towards your waist)
✓ Do not rearrange utensils on table
✓ Wait for all parties to arrive before ordering and/or eating meal

Ordering:

✓ Follow the lead of the host or other party
✓ Order simply–avoid expensive items
✓ Order meals that are easy to handle–no messy food or food that cannot be eaten with silverware
✓ Alcohol is inappropriate at business meals

Tipping:

✓ Make sure the bill is accurate
✓ Tip 15% of bill before tax if service is satisfactory
✓ Tip 20% of bill before tax if service is exceptional

Student Activity: Simulation Exercises

Have a formal table setting on display. Ask workshop participants to practice posture, using the utensils, conversing with dinner partners, etc.

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A1)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

(End of Session 2)

Activity: Facilitate networking/mentorship/interaction with employers

(Duration: 30 minutes)

(End of Session 3; Break for lunch and preparation for banquet–1 hour 20 minutes)

Day 3: Professional Day (Afternoon Session)

Target Skills: Public Speaking Skills & Professional Etiquette Skills (Dining/Table Etiquette)

Formal Function: Banquet & Awards Ceremony

(Duration: 3½ hours)

Objectives: At the end of the session, the students will be able to:

1. demonstrate the proper professional dining etiquette
2. present short public speech
3. fortify mentorship and networking relationships

Content: (Appendix A16 for banquet and awards ceremony program & Appendix A17 for sample certificate of participation)

Evaluation:

1. Students' evaluation of presentation: (Appendix A18)
2. Refer students to evaluation form, and allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form.
3. Collect the evaluation forms.

END OF JOB READINESS WORKSHOP

Appendix A: The Project

Part 3: Job Readiness Workshop Student's Manual with Power Point Slides

Day 1 Morning Session

Job Readiness Workshop

DAY 1

JOB SEEKING SKILLS 1
(MORNING SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: SOFT SKILLS AWARENESS &
COMMUNICATION SKILLS 1
(ORAL & NON-VERBAL)

_____

_____

_____

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_____

The Importance of Soft Skills

PRESENTATION 1:

(DURATION: 30 MINUTES)

_____

_____

_____

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Objectives

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. define soft skills.
2. identify soft skills relevant for the nature of jobs/positions they qualify to fill.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Content

- *Icebreaker: Who Am I?*

  Purpose:

  Have students articulate who they are based on things they like; express to others who they are; and work as a team.

What are Soft Skills?

- Non-technical skills

- "Interpersonal, human, people or behavioral skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace" (Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera, as quoted by De Villiers, 2010, p. 2).

- Related to human issues (Azim et al., 2010), such as:

  ✓ Communication
  ✓ Teamwork
  ✓ Leadership
  ✓ Professionalism

What are Soft Skills?

- Facilitate the positive interpersonal relationships

- Improved job performances

- Applied to a wide array of settings and job situations

Examples of Soft Skills:

1. Communication skills - verbal and non-verbal (oral, written, body language); listening skills
2. Teamwork skills
3. Decision making skills
4. Interpersonal skills
5. Self-management skills
6. Work ethic skills
7. Problem solving skills

Importance of Soft Skills:

• Comparable to hard/technical skills
• Expectation of employers
• Necessitates training
• Facilitate better job performance

Most Important Soft Skills (based on research):

1. Communication skills
2. Interpersonal skills
3. Teamwork skills
4. Work attitude skills

Soft Skills Most Lacking/Needing Improvement:

• Communication Skills

  ✓ Written communication skills

    1. Application letters
    2. Résumés

  ✓ Oral communication skills

    1. Job interviews
    2. Interactions with superiors

Are Soft Skills Inherited or Learned?

• Not inherited

• Learned

   ✓ Socio-economic (home and educational) backgrounds
   ✓ Adequate exposure and consistent reinforcement
   ✓ Life situations (personal and professional settings)

Best Practices for Learning Soft Skills:

• Different approaches to learning soft skills

   ✓ Lived experiences
   ✓ Simulation exercises
   ✓ Mentorship programs

Group Activity:

• List ideal entry level job and match relevant soft skills
• Ask sample of students to share responses
• Facilitate feedback from other participants

Evaluation:

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

(End of Session 1)

Day 1 Morning Session Cont'd

Job Readiness Workshop

DAY 1

JOB SEEKING SKILLS 1
(MORNING SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: SOFT SKILLS AWARENESS &
COMMUNICATION SKILLS 1
(ORAL & NON-VERBAL)

Communication as the Most Relevant Soft Skill

PRESENTATION 2:

(DURATION: 1 HOUR 30 MINUTES)

Objectives

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the
students will be able to:

1. identify communication challenges that hinder career
   progress.
2. develop the art of communicating with peers and
   superiors.
3. learn the messages of their non-verbal
   communication.
4. prepare a speech on a given topic.
5. present a short public speech on a given topic.

Content

○

What is communication?

- Skills used to share (give and receive) information
- Communication has many forms:
  1. Verbal (using words and sounds)
  2. Non-verbal (body language, posture, facial expressions, gestures, etc.)
  3. Written (letters, text messages, emails, etc.)
  4. Visual (posters, pictures, diagrams, symbols, etc.)

Non-verbal Communication:

- All forms of communication that do not include words

- Examples:

  ✓ eye contact
  ✓ facial expressions
  ✓ nodding
  ✓ body positioning (Anderson & Bolt, 2013)

- Body language & Gesticulations

- Use of gesticulations

  ✓ eliminate nervousness
  ✓ enhances delivery of message
  ✓ too much can be distracting
  ✓ used smoothly in a natural way

Student Activity 1: Gestures

- Conveying messages without words

- Aim of Activity:

  ✓ Gestures can be misinterpreted
  ✓ Difficulty understanding gestures, and at the same time
  ✓ Effective in supplementing verbal communication.

Gestures Game - Appendix A2 (Case, 2010)

Verbal Communication:

- Use of words to send messages

- Choice of words very important

- Wrong choice of words can distort the message intended

- Presentation focuses on oral communication

Oral communication

- Use of spoken words or sounds

Student Activity 2: Verbal Role Play

- Allow students to role play scenarios using verbal communication skills

- Each scenario includes at least 2 persons (supervisor and subordinate).

- Actors can improvise the role play

- Facilitate participants' feedback to the following questions:

    1. What messages were communicated in this scenario?
    2. Was there anything either party could have done differently?

Scenario 1:

John has been approached by a superior, Jade, to complete a given task that is urgently required. John is already engaged in other tasks assigned by another superior, and simply beckons that Jade leaves the work on his desk. Jade feels disrespected and reports John to the CEO and asks for his removal. She noted that this is a regular practice by John.

Scenario 2:

Maxine is placed on her first work experience at a company for 4 weeks. By the end of the first week, Maxine's attitude declines because she is dissatisfied with the degree of records management duties. When her supervisor expresses concern, Maxine becomes angry and tells her it was not her choice to be at the company doing their dirty work.

Scenario 3:

Tamar has been working for an accounting firm for 6 weeks, and her supervisor, Mr. Johnson, is impressed with her work attitude and overall performance. He offers some positive feedback that customers have also expressed.

Listening Skills:

Icebreaker: (Adopted from United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, n.d.).

Give each participant one sheet of paper (complete the activity yourself using your own sheet of paper).

The rules are: (1) no peeking and (2) no questions

Offer the following directions - pausing after each instruction to give the group time to comply:

1. Pick up your sheet of paper and hold it in front of you

2. Close your eyes and listen carefully to my directions

3. The first thing I want you to do is to fold your sheet of paper in half (Pause)

Listening Skills:

Icebreaker cont'd.:

4. Now, tear off the upper right hand corner (Pause)

5. Fold the paper in half again and tear off the upper left hand corner of the sheet (Pause)

6. Fold it in half again (Pause)

7. Now tear off the lower right-hand corner of the sheet. (Pause)

Listening Skills:

Icebreaker cont'd.:

8. After all tearing is complete, say:

   a) Now, open your eyes and unfold your paper.

   b) If I did a good job of communicating and you did a good job of listening, all of our sheets should look exactly the same!

   c) Hold your sheet up for everyone to see.

   d) Ask participants to compare their sheets.

Listening Skills:

Icebreaker cont'd.:

9. Ask why no one's paper matched yours exactly?

 Facilitate responses.

   (Responses will vary; some may say:

   "You didn't let us ask any questions!"

   "The way you gave us directions wasn't clear!"

Listening is:

- An active process

- Involves more than just hearing

- Listening involves:

  - ✓ being aware
  - ✓ physically receiving, selecting, organizing, interpreting
  - ✓ responding to information (Wood, 2012)

- An important aspect is the ability to recall or remember information

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Techniques/Signs of a Good Listener (Velsoft Training Materials Inc., 2013):

- Non-verbal signs:

  - ✓eye contact
  - ✓nodding of head
  - ✓use of silence

- Verbal signs include:

  - ✓ responding with phrases - "Yes, I understand", "Really!", and "Then what?"
  - ✓ Asking questions such as "Do you want me to send that information to you now?"
  - ✓ Summarizing statement to reiterate what you think the speaker is saying.

Barriers to Effective Communication and/or Listening:

- Information overload
- Complex information
- Distractions
- Lack of interest (Wood (2012)

Communication as the most important soft skill:

• Research studies rank communication skills as the most important soft skills

• Employers rank communication skills as the highest soft skill they expect from potential employees

• Look for soft skills in job interviews

Communication as the most important soft skill:

• During job interviews, employers evaluate:

  ✓ ability to share information
  ✓ relate or interact with others (peers, superiors, and customers)
  ✓ listen attentively
  ✓ process information
  ✓ write an error-free application letter and résumé
  ✓ follow instructions

Communication as the most important soft skill:

• During job interviews, employers evaluate:

  ✓ use of understandable appropriate language
  ✓ awareness of non-verbal cues:
    ○ eye contact
    ○ posture
    ○ facial expressions
    ○ hand signals

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Communication as the most important soft skill:

- Communication involves informal and formal channels

- Informal channels include grapevine

    ✓ Grapevine

        o lacks full accuracy
        o does not contribute negative information
        o clarifies inaccurate information
        o make no assumptions (Anderson & Bolt, 2013)

- Informal communication also deals with gossip

    ✓ Gossip

        o usually targeting the personal lives of individuals
        o inappropriate negative information about others
          with the intent to:

            1. hurt others
            2. show disrespect to others
            3. defend peers
            4. clarify misinformation

- Formal communication channels occur within the formal
  lines of authority

- Formal communication includes:

    ✓ Horizontal and Vertical Channels

        o Horizontal channels include:

            1. communication across same
            2. close levels of authority

    ✓ Vertical channels focus on:

        o Up - top-down
        o Down - down-up) levels of authority (Anderson & Bolt,
          2013)

The art of Public Speaking:

"There are three things to aim at in public speaking: first, to get into your subject, then to get your subject into yourself, and lastly, to get your subject into the heart of your audience" - Alexander Gregg (Wood, 2012).

- Important for some job
- Assets employers consider

  ✓ Ability to speak in small groups
  ✓ Ability to speak in large groups

- Learned and mastered:

  ✓ Practice
  ✓ Commitment

Guidelines for Effective Public Speaking:

1. Selecting and narrowing a manageable topic
2. Analyze the audience
3. Research the topic to integrate support materials
4. Organize the ideas for the speech.
5. Structure the presentation
6. Prepare a creative/attention getter introduction
7. Include an effective conclusion
8. Consider the appropriateness of the choice of language
9. Prepare relevant presentation
10. Practice several times
11. Make the presentation (Rattenborg, Simonds, and Hunt, 2010; Wood, 2013)

Student Activity 3: Self-Introduction

- Prepare a 2 minutes self-introductory speech

- Ask the student to introduce himself or herself to his colleagues

  ✓ Provide information about background
  ✓ Interests
  ✓ Ambitions

- The student must make eye contact and use relevant gesticulations.

- *Allow peers assessment and feedback*

- *(Refer to Appendix A3 for public speech assessment guide)*

Evaluation:

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

(End of Session 2; allow 10 minutes break)

Day 1 Morning Session Cont'd

Job Readiness Workshop

DAY 1

JOB SEEKING SKILLS 1
(MORNING SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: SOFT SKILLS AWARENESS &
COMMUNICATION SKILLS 1
(ORAL & NON-VERBAL)

Building a Professional Portfolio

PRESENTATION 3:

(DURATION: 30 MINUTES)

Objectives

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. know what a professional portfolio is.
2. know the value of the professional portfolio.
3. speak about himself/herself in a descriptive manner.
4. design a professional, personalized portfolio.

Content

What is a professional portfolio?

- Professional tool applicants use to sell their skills
- and abilities.
- A compilation of:
  - ✓ sample work
  - ✓ résumé
  - ✓ application letter
  - ✓ other documents illustrating applicant's strengths (Velsoft Training Materials Inc., 2013; Guildford Technical Community College, n.d.)

Content

What is a professional portfolio?

- The portfolio must be updated to represent accurate status
- The portfolio provides information not captured in the application letter and résumé

Factors to consider when designing professional portfolio:

- What you have to offer to an employer

- Description of yourself

- Your strengths and skills

- Personalize to meet your style and personality

Contents of the Portfolio: (Guildford Technical Community College, n.d.)**:**

- Table of Contents
- Career Summary
- Goals
- Personal Philosophy and Mission Statement
- Résumé
- Accomplishments
- Work Samples
- Research, Publications, and Reports

Contents of the Portfolio cont'd.:

- Testimonials and Letters of Recommendation
- Awards and Honors
- Conferences and Workshops
- Transcripts, Degrees, Licenses, and Certifications
- Professional Development Activities
- Volunteering/Community Service
- References

Additional Tips:

- Make it attractive and creative
- Proofread
- Provide relevant, up-dated information

  - ✓ contact information (name, address, telephone, and
  - ✓ email contact)
  - ✓ documents and certificates, etc.

- Use a professional email address
- Include information relevant for the position you are applying for
- Pay attention to your organizational skills and attention to detail (Guildford Technical Community College, n.d.).

Student Activity 4: (Description of Self)

- Complete the self-description form
  [Refer to Appendix A4 (i)].

- Use appropriate descriptive verbs
  [Refer to Appendix A4 (ii)] (Commonwealth Corporation, 2010)

Evaluation:

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

(End of Session 3; 1 hour lunch break)

Day 1 Afternoon Session

Job Readiness Workshop

DAY 1

JOB SEEKING SKILLS 1
(AFTERNOON SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: COMMUNICATION SKILLS 2
(WRITTEN COMMUNICATION -
COVER LETTER & RÉSUMÉ)

The Cover Letter and Résumé as Communication Tools

PRESENTATION 4:

(DURATION: 1 HOUR 40 MINUTES)

Objectives

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. indentify the features of an application letter.
2. compose an application letter .
3. identify the components of a résumé.
4. write career objectives.
5. prepare a résumé.

Content

Part 1:

Written Communication:

- involves either printed, handwritten or electronic (soft copy) formats of:

  - ✓ letters
  - ✓ memoranda
  - ✓ text messages
  - ✓ emails

Written Communication:

2 most important tools used in job seeking endeavors are:

1. application letter
2. résumé

The Application Letter:

- Also known as the cover letter
- A formal letter that introduces the résumé (Anderson & Bolt, 2013)
- Must be well-prepared - first impression of the application for the employer
- The tone of the application letter must be professional and carefully selected words.

Guidelines for preparing the cover letter
(Anderson & Bolt, 2013)**:**

- typed-written on white paper with black ink
- write to a specific person
- error-free (no typographical or grammatical errors)
- include basic features of a business letter:
    - ✓ return address/personal letterhead (contact information)
    - ✓ date
    - ✓ inside address
    - ✓ salutation
    - ✓ body of the letter
    - ✓ complementary close
    - ✓ signature
    - ✓ signatory
    - ✓ enclosure

Guidelines for preparing the cover letter cont'd.:

- avoid negativity
- short and simple (1-page)
- request interview
- do not replicate the résumé (briefly include qualification)
- avoid "I" statements
- refer reader to the résumé
- indicate how you learned about the job offer
- be honest - do not lie or exaggerate facts

Appendix A5 illustrates a sample format of an application letter (Anderson & Bolt, 2013)

End of Part 1; 20 minutes break

Part 2

The Résumé:

- A written formal profile of an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities

- Presented to potential employer(s)

- The résumé must be well-written to identify the skills and experience of the applicant.

Guidelines for preparing the résumé (Anderson & Bolt, 2013)**:**

1. Establish Clear Career Objective/Personal Profile
    a. Both statements are used on résumés to relate to target career, target employer, introduce key skills, and express interest in a position.
    b. Career objective: used for individuals with little or no work experience
    c. Personal Profile: used for individuals with more extensive career experience

2. Gather relevant information & create draft document with six key headings:

    1. Education
    2. Skills
    3. Employment
    4. Languages
    5. Honors and Awards
    6. Professional/Community Involvement

Guidelines for preparing the résumé cont'd.:

3. Select a Proper Layout

    a) Functional résumé layout (usually for entry-level positions; one-page)

    b) Chronological résumé layout (usually for higher level positions; two or more pages)

        i. Both résumé layouts present employment history and education in reverse time order
        ii. Be consistent in layout, dates, and tense
        iii. Avoid the use of résumé templates

Guidelines for preparing the résumé cont'd.:

4. Prepare the final draft of the résumé

    a) Check for information that is frequently forgotten or not presented appropriately
    b) Information heading: personal contact information - avoid personal information such as photographs, birth date, and marital status
    c) Use a professional address)
    d) Use easy to read font and size – black ink, 12-14 point Times New Roman or Arial
    e) Do not list "References Available" on résumé

Appendix A6 illustrates a sample résumé with functional layout (Anderson & Bolt, 2013)

Student Activity: Application Letter and Résumé Writing

Writing Session 1:

(Duration: 20-25 minutes)

Ask student to use job advertisements provided to prepare a draft copy of the application letter and résumé for one of the positions

---

Student Activity: Building Your Professional Portfolio

Writing Session 2:

(Duration: 5 minutes)

Ask student to build professional portfolio – include copy of cover letter and résumé

Evaluation:

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

(End of Session 4; 10 minutes break)

Day 1 Afternoon Session Cont'd

Job Readiness Workshop

DAY 1

JOB SEEKING SKILLS 1
(AFTERNOON SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: COMMUNICATION SKILLS 2
(NETWORKING SKILLS)

Mentorship and Networking with Industry Professionals

PRESENTATION 5:

(DURATION: 40 MINUTES)

Objectives

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. define professional mentorship and networking.
2. create a professional network and identify at least one mentor.

Procedures

Procedure for facilitating the professional network session:

1. The facilitator introduces the concept of mentorship and professional networking so that students understand what professional networking is and the value of mentors.
2. Ask employers to introduce themselves to the students publicly.
3. Ask students to interact with employers on a one-on-one basis or in groups
4. Encourage students to share contact details with employers and establish mentorship/networking relationships.

Content

Mentorship: What is Mentorship?
- A partnership that builds a relationship with an experienced person with a less-experienced individual with the aim of fostering personal and professional development for the mentor, the mentee and related organizations.
- A mentor is sometimes referred to as a role model, and serves as a motivation to the mentee. The mentee is the less-experienced person who is being mentored.

Content

Benefits of Mentoring:
To the mentor:
1. The opportunity to share knowledge and skills to help others develop personally and professionally
2. An understanding of the challenges or issues that others face in a contextual framework
3. Builds leadership and interpersonal skills developed through coaching and relating to others
4. Helps to define acceptable professional behavior for inexperienced mentees

Content

Benefits of Mentoring cont'd.:

To the mentee:

1. The avenue or source to discuss or talk about concerns, problems and issues related to professional and personal goals
2. Obtain insight into the culture, practices, and expectations of organizations through mentors

Content

Benefits of Mentoring cont'd.:

To the mentee:

3. Establish network with organizations and create opportunities for employment
4. Builds interpersonal skills and other soft skills
5. Fosters career advancement

Content

Benefits of Mentoring cont'd.:
To related organizations:

1. Improves staff retention
2. Improves customer service and satisfaction - skills transferred help new recruits to model acceptable behaviors
3. Reduces recruitment expenses and meet recruitment goals

Content

Benefits of Mentoring cont'd.:

To related organizations:

4. Communicates the mission, vision, and goals of the organization to potential/current employees
5. Provides a practical application of knowledge-based learning

Content

Role of the Mentor:

Mentors function as:

- Career counselors
- Coaches
- Agents

Professional Networking:

What is Professional Networking?

- Professional networking is the act of establishing and maintaining professional relationships with industry and education personnel.

- A professional network include:

  ✓peers (friends and/or coworkers)
  ✓superiors/supervisors
  ✓instructors
  ✓family members

Professional Networking:

What is Professional Networking?

- There is no limit to the number of persons that can be included in the network

- These individuals are available for advice and assistance in the pursuit of professional goals

- One can utilize:

  ✓social media
  ✓face-to-face
  ✓telephone

Tips for establishing a professional network:

- Display confidence

- Initiate introductions

- Have personal business cards available

- Offer a professional handshake

- Be willing to share information electronically, but cautiously

---

Opportunities for Networking:

1. Professional association meetings
2. Trade association meetings/shows
3. Entertainment events - sports, parties, music events
4. Volunteerism - nursing, children's homes, and other facilities
5. Religious meetings
6. Social clubs - toastmaster, Key Club, Kiwanis Club, etc.

Anderson and Bolt (2013) suggested the need for network partners to share the following contact details:

• Name
• Address
• Telephone number(s)
• E-mail address
• Face book/website access

Student Activity:

Ask students to engage in interaction with employers - identify at least one (1) mentor and establish a professional network with employers.

[Refer to Appendix A7 (i), Appendix A7 (ii) for mentors and mentee's information forms (Design Ignites Change (April 2010), and Appendix A8 for professional network form].

Evaluation:

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

(End of Session 5)

Reflections:

Have students prepare a written journal of the lessons learned during Day 1 of the Job Readiness Workshop (refer to Appendix A9 for sample journal)

Assignments: Professional Portfolio and Interview Attire

1. Ask students to complete their professional portfolio to be presented to the interviewer(s) on Day 2 at the mock job interviews.
2. Encourage students to select and bring with them their attire for the professional attire assessment on Day 2.

(End of Day 1 of Job Readiness Workshop)

Day 2 Morning Session

Job Readiness Workshop

DAY 2

JOB SEEKING SKILLS 2
(MORNING SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: WORK ETHICS SKILLS –
PROFESSIONALISM
(PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE)

Opening Activities

WELCOME
ICEBREAKER
REFLECTION
OVERVIEW OF DAY 2 GOALS

Opening Activities

ICEBREAKER

Icebreaker Activity: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

1. Ask 5 volunteers to look in a full-length mirror provided and describe who is looking back at him/her in the mirror.

2. The volunteers cannot give their names as a response.

3. Facilitate feedback from the other students/participants.

Opening Activities

REFLECTION

Reflection Activity:

Ask a sample of 4 students to share their journal prepared at the end of Day 1 of the Job Readiness Workshop (allocate 2 minutes for each students).

Opening Activities

OVERVIEW OF DAY 2 GOALS

The aim of Day 2 of the Job Readiness Workshop is to help students to:

- Understand that an individual's dress code communicates much about the person.
- Understand the importance of making the right impression on others, particularly potential employers through dress.
- Learn how to appropriate attire for different occasions in the work settings.

Opening Activities

OVERVIEW OF DAY 2 GOALS CONT'D.

The aim of Day 2 of the Job Readiness Workshop is to help students to:

4. Prepare for the job interview.
5. Learn the art of mastering job interviews.
6. Continue building their professional portfolio.
7. Learn through reflection (Journaling).

Tips from Head to Toe

○

PRESENTATION 1:

(DURATION: 1 HOUR)

Objectives

○

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. state the impact of dress on the perception of others of the individual.
2. demonstrate appropriate professional attire for the work place, formal business functions, office party, and casual day at work

Content

○

PART 1:

Icebreaker: What not to wear

The facilitator projects on screen the images of individuals and asks participants to determine the appropriateness of the attire for the workplace. The participants must tell why the attire is appropriate or inappropriate.

Content

Dress as a means of communication:

- Non-verbal communications form a great deal of the decision-making process for employers when hiring
- Most first impressions are based on your visual appearance
- For example, handshake, clothing and grooming convey in a subtle way many things about an individual

Content

Dress as a means of communication:

- First impressions last
- Many people do not forget their first impression of you based on the choice of attire
- Your look impact your perform on the job

Content

Dress as a means of communication:

- Most organizations have a dress code outlining its policy on:

  ✓ attire
  ✓ make-up
  ✓ jewelry
  ✓ hairstyle

Content

Dress as a means of communication:

- Based on the nature of the job and/or industry, the dress code may differ to facilitate health and safety issues

- Maintain a dress code that conforms to the company's policy and match your style and taste

---

Types of attire:

Harvey (n.d.) described two types of business attire

1. Business Formal

    a. Interview
    b. Regular workday (Work uniforms)

Types of attire:

    c. Formal Office function (Special occasions attire)

2. Business Casual

    a. Dress-down/Casual Workday
    b. Office Party (Example: Christmas Holiday)

Examples of unacceptable attire:

• Torn, stained or washed-out clothes (jeans, shirts, etc)
• Shirts or blouses that have offensive images or words
• Flip-flops/slippers/sneakers
• Colored hair - red, orange, purple, pink, and other unnatural hair colors
• Caps
• T-shirts
• Revealing clothes
• Clothes that do not fit well

NOTE: *Different territories may have specific guidelines for professional dress, for example, plaited-hair for males is not acceptable in the Jamaican context*

Tips from Head to Toe:

• Select clothing, fragrances, hairstyles, and jewelry that maintain a professional image.
• Avoid body piercings, more than one pair of earring, flashy chains, bracelets, etc.
• Hide visible tattoos
• Clothes should be clean and neatly ironed.
• Wear clothes that fit - not too tight or loose.
• Shower daily and use mild fragrances.
• Maintain well-groomed hands, nails, and hair
• Maintain good oral hygiene (fresh breath and daily care of teeth)
• Wear comfortable and clean shoe in good condition.

Special Tips for Women (Harvey, n.d.):

• Makeup should be for day wear

• Avoid suggestive clothing

• Wear skirts of knee-length or longer

• Tailor pants suits only if pantsuits are worn

• Avoid long colored nails

Special Tips for Men (Harvey, n.d.):

• Shave and/or trim facial hair, including nose and ear hair
• Shirts should be tucked in
• Hats should not be worn inside buildings except for
  religious purposed
• Avoid socks that are not dark blue, black or gray
• Belt should match shoes and hold pants on the waist
• Avoid pants below waist that show undergarments
• Strictly no earring

(End of Part 1 of Session 1; 10 minutes break)

PART 2:

Student Activity: Professional Attire Assessment

(Duration: 2 hours 15 minutes)

• Ask all students participating in a dress assessment

• Have a panel of employers evaluate the appropriateness
  of participants' attire for various functions (job interview,
  regular work day, casual day, office party, and formal
  function, etc).

• Refer to Appendix A10 for professional attire assessment
  form.

Evaluation:

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

(End of Part 2 of Session 1; Lunch break for 1 hour)

Day 2 Afternoon Session

Job Readiness Workshop

○

DAY 2

JOB SEEKING SKILLS 2
(AFTERNOON SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: COMMUNICATION SKILLS/JOB
INTERVIEW SKILLS

Mastering the Job Interview

○

PRESENTATION 2:

(DURATION: 1 HOUR 30 MINUTES)

Objectives

○

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. prepare for a job interview
2. know the different types of interview questions
3. know how to answer the different types of interview questions
4. communicate effective at the interview
5. learn how to solicit feedback after the interview.

Content

The Job Interview:

- A formal meeting at which the employer evaluates a prospective employee's hard and soft skills set
- The meeting is really about the needs of the organization and how the applicant can help the organization meet these needs
- Applicant can also use the interview to determine whether the organization is the right one for him/her

The Job Interview:

- The employer is evaluating what you say, as well as how you say it

- The interviewer is looking at your communication skills:

  ✓ are you well-spoken
  ✓ grammar
  ✓ clarity
  ✓ your attitude

- Understanding the purpose of the interview presents great advantages

- In essence, the employer needs to know five (5) things about the applicant:

  1. Why you want to work for the organization and not elsewhere?
  2. What you can offer the organization?
  3. Who are you, and how will you fit in the culture and structure of the organization?
  4. How better are you than the other applicant(s)?
  5. Can the organization afford your services?

- Obtaining a job interview is an accomplishment

- The job interview process can be very stressful

- It is normal for the interviewee to become nervous.

- It is important to display confidence and poise during the interview

- Mastering the interview takes preparation and practice.

Preparing for the Job Interview:

- The following tips are great guidelines prior to, during, and after the interview.

  a. *Prior to the Interview:*

    1. Gather information about the organization (its mission, vision, goals, current projects, goods and services, etc.)
    2. Prepare and have someone else (mentor, etc.) vet your professional portfolio
    3. Have your portfolio ready and located where you will not forget it

---

Preparing for the Job Interview:

a. Prior to the interview cont'd.:

    4. Conduct mock interviews with mentors to get adequate practice
    5. Purge personal social network of inappropriate images and other messages
    6. Identify the shortest transportation route to the interview
    7. Prepare clothing and other necessaries the night before
    8. Set alarm clock or other device for the appropriate time that will make you ready early

Preparing for the Job Interview:

a. Prior to the interview cont'd.:

9. Have a proper breakfast the day of the interview
10. Have a bath/shower and maintain proper oral hygiene
11. Know exactly who and where you will report to when you get to the interview
12. Practice good manners to everyone in the organization (even the auxiliary staff)
13. When you arrive at the interview location, turn off all electronic devices (cell phone, pager, tablets, etc.)

Preparing for the Job Interview:

b. During the Interview:

Student Activity: *Ask sample of students to demonstrate each point as they are presented*

1. Greet interviewer(s) with a smile and firm handshake
2. Take a seat only if offered
3. Maintain positive eye contact, pleasant and friendly attitude
4. Remain attentive (even if the interview takes longer than planned)
5. Speak clearly and audibly

Preparing for the Job Interview:

b. During the Interview cont'd.:

6. Use appropriate language (no slangs, fowl and
7. Ask for clarification of questions you may not understand
8. Take deep breathe (subtly) if you feel nervous
9. Ask appropriate questions when the opportunity is offered

Preparing for the Job Interview:

c. *After the Interview:*

Immediately following the interview:

1. Stand, offer a firm handshake and thank the interviewer(s) for taking time for your interview
2. Express your interest in the job and your anticipation of feedback of the interview
3. Ask whether you should make contact or wait for a response from the organization and when is the best time to expect this feedback

---

Preparing for the Job Interview:

c. *After the Interview:*

Day(s) after the interview:

1. Send a thank you letter - express thanks for the time taken for your interview and your anticipation of a response
2. Keep your cell phone line available (if contact is to be made by telephone), or check email as is necessary
3. If you were told to make follow-up contact, do so at the agreed date and time
4. If an offer is made, indicate your acceptance or rejection politely
5. Obtain follow-up information on when to report and to whom (if you have accepted the job offer)

Additional Tips for a Great Interview (Harvey, n.d.):

Do's:

• Arrive 10-15 minutes early
• Answer questions thoroughly
• Write a thank you note/letter within 48 hours
• Pause and think about answers before you respond

Don'ts:

• Chew gum
• Give 1 or 2-word answers
• Smoke prior to interview
• Look at watch during the interview
• Interrupt the interviewer
• Talk poorly about former/current employer

Job Interview Questions:

• The interviewer may give the interviewee the opportunity to ask questions

• The questions that the interviewee asks may influence the interviewer's decision to hire or not to hire

• Ask questions that show that you are interested in the goals of the organization and not just a paycheck

Appendices A11 represents sample job interview questions for interviewer and interviewee (Harvey, n.d.).

Guidelines for Responding to Popular Interview Questions:

• Tell me about yourself:

  ✓ The interviewer wants to find out the assets you possess for the particular position/job.

  ✓ Respond with your educational and work experiences that highlight your strengths that make you the best candidate for the job.

Guidelines for Responding to Popular Interview Questions:

• Why do you want to work with this organization?

  ✓ The interviewer wants to determine what you know about the organization

  ✓ The interviewer wants to know if your career goals correlate with the goals of the organization's goals.

  ✓ Demonstrate that you did your research about the organization.

  ✓ Show that you have the skills to help the organization to solve problems and meet its goals.

Guidelines for Responding to Popular Interview Questions:

- Do you have any questions?

  ✓ Seize the opportunity to ask at least one questions

  ✓ Do not limit your questions to remuneration and benefits

  (Refer to Appendix A11 for suggestions)

  (End of Part 1 of Session 2; 15 minutes break)

PART 2:

Student Activity: Practice Makes Perfect (Simulation Activity/Mock Job Interviews)

(Duration: 1 hours 50 minutes)

- Ask students to participate in a mock job interview for the position they had prepared their letter and résumé for

- Ask a panel of expert human resource managers and other managers to conduct and evaluate students' performance on the mock job interviews

---

PART 2:

Student Activity: Practice Makes Perfect (Simulation Activity/Mock Job Interviews) cont'd.

- Each interview must last 10 minutes
- Each interview can be conducted privately or publicly (depending on the number of employers available)

(Refer to Appendices A11 and A12 for interview questions and mock job interview assessment form respectively)

PART 2:

Student Activity: Practice Makes Perfect (Simulation Activity/Mock Job Interviews) cont'd.

• Ask the panelists to provide feedback to each student privately (if the interview is conducted privately)

• If the interview is conducted publicly, provide feedback on each interview

• Each interviewer provides summary of the overall feedback to the participants in general.
• Have students share their experience and feedback

Evaluation:

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

Student Activity: Reflection/Personal Journal

Reflection:

• Allow students time to complete the written journal based on the activities of Day 2 (refer to Appendix A13).

Assignment: Professional Portfolio

• Ask students to complete their professional portfolio as home assignment.

(End of Part 2 of Session 2)

(End of Day 2 of Job Readiness Workshop)

Day 3 Morning Session

Job Readiness Workshop

DAY 3

PROFESSIONAL DAY
(MORNING SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: WORK ETHIC SKILLS
(BUSINESS ETIQUETTE)
PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS
TEAMWORK SKILLS

Opening Activities

WELCOME
REFLECTION
OVERVIEW OF DAY 3 GOALS

Opening Activities

WELCOME

Facilitator extends welcome to participants and congratulate them on making it to Day 3 of the Job Readiness Workshop.

Opening Activities

REFLECTION

Reflection Activity:

Ask a sample of 5 students to share their journal prepared at the end of Day 2 of the Job Readiness Workshop (allocate 2 minutes for each students).

Opening Activities

OVERVIEW OF DAY 2 GOALS

The aim of Day 2 of the Job Readiness Workshop is to help students to:

- Know how to react to work-related challenges occurring in any typical organization
- Develop problem solving skills
- Build team work skills
- Build interpersonal skills

Opening Activities

OVERVIEW OF DAY 2 GOALS CONT'D.

The aim of Day 3 of the Job Readiness Workshop is to help students to:

- Communicate with peers and superiors
- Dress for a formal function
- Practice basic table manners - how to use a knife and fork, proper posture at the dining table, appropriate conversations to engage in, etc.

Opening Activities

OVERVIEW OF DAY 2 GOALS CONT'D.

The aim of Day 3 of the Job Readiness Workshop is to help students to:

- Know how to behave professionally at a formal business function such as an Awards Banquet
- Speak at a formal function (build public speaking skills)
- Expand professional network
- Fortify mentor-mentee relationship

A Typical Day at Work

PRESENTATION 1:

(DURATION: 50 MINUTES)

Objectives

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. solve every day work-related problems individually and as a team.

2. know how to react in given work-related situations.

Content

A Typical Day at Work:

- Your daily tasks may vary on a daily basis because of nature of the industry and your job description

- The key to survival in the workplace is to be flexible

- Applying coping skills especially when problems arise is very important

Instructions:

1. Examine one of the examples of a typical day and respond to the questions related to each scenario.

2. Divide the participants in groups of 4 and have each group select one of the scenarios.

3. Each group member will think about and record his/her solution to the problem.

4. After 2 minutes, he will then pair with one member of the group and share his/her response and decide on a solution together.

Instructions cont'd.:

5. Allow 2 minutes, then ask 4 group members to share their response to the problem.

6. Make a final proposal how they would solve the problem.

7. Ask each group to share with the wider group the solution to the problems they chose.

8. Allow groups to share the dynamics of solving problems individually compared to solving problems as a group.

Scenario 1: New Strategy versus Old Strategy

After 6 months on the job as a customer service/receptionist at a popular bank, your confidence has improved greatly and you are enjoying your job. You believe that you are meeting your job description and you are good at what you do. Your supervisor just informed you of a new set of instructions on how to meet the needs of customers. You are confused with the new instructions, and your colleagues, who have been long-standing employees at the company, advised you to ignore the new instructions as they are irrelevant. When you inform your customers about the new instructions, they are dissatisfied and want you to continue what you were doing. What do you do?

Scenario 2: A Friendly Supervisor

Your boss is very warm and easy to talk with. She shares excellent advice on how to get your job done efficiently and effectively, as well as career counsel. She is very open about her life experiences and career journey; and often provides details about her personal life. You feel uneasy when she gives details about her love life and her medical checks. She considers herself your friend and expects you to share the same information with her; so you spend too much time in her office listening to her life story which you find unwelcomed. How do you deal with this situation?

Scenario 3: Office Supplies

You work in a position that allows you access to the internet and printing facilities in your office. No one has ever said publicly that the company's resources/machinery should be for office use only; no log of resource usage is required. Your son has an assignment that is due the next day and emailed you his project to be printed. You have paper at home that you can replace the office supplies you may use. You can use your break period to print your son's work. What is the professional thing to do?

Scenario 4: The Uncooperative Customer

The company you work for is a lending agency, and one of its policies is that customers must utilize salary deductions to make repayments. The company facilitates over-the-counter and other flexible payment options in special cases. There are many benefits to both the agency and the customer to facilitate salary deductions. You are responsible for getting customers on the salary deduction plan. One customer refuses to go on the salary deduction plan although his case does not meet the requirements for special consideration. He is simply doesn't want his employer to know his personal business. You have the authority to effect the salary deduction anyway. What do you do?

Scenario 5: Shrewd Supervisor

You worked very hard at developing a computer program that will help the company monitor the job performances of its employees. You presented the idea to your supervisor and she was extremely impressed. Two weeks later she approached you for permission to present the idea at a business conference, but you have an inclination that she will take credit for the work and walk away with a huge promotion or monetary benefit. What do you say to the supervisor?

Scenario 6: Login Time

One of your coworkers has an early morning doctor's appointment the following day, but refuses to ask the supervisor for the time. Her brilliant idea is that you login her time card on her behalf and she will report later without anyone knowing she was late. She has agreed to assist you with the reports you are having challenges with if you do this one favor for her. What do you do?

Evaluation:

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

(End of Session 1; Allow 20 minutes break)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Day 3 Morning Session Cont'd

Job Readiness Workshop

DAY 3

PROFESSIONAL DAY
(MORNING SESSION)

TARGET SKILLS: WORK ETHIC SKILLS
(BUSINESS ETIQUETTE)

Modeling Professionalism in the Dining Room

PRESENTATION 2:

(DURATION: 1 HOUR 10 MINUTES)

Objectives

At the end of the soft skills awareness session, the students will be able to:

1. know how the appropriate use of dining tools
2. know appropriate conversation when dining
3. display proper posture at a dining table

Content

- Professionalism goes beyond the confines of work setting or office space
- Professional behavior is expected in the lunch room, the rest room, and other work-related settings
- Behavior extends to business dinners and other formal functions onsite or offsite. For example office parties, awards banquets, conferences, etc.
- A good grasp of acceptable professional business etiquette for dining is an asset.

Basic table setting

Champagne Glass
White Wine Glass
Red Wine Glass
Sherry Glass
Water Glass
Butter Knife
Butter Plate
Salad Fork
Dinner Fork
Fish Fork
Dinner Knife
Fish Knife
Soup Spoon
Service Plate

(Source: Lininger, Etiquette Scholar, 2011)

Basic table setting:

- Forks and butter plate on the left
- Spoons, knives, cups/glasses on the right
- Napkin (may be on plate, table, or in glass)
- Dessert utensils may be above the place setting or served with dessert
- Plates in center

(Appendix A14 for pictorial display)

Using the utensils:

- Use the utensils from the outside in (except for when dessert silverware are placed above plates)
- Knife is held with the right hand and fork is held with the left hand
- Drink from the side of a soup spoon

Basic table manners:

- Do not talk with mouth full
- Cut only enough food for the next mouthful
- Take small bites
- Chew with your mouth closed
- Food is served from left and plates are cleared from the right
- Use napkin often; do not use as tissue

Basic table manners cont'd.:

- Men should rise when a woman leaves the table
- Be polite to the serving staff
- Cross silverware across the plate when finished; keep napkin in your lap
- For soup, dip into the soup from the edge of the bowl to the middle moving away from you; to avoid spills, do not full spoon; tip the bowl slightly away from you to access all the soup

Basic table manners cont'd.:

- Place hand in lap or place wrist on the edge of the table if you are not eating.
- Do not place your elbow on the table
- Sit upright with back straight; do not bend over the table

AVOID:

- Making slurping and other sounds with your mouth
- Asking for a 'doggie bag'
- Blowing on food if it is too hot

Basic table manners cont'd.:

AVOID:

- Turning your glass upside down to decline wine/water/drink
- Smoking at the table
- Getting drunk
- Wave silverware during conversation
- Controversial/distasteful discussion topics – politics, religion, racism, gossip, etc.
- Tasting someone else's food
- Licking utensils or fingers

***Additional tips for business dining Etiquette (For business dinner/lunch),* (Adopted from University of Delaware Career Services Center, n.d.):**

Pre-dinner etiquette:

- Determine who will pay for the meal
- Arrive early
- Call your dinner partner(s) or the restaurant if you know you will be late
- Wait 15 minutes before checking up on the status of your dinner partner(s)

***Additional tips for business dining Etiquette (For business dinner/lunch),* (Adopted from University of Delaware Career Services Center):**

Sitting down:

- Do not place anything (bag, cell phone, briefcase, etc. on the table
- Gently unfold dinner napkin and place dinner napkin in your lap (folded in half with folded edge towards your waist)
- Do not rearrange utensils on table
- Wait for all parties to arrive before ordering and/or eating meal

***Additional tips for business dining Etiquette (For business dinner/lunch),* (Adopted from University of Delaware Career Services Center):**

Ordering:

- Follow the lead of the host or other party
- Order simply - avoid expensive items
- Order meals that are easy to handle - no messy food or food that cannot be eaten with silverware
- Alcohol is inappropriate at business meals

***Additional tips for business dining Etiquette (For business dinner/lunch),* (Adopted from University of Delaware Career Services Center):**

Tipping:

- Make sure the bill is accurate
- Tip 15% of bill before tax if service is satisfactory
- Tip 20% of bill before tax if service is exceptional

Student Activity: Simulation Exercises

- Have a formal table setting on display.

- Ask workshop participants to practice posture, using the utensils, conversing with dinner partners, etc.

**Evaluation:**

Students' evaluation of presentation: (Refer to Appendix A1)

1. Allow 2 minutes for completion of the evaluation form

2. Collect the evaluation forms

(End of Session 2)

Activity: Facilitate networking/mentorship/ interaction with employers

(Duration: 30 minutes)

(End of Session 3; Break for lunch and preparation for banquet - 1 hour 30 minutes)

Appendix A1: Presentation Evaluation Form

Students, your evaluation of the session is very important for the improvement of the training experience; please read carefully, and complete the form based on your experience. Return the form as soon as you have completed it.

Name of Session: _____

Presenter: _____
Place a tick (✓) in the response that best indicates the degree to which you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The session was of a high quality.					
The subject matter was clear.					
The session covered the materials I expected.					
The session is of importance to me for success job performance.					
The session helped me to understand the subject matter.					
The facilitator was professional, well-prepared and knowledgeable about the subject matter.					

Would you recommend this session for other students?   No ☐   Yes ☐

What one thing would you change about the session? …………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………

What was the most important thing you learned from the session? ………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix A2: Classroom Gestures (Body Language and Miming Game)

(Adapted from Case, 2010)

Choose one of the actions below and mime it to your partner (without speaking or making noises until they guess which one you are thinking of.

"(In the) past"	"(In the) future"	"Shake hands"	"Listen to your partner"
"Cover the right hand page"	"Pick up your chair and move it over there"	"Hold hands"	"Spit your gum in the bin please"
"Stand up and make/form a circle"	"Everyone swap chairs with their neighbor"	"Take a rest/Time out/5 minute break"	"Pay attention"
"Come a little bit closer (and then stop)"	"Good" *(only using your hands)*	"Can I have a volunteer?"	"Good luck"
"Stand up and come here." *(to one student)*	"Calm down (everyone)"	"Turn to the back of your books"	"Speak louder/shout"
"(That was) excellent/ fantastic/superb/great"	"Close your books"	"You won/you are the champion(s)"	"I don't approve"
"Everyone stand up and mingle"	"Open your books"	"That's not allowed"	"Wake up"
"Read quickly"	"That's incorrect" *(only using your hand)*	"Speak (to your partner)"	"I don't know/I don't understand"

Appendix A3: Public Speech Assessment Guide

(Integrating Listening Skills)

Rate your colleague's speech by completing this form.

1. What was the topic of the speech?

2. What was the speaker's aim?

3. How did the speaker gain your attention in the introduction?   (Tick as many as is relevant).

☐ Telling Story   ☐ Participating with the audience

☐ Telling a joke   ☐ Using a quotation

☐ Asking questions   ☐ Sharing personal experience

☐ Using visual or audio aids   ☐ No attempt to gain attention

☐ Other–State: …..………………………………….....................................

………………………………………………………………….......................

………………………………………………………………………………….

4. Did the speaker preview the main points of the speech in the introduction?

5. What were the main points developed in the body of the speech?

6. Were the main points clear and easy to follow? Why or why not?

8. Did the speaker make smooth transitions between main points throughout the speech?

9. How did the speaker conclude?

☐ Restated the main points   ☐ Ended with a quotation

☐ Made a gripping statement   ☐ Restated the introduction

☐ Challenged the audience   ☐ Called for action

Appendix A4 (i): Description of Self

List your top five skills (use the verb lists as guidance):

(Example: Designed computer software that my instructor used in preparing instant grades for my classmates.)

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

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I am already good at these things:

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

I want improvement in these area(s):

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

I have these resources to help me improve these area(s):

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………......…………………………………………

Appendix A4 (ii): List of Descriptive Verbs

(Adapted from Commonwealth Corporation, 2010)

Accomplished	Achieved	Acted	Adapted	Addressed
Administered	Advanced	Advised	Allocated	Analyzed
Appraised	Approved	Arranged	Assembled	Assigned
Assisted	Attained	Audited	Authored	Automated
Balanced	Budgeted	Built	Calculated	Cataloged
Chaired	Clarified	Classified	Coached	Collected
Compiled	Completed	Composed	Computed	Conceptualized
Conducted	Consolidated	Contained	Contracted	Contributed
Controlled	Coordinated	Corresponded	Counseled	Created
Critiqued	Cut	Decreased	Delegated	Demonstrated
Designed	Developed	Devised	Diagnosed	Directed
Dispatched	Distinguished	Diversified	Drafted	Edited
Educated	Eliminated	Enabled	Encouraged	Engineered
Enlisted	Established	Evaluated	Examined	Executed

Expanded	Expedited	Explained	Extracted	Fabricated
Facilitated	Fashioned	Focused	Forecast	Formatted
Founded	Generated	Guided	Identified	Illustrated
Implemented	Improved	Increased	Influenced	Informed
Initiated	Innovated	Inspected	Installed	Instigated
Instituted	Instructed	Integrated	Interpreted	Interviewed
Introduced	Invented	Launched	Lectured	Led
Maintained	Managed	Marketed	Mediated	Moderated
Monitored	Motivated	Negotiated	Operated	Organized
Originated	Overhauled	Performed	Persuaded	Planned
Prepared	Presented	Prioritized	Processed	Produced
Programmed	Projected	Promoted	Provided	Publicized
Published	Purchased	Recommended	Reconciled	Recorded
Recruited	Reduced	Referred	Regulated	Rehabilitated
Remodeled	Repaired	Represented	Researched	Restored
Restructured	Retrieved	Revitalized	Saved	Scheduled

Screened	Set	Shaped	Solidified	Solved
Specified	Stimulated	Streamlined	Strengthened	Summarized
Supervised	Surveyed	Systemized	Tabulated	Taught
Trained	Translated	Traveled	Trimmed	Upgraded
Validated	Worked	Wrote		

Appendix A5: Sample Job Application Letter
(Adapted from Anderson & Bolt, 2013)

Applicant's Name
Applicant's Address
Applicant's Telephone Number
Applicant's Professional E-mail Address

Date of letter
(TS –3 line spacing)

Employer's name,
Employer's Title
Company Name
Company Address
(DS/TS –2 or 3 line spacing)

Salutation
(DS –2 line spacing)

First Paragraph: Give the reason for the letter, the position you are applying for, and how you learned about the position. (Where applicable, mention any previous contact with the employer).
(DS –2 line spacing)
Second Paragraph: State why you are interested in the position, the organization, and its services or products. Provide any information about the position and/or the organization that you have researched.
(DS –2 line spacing)
Third Paragraph: Refer to the résumé attached and mention the highlights of your résumé. Highlight the skill sets (strengths) that are applicable to the position as noted in the job description or advertisement. Convince the employer why you should be hired over others and what you have to offer the organization.
(DS –2 line spacing)
Last Paragraph: Request an interview at a flexible time and place. Express gratitude for the employer's consideration of your application. Express expectation to meet with employer and refer to how you can be contacted (telephone numbers or e-mail address).
(DS –2 line spacing)

Sincerely
(Allow 4–6 line spacing for your signature)
Your Name
(DS –2 line spacing)
Enclosure

Appendix A6: Sample Résumé with Functional Layout
(Adapted from Anderson & Bolt, 2013)

APPLICANT'S NAME (16 point, bold)
Address (12 or 14 point, bold)
Telephone Number (Include Area Code)
E-mail Address (Remove Hyperlink)

(Horizontal line optional and thickness varies)

OBJECTIVE   Heading can be on the left or centered, 12- or 14-point font, and
uppercase or initial cap.
Format headings the same throughout the résumé.
Keep spacing equal between each section.

QUALIFICATIONS
- Relate to target job, all job-related skills and transferable skills
- Most relative to the job are listed first
- Bullet)small round or small square only) these items to stand out

EDUCATION
You may list before qualifications
Do not list high school if you have graduated from college
Include the dates and align to the right
List schools in chronological order, most recent attended first

WORK EXPERIENCE
Include: *Name of Company* and City–No Addresses
Job title bolded, if part-time, dates employed (month, year)
List the jobs in chronological order, most recent first; align dates to the
right
List the duties, responsibilities, and achievements
Be consistent in your setup
Use the same tense throughout ('*ed*' or '*ing*')
Do not use complete sentences or the words, *I, me,* or *my*

OTHER CAPABILITIES
Optional items in this section may not be directly related to the job but may
interest the employer, such as honors or awards, professional membership,
community service activities, etc.

REFERENCES
Do not list "References Available" on the résumé

Appendix A7 (i): Mentor's Information Form

(Adapted from Design Ignites Change, 2010)

Name: …………………………………………………………………………………

Organization: .…………………………………………………………………………

Address: .………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

Telephone number(s): ……………………………… (Home) .……………………… (work)

E-mail address: ……………………………………………………………………….

Face book/website contact: ………………………………………………………………..

Occupation/Position: .…………………………………………………………………

Availability for dialogue/meeting with mentee:

Monday ☐   Tuesday ☐   Wednesday ☐   Thursday ☐   Friday ☐

If you agree to work with the student in a mentor-mentee relationship, please sign and date the section below:

…………………………………………………..   …………………………………
Mentor's Signature   Date

…………………………………………………..   …………………………………
Mentee's Signature   Date

Appendix A7 (ii): Mentee's Information Form

(Adapted from Design Ignites Change, 2010)

Name: ……………………………………………………………………………………

School/College: ……………………………………………………………………………

Address: …………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………

Telephone number(s): ……………………… (Home) ……...……….………… (Mobile)

E-mail address: …………………………………………………………………………….

Face book/website contact: ………………………………………………………………..

Age: ………………………………… Gender: Female ☐ Male ☐

Career Goal: ………………………………………………………………………………

How do you prefer to be contacted? E-mail ☐ Telephone ☐

Availability for dialogue/meeting with mentor:

Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday ☐ Friday ☐

If you agree to work with the mentor in a mentor-mentee relationship, please sign and date the section below:

…………………………………………………..   …………………………………
Mentee's Signature   Date

…………………………………………………..   …………………………………
Mentor's Signature   Date

Appendix A8: Professional Network Form

Name: ………………………………………………………………………………………

Organization: ………………………………………………………………………………

Address: ……………………………………………………………………………………

Telephone number(s): ………………………………… (Home) …………………… (Work)

E-mail address: …………………………………………………………………………….

Occupation/Position: ………………………………………………………………………

Name: ………………………………………………………………………………………

Organization: ………………………………………………………………………………

Address: ……………………………………………………………………………………

Telephone number(s): ………………………………… (Home) …………………… (Work)

E-mail address: …………………………………………………………………………….

Occupation/Position: ………………………………………………………………………

Name: ………………………………………………………………………………………

Organization: ………………………………………………………………………………

Address: ……………………………………………………………………………………

Telephone number(s): ………………………………… (Home) …………………… (Work)

E-mail address: …………………………………………………………………………….

Occupation/Position: ………………………………………………………………………

Appendix A9: Day 1 Journal

Name: ..……………………………………………   Date: ..………………………

Reflect on the activities of the day and respond to the following prompts:

- What have you learned?

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- What do you want to remember for future use?

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- What areas do you need to work on?

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- How do you plan to use the lessons to improve your job readiness skills?

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Appendix A10: Professional Attire Assessment Form

Instructions: *Use the following scale to rate the attire/grooming of the student:*

5– Excellent   4–Very Good   3–Good   2–Average   1– Needs Improvement

Name of Student: …………………………………….…. Date: ………….….………

Function/Purpose of Attire: Job Interview ☐   Casual Day ☐   Office Party ☐

Formal Function ☐   Regular Work Day ☐

Criteria	Rating	Comments
Appropriateness of dress		
Color coordination		
Appropriateness of make-up		
Appropriate use of jewelry		
Use of tie, stockings, and socks		
Appropriateness of shoes		
Suitability of hair style		
Appropriate use of perfume/ cologne		
General hygiene		
Overall Rating		

Recommendations: ……………………………………………………….………...

………………………………………………………………..…………………………

………………………………………………………………….……..…………………

Signature of Evaluator: …………………………………..……………….…………

Appendix A11: Sample Job Interview Questions

(Adapted from Henry, n.d.)

Sample Interviewer's Questions: The interviewer can ask any combination of the following questions; some of the questions may include relevant current event or issues to assess your level of awareness in the trends and issues in the industry, questions 17–19 provide example of questions on related issues:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you interested in working with our organization?
3. What are your career goals?
4. Where do you see yourself in 5 years, 10 years?
5. What qualifies you for this position?
6. What do you know about our organization?
7. How do you deal with conflict?
8. Why should I hire you?
9. Do you prefer to work alone or in a team?
10. Tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills.
11. What are your strengths/weaknesses?
12. What was/is your favorite course in college?
13. What do you do for leisure?
14. Why did you choose this career field?
15. Why are you leaving your current job/what was the reason you left your previous job? (If relevant to your experience)
16. Do you have any questions?
17. What are your thoughts on the flexi-work week?
18. What current technologies would you recommend to improve our goods/services to our customers?
19. Scenario questions related to the specific job description (example, how would you handle a customer who calls every day to complain about the services of the company?)

Sample Interviewee's Questions: Be prepared to ask the interviewer some questions of your own. Here are some suggestions:

1. What specific duties are associated with the available position?
2. How will my performance be supervised and evaluated?
3. Are there opportunities for advancement?
4. Would I undergo a formal training for this position, and if so, how long will it last?
5. Is there anything else I can share about my experience and/or qualifications?
6. When can I expect to hear from you?

Appendix A12: Mock Job Interview Assessment Form

Instructions: *Use the following scale to rate the attire/grooming of the student:*

5– Excellent   4–Very Good   3–Good   2–Average   1– Needs Improvement

Name of Student: …………………………...…………… Date: …………………..……

Criteria	Rating	Comments
Greeted interviewer(s) with smile and handshake		
Professional appearance		
Posture & body language		
Poise, self-confidence		
Knowledge of self–strengths & weaknesses		
Communication skills (articulation, clarity, listening)		
Clarity of career interests and goals		
Ability to communicate value of prior work experience		
Demonstrated appropriate enthusiasm throughout interview		
Competence/skill for work		
Closed interview in appropriate manner		
Overall Rating		

Recommendations: …………………………………………………………………...

……………………………………………………………………………………………

Signature of Evaluator: …………..…………………………………………………

Appendix A13: Day 2 Journal

List three things you learned about yourself:

…...……………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

List three strengths you noticed about yourself:

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

List three things you need to work on about yourself:

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

How do you plan to address the things about yourself you need to work on?

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Appendix A14: A Typical Day at Work Scenarios/Case Studies

Scenario 1: New Strategy versus Old Strategy

After 6 months on the job as a customer service/receptionist at a popular bank, you have developed self-confidence and you are enjoying your job. You believe that you are meeting your job description and you are good at what you do. Your supervisor just informed you of a new set of instructions on how to meet the needs of customers. You are confused with the new instructions, and your colleagues, who have been long-standing employees at the company, advised you to ignore the new instructions as they are irrelevant. When you inform your customers about the new instructions, they are dissatisfied and want you to continue what you were doing. What do you do?

Scenario 2: A Friendly Supervisor

Your boss is very warm and easy to talk with. She shares excellent advice on how to get your job done efficiently and effectively, as well as career counsel. She is very open about her life experiences and career journey; and often provides details about her personal life. You feel uneasy when she gives details about her love life and her medical checks. She considers herself your friend and expects you to share the same information with her; so you spend too much time in her office listening to her life story which you find unwelcomed. How do you deal with this situation?

Scenario 3: Office Supplies

You work in a position that allows you access to the internet and printing facilities in your office. No one has ever said publicly that the company's resources/machinery should be for office use only; no log of resource usage is required. Your son has an assignment that is due the next day and e-mailed you his project to be printed. You have paper at home that you can replace the office supplies you may use. You can use your break period to print your son's work. What is the professional thing to do?

Scenario 4: The Uncooperative Customer

The company you work for is a lending agency, and one of its policies is that customers must use salary deductions to make repayments. The company facilitates over-the-counter and other flexible payment options in special cases. There are many benefits to both the agency and the customer to facilitate salary deductions. You are responsible for getting customers on the salary deduction plan. One customer refuses to go on the salary deduction plan although his case does not meet the requirements for special consideration. He is simply doesn't want his employer to know his personal business. You have the authority to effect the salary deduction anyway. What do you do?

Scenario 5: Shrewd Supervisor

You worked very hard at developing a computer program that will help the company monitor the job performances of its employees. You presented the idea to your supervisor and she was extremely impressed. Two weeks later she approached you for permission to present the idea at a business conference, but you have an inclination that she will take credit for the work and walk away with a huge promotion or monetary benefit. What do you say to the supervisor?

Scenario 6: Login Time

One of your coworkers has an early morning doctor's appointment the following day, but refuses to ask the supervisor for the time. Her brilliant idea is that you login her time card on her behalf and she will report later without anyone knowing she was late. She has agreed to assist you with the reports you are having challenges with if you do this one favor for her. What do you do?

Appendix A15: Table Setting
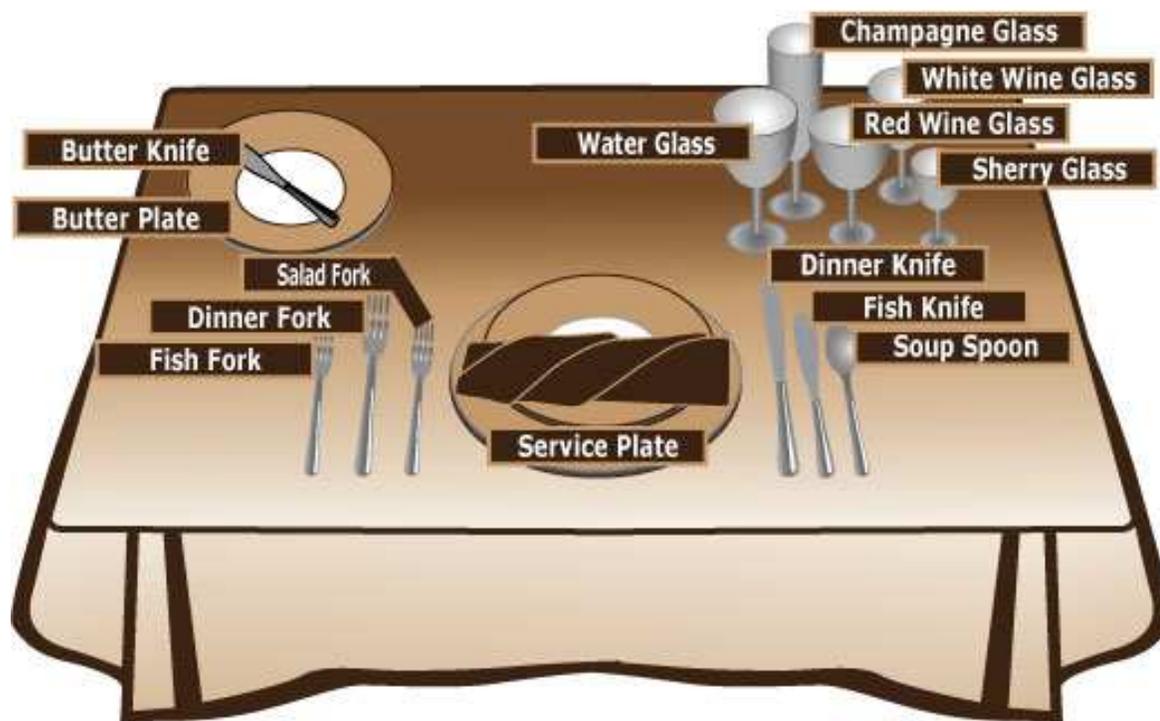
(Adapted Lininger, *Etiquette Scholar*)

Appendix A16: Job Readiness Banquet & Awards Ceremony Program

QUOTES TO LIVE BY
(Adapted from Anderson & Bolt, 2013)

"The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said" (Peter Druker).

"Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. The factor is attitude" (William James).

"Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected" (Steve Jobs).

"I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man" (George Washington).

"Winning is accomplished in the preparation phase, not the execution phase" (Anonymous).

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams" (Eleanor Roosevelt).

"Real success is finding your lifework in the work that you love" (David McCullough).

"Eighty percent of success is showing up" (Woody Allen).

"All the world's a stage" (Williams Shakespeare).

"Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life" (Confucius).

"The price of greatness is responsibility" (Sir Winston Churchill).

"Whenever you are asked if you can do a job, tell 'em, Certainly, I can!" Then get busy and find out how to do it" (Theodore Roosevelt).

"We must use time as a tool, not as a crutch" (John F. Kennedy).

(NAME OF INSTITUTION)

JOB READINESS BANQUET & AWARDS CEREMONY

"Succeeding in a Global Market"
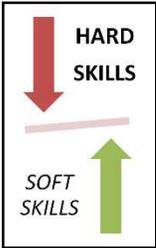
(Guest Speaker's Name)
(Title/Position of Guest Speaker)

(Venue)
(Address)

(Time)

(Date)

Appendix A16: Job Readiness Banquet & Awards Ceremony Program Cont'd.

PROGRAM	Day 1 Sessions Cont'd:
Welcome …..……………..…….. (Name of M.C.) *(Title/Position)*	"Mentorship and Networking with Industry Professionals"
Opening Prayer …….....….. (Name of Participant) *Head of Business Department*	**Day 2 Sessions:**
Overview of Program …… Workshop Facilitator *(Title/Position)*	"Tips from Head to Toe" "Mastering the Job Interview"
Special Music …………... (Name of Participant) *(Title/Position)*	**Day 3 Sessions:**
DINNER	"A Typical Day at Work" "Modeling Professionalism in the Dining Room"
Introduction of Speaker … (Name of Participant) *Student*	Special Awards *(Presented to Participants who Displayed Outstanding Skill Sets)*
Presentation ……........ (Name of Guest Speaker) *Student*	Outstanding Communication Skills Outstanding Teamwork Skills Outstanding Interpersonal Skills Most Cooperative/Involved
Special Music …………... (Name of Participant) *(Title/Position)*	
Students' Reflections …. (Names of Participants) *Students*	Presentation to Guest Speaker ……........ (Name of Participant) *Student*
Presentation of Awards ……………..…… (Names of Participants)	Presentation to Employers …………..... (Names of Participants) *Students*
(Titles/Positions)	
CATEGORIES OF AWARDS	Vote of Thanks ……..... (Name of Participant) *Student*
Certificate of Achievement for Workshop Sessions *(Presented to All Participants Attending Each Session)*	Mentorship/Networking Job Readiness Workshop Evaluation Exercises
Day 1 Sessions:	Benediction …………..…. (Name of Participant) *Student*
"The Importance of Soft Skills" "Communication as the Most Relevant Soft Skill" "Building a Professional Portfolio" "The Cover Letter and Résumé as Communication Tools"	Closing Remarks ………………………..... M.C.

Appendix A17: Sample Certificate of Appreciation

Certificate of Achievement

awarded to:

\<Name of Recipient\>

for completing a workshop in:

Mastering the Job Interview

Signature: …………………………….…………. Date: …………………

Appendix A18: Job Readiness Workshop Evaluation Form

(Administered at the End of Day 3 of the Workshop)

Students, your evaluation of the session is very important for the improvement of the training experience; please read carefully, and complete the form based on your experience. Return the form as soon as you have completed it.

Place a tick (✓) in the response that best indicates the degree to which you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The workshop was of a high quality.					
The subject matter was clear.					
The workshop covered the materials I expected.					
The workshop is of importance to me for success job performance.					
The workshop helped me to understand the importance of soft skills.					
The workshop helped me to identify the soft skills that employer expect from prospective entry-level recruits.					
The workshop helped me to develop the relevant soft skills for employment.					
The facilitators were professional, well-prepared and knowledgeable about the subject matter.					

Would you recommend this workshop for other students?   No ☐   Yes ☐

What one thing would you change about the workshop? …………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

What was the most important thing you learned from the workshop? ……………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

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……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix A19: Work Experience Evaluation Form

(*For use by Supervisors only*)

Name of Student: …………………………………………………………………………

Name of Organization: …………………..……………………………………………….

Address of Organization: ……………..…..……………………………………………….

Name of Supervisor: ………………………………………………………………………

Department of Placement: …………………………………………………………………

Period & Duration of Work Experience: …..…………………………………………………

Summary of duties performed: ………………………………………………………….

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Description of Skills

Communication	Oral, written, nonverbal means of processing and sharing information.
Courtesy	Is polite, considerate and tactful. Has respect for the feelings, opinion and beliefs of others.
Initiative	Possesses the ability to work independently.
Grooming	Is appropriately dressed with attention to personal hygiene.
Interpersonal	Working and/or interacting well with others.
Problem solving	Generating and implementing solutions to problems.
Work ethic	Modeling professionalism and business etiquette. (Dining manners and general deportment in the workplace).
Teamwork	Ability to work well in groups or teams; collaborating with others.

Please use the scale provided to rate the student's display of the soft skills noted:

5 Outstanding;   4 Above Average;   3 Average;   2 Below Average;   1Unsatisfactory

SKILLS	RATING	COMMENTS
Communication		
Courtesy		
Initiative		
Grooming		
Interpersonal		
Problem solving		
Work ethic		
Teamwork		

Supervisor's overall comments and recommendations: …………………………………...

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Supervisor's Signature:……………………………..………… *Date*: ……………..………

Student's Comments: (Respond whether you agree with supervisor's comments)

 AGREE ☐   DISAGREE ☐

Other Comments: ………………………………………………………………………….....

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Student's Signature: ……………………………………………… *Date:* ………………….....

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Appendix B: Students' Recruitment Correspondence

Dear Student:

I am e-mailing you this correspondence because I am in the process of conducting an educational research for an online doctoral degree program I am pursuing at Walden University, USA, and you were randomly selected as a prospective participant. My study is to investigate employers and students' perspectives of the nature of soft skills that employers consider relevant employability skills. Soft skills are the nontechnical skills that everyone needs to be successful in the work setting, for example, patience and self-control.

The study is not a requirement of the community college or the work experience program; however, I would like to collect the data from final year students in the associate degree program via a face-to-face interview. If you are interested in becoming a participant, you must meet the following requirements:

- You must be 18 years or older
- You must be a final year associate degree student in business or computer studies
- You must have completed the work experience program

Your participation is strictly **voluntary**. That is, you do not have to participate in the study if you do not wish to do so. If you choose to decline participation, your relationship with me or the college will not be affected. Your participation or nonparticipation will in no way affect your status with the work experience program, future employment opportunities, and no employer will know who participated or did not participate in the study. Your name or other identification will not be revealed throughout the process of the study. You can also withdraw from the study if you choose without any explanation or suffer any negative effect.

I am attaching a letter of invitation and consent form for your review. Please read the details carefully before deciding whether to participate or not to participate. You may direct any questions you may have regarding the study or any other concerns; I will be happy to respond to your questions. You are **not required** to sign the consent form at this time.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

Ann-Marie Williams
Researcher

Appendix C: Employers' Recruitment Correspondence

Dear Employer:

I am e-mailing you this correspondence because I am in the process of conducting an educational research for an online doctoral degree program I am pursuing at Walden University, USA, and you were randomly selected as a prospective participant. My study is to investigate employers and students' perspectives of the nature of soft skills that employers consider relevant employability skills. Soft skills are the nontechnical skills that everyone needs to be successful in the work setting, for example, patience and self-control.

The study is not a requirement of the community college or the work experience program; however, I would like to collect the data from employers who participate in the work experience program coordinated by the college. The method of data collection will be face-to-face interview. If you are interested in becoming a participant, you must meet the following requirements:

- You must be 18 years or older
- You must provide work experience opportunities for the community college business and computer students at the associate degree level

Your participation is strictly **voluntary**. That is, you do not have to participate in the study if you do not wish to do so. If you choose to decline participation, your relationship with me or the college will not be affected. Your participation or nonparticipation will in no way affect your status with the work experience program, recruitment opportunities, and no student will know which employer participated or did not participate in the study. Your name or other identification will not be revealed throughout the process of the study. You can also withdraw from the study if you choose without any explanation or suffer any negative effect.

I am attaching a letter of invitation and consent form for your review. Please read the details carefully before deciding whether to participate or not to participate. You may direct any questions you may have regarding the study or any other concerns; I will be happy to respond to your questions. You are **not required** to sign the consent form at this time.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

Ann-Marie Williams
Researcher

Appendix D: Letter of Invitation to Students with Consent Form

Dear Student:

You are invited to take part in a research study of the nature of soft skills that are relevant employability skills from the perspectives of employers and community college students. The researcher is inviting participants who are enrolled in the associate degree program offered at the community college, and who have also participated in the work experience program coordinated by the college; the participants must be students in the schools of computing and business studies. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Ann-Marie Williams, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as the work experience officer, but this study is separate from that role.

Your decision to participate or not to participate in this study will not affect your work experience status; you decision will not influence your employability status or deny you any service offered by the College or any employer. No employer will be aware that you have or have not participated in the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of soft skills that employers expect new employees to possess for entry level jobs. The term soft skills, as used in the study, are the personal attributes that are needed to be a successful in the workplace. These skills are not specific to any career, but are required by any job offers in most careers, for example, interpersonal/people, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. If an employer were recruiting an accountant or computer programmer, one of the soft skills that may be required, is the ability to work in teams. In this scenario, teamwork would be a soft skill.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in a face-to-face interview as a means of collecting data.
- Participate in one interview session which will last for no more than 1 hour.
- Provide clarification of the data by reviewing transcriptions of the interview.
- Respond to interview questions about the nature of soft skills that you consider to be relevant employability skills

The interview will be conducted on the community college campus in a private office, and no one will know that you are a participant in the study.

Here are some sample questions:

1. Do you think that students need to possess soft skills for employment?
2. What are the soft skills that you believe that students should strive to attain for employment?
3. How would you rank the soft skills in terms of importance? *(Provide pre-prepared paper with typed skills, and then ask student to rate according to the top 10 soft skills–1 being the most important and 10 being the least important).*

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the community college or Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Your decision to decline or discontinue your participation in the study will not negatively affect your relationship with the researcher, the college or deny you of access to any relevant services.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

At the end of the study you will be provided with summary of the findings, and as a student you will be better informed about the nature of skills that employers expect their employees to possess. The study will make you aware of these skills as you apply for employment.

Payment:

No monetary or nonmonetary gifts or reimbursement will be provided to participants in the study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by audio-tape (where relevant), in handwritten, as well as, typed-written formats in lockable file cabinets, and personal computer protected by password. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via (876) 781-1316 (Mobile), (876) 924-2258 (Home) or

ann-marie.williams@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 001-612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB 08-20-14-0195368** and it expires on **August 19, 2015.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Yours truly,

Ann-Marie Williams
Researcher

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

The researcher may audio-tape the interview (*circle response*): YES   NO

Printed Name of Participant

Date of Consent   _____

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature   _____

_____

Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Students

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview for a study on your perspective of the nature and acquisition of soft skills as relevant employability skills. You are encouraged to use an alias to protect your identity. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. You will have the opportunity to review and confirm a verbatim transcript of the interview.

During the interview, I will ask you to describe the nature of soft skills you think are relevant employability skills. You will relate your responses based on your exposure to the workplace while on work experience. Please share your thoughts honestly and openly. I will indicate when the recording begins. Do you have any questions before we begin?

(Respond to the questions asked)

May I begin the recording now? The audio tape will begin now.

(Audio-taping begins)

Thank you for consenting to participate voluntarily in the interview. According to researchers in the competitive job market employer want employees who have more than technical skills. The consensus is that employees should have soft skills. Soft skills refer to the nontechnical skills, or personality traits, for example, communication and decision-making skills. The interview is soliciting your perception of the soft skills that students need for employment. I will ask questions and allow you adequate time to respond to each question in details. Do not hesitate to speak honestly and openly. Please elaborate on your responses.

Here's the first question.

Do you think that students need to possess soft skills for employment?

What are the soft skills that you believe that students should strive to attain for employment?

How would you rank the soft skills in terms of importance? (Provide pre-prepared paper with typed skills, and then ask student to rate according to the top 10 soft skills–1 being the most important and 10 being the least important).

Based on the soft skills you believe that students should possess, which of these soft skills would you say that you and/or your fellow students possess?

Does your current academic course of study help you to develop the soft skills you need for employment?

How would you recommend that the community college help students develop the relevant soft skills?

Thank you for participating in the interview. Your participation was invaluable. I will forward to you a verbatim transcript of the interview and ask that your review it, make the necessary corrections of your thoughts and experiences, and return to me within 10 days of receipt.

Appendix F: Letter of Invitation to Employers with Consent Form

Dear Employer:

You are invited to take part in a research study of the nature of soft skills that are relevant employability skills from the perspectives of employers and community college students. The researcher is inviting participants who provide work experience opportunities for the associate degree computer and business students of the community college as coordinated by the college. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Ann-Marie Williams, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as the work experience officer, but this study is separate from that role.

Your participation or nonparticipation will not affect your relationship with the community college, and specifically, the work experience program. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not jeopardize your recruitment process through the college.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of soft skills that employers expect new employees to possess for entry level jobs. The term soft skills, as used in the study, are the personal attributes that are needed to be a successful in the workplace. These skills are not specific to any career, but are required by any job offers in most careers, for example, interpersonal/people, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. If an employer were recruiting an accountant or computer programmer, one of the soft skills that may be required, is the ability to work in teams. In this scenario, teamwork would be a soft skill.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in an off-site face-to-face/telephone/e-mail interview as a means of collecting data.
- Participate in one interview session which will last for no more than 1 hour.
- Provide clarification of the data by reviewing transcriptions of the interview.
- Respond to interview questions about the nature of soft skills that you consider to be relevant employability skills

The interview will be conducted on the Tom Redcam public library in a private booth, and no one will know that you are a participant in the study.

Here are some sample questions:

1. How would you describe the selection and recruitment process employed by your organization?
2. What are the relevant soft skills that you look for in prospective employees?
3. How would you rank the soft skills in terms of importance? *(Provide pre-prepared paper with typed skills, and then ask student to rate according to the top 10 soft skills).*

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the community college or Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Your decision to decline or discontinue your participation in the study will not negatively affect your relationship with the researcher, the college or deny you of access to any relevant services.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

At the end of the study you will be provided with summary of the findings, and as an employer you will be able to articulate the soft skills that you desire new employees to possess upon recruitment. Students/graduates at the community college will be better prepared to fill job offering at your organization, thus, minimizing costs related to recruitment and training.

Payment:
No monetary or nonmonetary gifts or reimbursement will be provided to participants in the study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by audio-tape (where relevant), in handwritten, as well as, typed-written formats in lockable file cabinets, and personal computer protected by password. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via (876) 781-1316 (Mobile), (876) 924-2258 (Home) or

ann-marie.williams@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 001-612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB 08-20-14-0195368** and it expires on **August 19, 2015.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep or you may print or save this consent form for your record.

Yours truly,

Ann-Marie Williams
Researcher

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

The researcher may audio-tape the interview (*circle response*): YES   NO

Printed Name of Participant

Date of Consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix G: Interview Protocol for Employers

Employability skills include both technical and nontechnical skills. Technical skills are

considered hard skills, while nontechnical skills, such as personality traits and social

skills are referred to as soft skills. In this interview I am interested in your perception of

the relevant soft skills that you consider when selecting and recruiting prospective

employees.

1. What are the relevant soft skills that you look for in prospective employees?

2. How would you rank the soft skills in terms of importance? *(Provide pre-prepared paper with typed skills, and then ask employers to rate according to the top 10 soft skills).*

3. Based on your interaction with the community college students, do you believe they possess the relevant soft skills?

4. How would you recommend that the community college help students develop the relevant soft skills?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your participation was invaluable. I will

forward to you a verbatim transcript of the interview and ask that your review it, make

the necessary corrections of your thoughts and experiences, and return to me within 10

days of receipt.

Appendix H: Table of Research Questions Alignment Matrix

Table H1

Research Questions Alignment Matrix Table

Research Questions (RQ)	Interview Questions
RQ1	Student Interview Questions 1, 2, & 3
RQ2	Employer Interview Questions 1 & 2
RQ3	Student Interview Question 4
	Employer Interview Question 3
RQ4	Student Interview Questions 2 & 3
	Employer Interview Questions 1 & 2
RQ5	Student Interview Questions 5 & 6
	Employer Interview Question 4

Appendix I: Soft Skills Rating Scale

Table I1

Soft Skills Rating Scale

Instructions: The list of 10 soft skills are in no specific order, rate the soft skills according to importance; 1 being the most important and 10 being the least important.

Rating	Soft Skills	Meaning
	Communication	Oral, written, nonverbal means of processing and sharing information.
	Critical thinking	Ability to evaluate ideas–self-criticism, constructive critique of others' ideas.
	Decision-making	Using accurate information to determine action.
	Interpersonal	Working and/or interacting well with others.
	Negotiation	Using power tactics to arrive at agreement or compromise; cooperating with others.
	Problem solving	Generating and implementing solutions to problems.
	Self-confidence	Belief in one's competencies and/or abilities; lack of self-doubt.
	Self-management	Ability to plan, execute, and monitor one's activities and goals.
	Teamwork	Ability to work well in groups or teams; collaborating with others.
	Work ethic	Modeling professionalism and business etiquette.

Appendix J: Sample Employer's Interview Transcript

Interview Transcription of Employer #6

Interviewer: Thank you participating in the interview

Employer: You're welcome.

Interviewer: Employability skills include both technical and nontechnical skills. Technical skills are considered hard skills, while nontechnical skills such as personality traits and social skills are referred to as soft skills. In this interview, I am interested in your perception of the relevant soft skills that you consider when selecting and recruiting prospective employees. Particularly for this interview, we're looking at like entry-level employees, since I am focusing on the community college students, who would leave with an associate degree.

Employer: Mmm, mmm.

Interviewer: Now, here is the first question:
What are the relevant soft skills that you look for in a prospective employee?

Employer: Well, the first thing I look for when the interview begins and the person walks into the room, is the person's dress; how appropriate is the dress, the hair, and, and the clothes?

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: Ahm, how the person carry themselves? You have some people who walk with very, very confident and head high and you have some people walk in, as if they're going into punishment. *(Interviewer laughs).* Ahm, so, you usually try and put them at ease, especially when they're coming at this, this level, they are very, very nervous. You try and put them at ease, let them talk about themselves, you run some jokes with them, ahm, find out what interests them outside of work, that type of thing; and during that discussion, you also, you, you get to assess their communication level, how well they, they com, how well they speak, and understand what you're saying. That is very, very important. And in answering your question, what do they answer? Ahm, the content of what they are telling you, 'cause I don't want to hear that, sometimes you say, tell me about yourself. "Oh, well, I don't know where to start; I am X, I was born in Clarendon at, at, at Jubilee Hospital *(interviewer chuckles)*; I don't want to

hear all of that *(Employer states jokingly)*. So, communication is key; how you carry yourself is key. Ahm, I once had an interview once where I was part of a panel with a VP [Vice President] and we were interviewing for a senior position, and every, we had four person on the panel, and everybody thought that this gentleman was extremely good; we rated him high, and the VP said, 'No, I don't want to work with him; I couldn't work with somebody like that", "So, what you know him?" "No." "What happened?" "Did you see the socks that the man had on?" *(Interviewer and Employer laugh)* Because he sat back and he crossed his legs and you know his pants came up…

Interviewer: Yeah.

Employer: …and his sock was a totally different, didn't match his pants; didn't, it was like ahh shocking. And the VP said that because of the socks that; and it always stuck in my mind, that these are the little things…

Interviewer: Very much so.

Employer: …that people will look at, socks. But in my case *(pause)*

Interviewer: So, do you classify that as dress code?

Employer: As dress code, but in his mind it was more than dress code, it was taste; it spoke to taste level of the person, and can I carry this gentleman out to represent the company?

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Employer: That is what the VP was thinking.

Interviewer: Yes, yes; that makes sense.

Employer: Right. Alright, we spoke about presentation skills; is the person able to get up in front of a group of persons and make a presentation, because regardless of the level you will coming in at, sometimes you might be required to attend a meeting with your boss, and the boss will allow you to make a presentation. And in our case, it also depends on the department; you have certain departments who *(pause)* where they, we interact with people from outside. Some of us don't, some departments go out and meet people, and it's almost like sales, like they are selling our product. So, you might not be an account executive that go out and sell, but you go with the team. We have booths at various locations, and ahm, people will

come up to you and ask you about our company's product, and if an account executive is not there, you as the junior person, who might be a clerk in the department, you are expected to be able to speak on the company's product. Or if you don't know it, you should have the 'present of mind' to say, "Let me get somebody to help you". So all of that is communication, and presence, and confidence. Ahm, we also look to, 'what else is there?' *(Employer talking to herself)* we'll questions as to, situational questions, like we put them in a scenario and say, "This is a typical day here at X, ahm, and this can happen, if you were in this position, what would you do?" So, I think that *(short pause)* will bring out their decision making skills, and if *(Employer laughs)*. But I guess you will, you will *(short pause; Employer still laughing),* ahm, how they, if they can think on their feet, right. "And what else is there?" *(Employer talking to self)*. That's basically it. We also ask them questions that will determine whether or not, ahm, if they are a leader, if they're a follower; if they like to work in teams, or if they want to work by themselves, and if they have had experience in such situations, and they are to give examples of when they were a member of team, a team leader ahm, and you had a difficult team member, you know, what did you do about it? Basically, that's about it in the soft skills for entry-level staff.

Interviewer: Alright, thank you. My second question, I have a pre-prepared rating scale of the 10 most common soft skills that I found in my literature review, I am going to ask you to review the list, and you're going to rank the soft skills in terms of importance. Number 1 would be the most important, and number 10 would be the least important. I will allow you some time to review the document, then you can explain at the end…

Employer: Mmm, mmm.

Interviewer: …your reason for giving each a particular rating.

(Pause; employer reviewing and completing pre-prepared soft skills rating scale provided).

Employer: And this will, this, we're speaking of our, our entry-level persons?

Interviewer: Basically speaking…

Employer: Okay.

Interviewer: Because the research is centered around ahm community college students…

Employer: Mmm, mmm.

Interviewer: …and most of them, based on their area of training, would get entry-level jobs.

Employer: Okay.

(Long pause; employer reviewing and completing pre-prepared soft skills rating scale provided).

Employer: So, do I have to rank it in order *(short pause)* or 1 being the most important and 10 being the least important.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm,

Employer: So, then it must be 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10?

Interviewer: Yes. Do you have any that you would give the same ranking?

(Pause)

Interviewer: Is that the concern?

Employer: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So you can do that and then you can reverse, I mean, you can revise the numbering.

Employer: Okay.

(Long pause; employer reviewing and completing pre-prepared soft skills rating scale provided).

Employer: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 *(to self)*.
Alright.

Interviewer: Okay, so go ahead now and, and you can explain why you gave the rating; maybe you could also elaborate by use of scenarios like you answered in the first question.

Employer: But I think I answered all of these already in the first question.

Interviewer: You probably did, but go ahead, nevertheless with your response.

Employer: Number 1 is communication, *(pause)* communication, communication, communication. First of all if the letter, the application letter has errors in it, I usually don't call in the person for the interview, even if the qualifications are there. Ahm, communication, oral communication and written communication is extremely important. Critical thinking I would give as 2, ahm, *(short pause).* To me critical thinking is looking at a situation, and analyzing it and evaluating it, and making a determination as how to proceed. Ahm, you might not be at the level to decide on your own that this is the way to go; however, you should be able to when you go to your supervisor, you have a problem, you should be able to say to him or her, "I propose, and I think that this we should do". Don't sit down and say, "Boy, this, I have this to do, you know, and I don't know what to do". You should always go with.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Employer: I gave work ethic number 3. Ahm, to me ethics also means honesty, ahm, being ethical in your work and know that you're not going take credit for something you didn't do. You're not going to accept a gift from somebody outside to get something done inside, ahm, or push through somebody's application before another. So, that is important. I gave problem solving a 4, because that is important, although that is a skill that can be learned. But you need to have some semblance that you have ability to be trained to solve problems. Interpersonal skills, I gave a 5, 'cause you have to be able to get along with the team, *(short pause)* and you're not, there is no, we have no position where you work on your own. So, you have to be able to adjust and be a member of the team. 6, I gave decision making, 'cause at that level, decision making is not as important as it would be for maybe a manager. Teamwork, I gave 7, 'cause that can be cultivated and, and eighth self-management, you must show that you can work on your own, that if necessary, it's not necessary for your supervisor to be over you, your shoulder all the time; but somebody just coming out of school, that is something you acquire over time. Self-confidence is 9, *(short pause)* I think that is self-explanatory. And I gave negotiation a 10 at that level; ahm, maybe because in our position, we don't have sales as such. Ahm, so if it was a sales job, then negotiation would be much higher; but in our organization, at this level it's not, it's not a requirement.

Interviewer: It's good to have, but would you use that to determine whether you recruit someone or not?

Employer: Right, absolutely not.

Interviewer: Alright, is that it?

Employer: So, that's my 10.

Interviewer: Alright. Ahm, you did mention in question 1 that you look at the person's level of self-confidence, why did you rank self-confidence so low?

Employer: Because it helps me to assess the person, ahm, *(pause)* how, how the person will answer the questions, and ahm, if the person will speak up in the interview, but in the job itself *(pause)* it's, it's *(pause)*…

Interviewer: Something that can be developed?

Employer: Definitely; especially when you come into this level position, ahm, but you need some level of self-confidence in order to project yourself and answer properly at the interview. But it would, if the person is shy in the interview, it wouldn't let me 'right them off'.

Interviewer: Okay, understood. Alright, next question. Based on your interaction with the community college students, do you believe they possess the relevant soft skills?

Employer: No.

Interviewer: Elaborate.

Employer: No, I find them lacking in particularly in communication. Ahm, particularly written communication; they will speak well, but written communication is poor, and ahm I find that I have, and I don't know if it is *(short pause)* young people, I don't want to say young people because that makes me sound old *(Employer laughs)*…

Interviewer: And we were young once *(interviewer joins in laughter)*

Employer: I find that they are *(pause)* YOUNG *(Employer stressed the word, 'young' in a soft gentle tone)* to me *(pause)* you have to, *(pause)* common sense is not there. If you say, and, and I am talking generally, because you have a few who are exceptional who come and just, but I find for the most part, if you say put this here and put this here, and put this here, and you give them something outside of the instructions, they are lost. If you know, they can't figure out that "oh, she didn't tell me what to do with this one, ahm, I don't know if it must go between this or that one". You know, and

sometimes it is so clear, it is common sense. I find that they are lacking in common sense. Ahm, *(pauses)* or is it critical thinking then, it could be?

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: It could be.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: Interpersonal, oh, they usually, when those that we have here, they usually come and get on well with everybody; ahm, by the end of the, the third or fourth week, they're, you'd never know that they are a student who *(pause)*

Interviewer: So, the interpersonal skill is, is present.

Employer: Yes. Ahm, *(pause)* and, therefore, if interpersonal is present, usually self-confidence it goes with interpersonal.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: Ahm, negotiation comes with communication, and because the communication skills are poor, so it lacks there so, but *(pause)* I find, like we had a few ones who, well almost all of them, after the period of internship, usually send in a letter applying for a job. And there are many times when I have to call them and ask them to do over the letter, and I think the school should teach them these things, how you apply for a job. Yeah. Mainly it's in the written; they take instructions well, ahm, whatever you give them to do, and usually do it well, and quickly. Ahm, *(pause)*

Interviewer: And you were saying something about their letter of application.

Employer: It's poor, which is communication, written communication, you know. And sometimes some of them, I'll, well so far those I have spake, spoken to, they seem to appreciate it, and, and have not taken offence; but ahm, it is always surprising that letters like that are coming from someone at the community college level.

(Pause)
Interviewer: Actually, I get the same response because at the end of their work experience, they have to present a project to me; in the project is a copy of a résumé and an application letter. That's one of the reasons I chose this

area to do my study, so that I could probably use the results to help pass on some strategies, cause that would be my next question, and you started it, and responding to it already...

Employer: Mmm, mmm.

Interviewer: ...how we could really help them to develop some of these skills. Because some of them are good with their technical skills, but we would want them to be a little more rounded. So, I've...

Employer: I think you should have courses in, in, in, you should have not only people come in and speak to them, but it should be a class.

Interviewer: So, would you recommend? Would you, would you say a soft skills course?

Employer: I don't know if you call it...

Interviewer: ...do we integrate it?

Employer: ...social etiquette or something like that. Where if it is an actual course, not somebody comes in and speak one-off, where they physically go through the motion of interviews, preparing the, the J, the CVs and letters, and physically going through and critique each other, I think it is, and they dress for it and you know.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: I think all schools should have that. Ahm, I remember my son plays professional football, and the, the club brought in somebody to the club and taught them how to dress, how to go to an award function and sit at a dinner table, and what utensils to use, which wine glass to use, how to give an, an appropriate thank you speech. If somebody calls on you impromptu to say, or to give the vote of thanks...

Interviewer: Or to be interviewed by the press.

Employer: Exactly. What to say and not to say, you know. Don't, don't, don't go with your pants down under your bottom *(interviewer chuckles)* and you know. I think schools need it.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So...

Employer: Because we have children here, '… call them children' *(Employer speaking to herself)*, people we have taken on who some of them have been through HEART [Human Employment And Resource Training], some of them came straight from university with a first degree, and we have to be sending them to classes–communication speech, etiquette, how to dress, what is, what is appropriate in the office…

Interviewer: Yes.

Employer: …and these have a first degree and some of them have honors.

Interviewer: Do you think it is something that they don't think is important why they haven't honed those skills, or…

Employer: I don't, I think they don't think it is important, and everybody has it.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: And you will find that children who go to certain school or come from a certain background, they have it; but others who come from certain schools and certain backgrounds don't. Ahm, I had a, a student here once, who we took her from under the HEART program, and she refused to eat in the cafeteria. Because in the cafeteria, you go, and you get, get your tray and you take a knife and fork and you go and sit at the table and everybody would eat with the knife and fork. And she was embarrassed, 'cause she didn't know how to eat with the knife and fork. So, she would go and take her lunch in a box and come outside and eat it, because, and the box costs $50 more if you take it in the box. And I knew that she didn't have it. So, I said, "Why do you do that?" And finally, she tell me. Knife, and something simple as knife and fork, and she didn't want to eat in front of other people.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: I had to tell her, listen, you have some people take the knife and fork, but they don't use it; they use the fork only.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: So, go and do what is comfortable. And it's a way of learning, watch what other people are doing.

Interviewer: Exactly, yes, yes.

Employer: So, I think it should be taught. If it's even 1 semester, it should be taught.

Interviewer: Very good. And, ahm, outside of teaching it over 1 semester or so, is there anything else the college could implement?

Employer: A way from it being a requirement and a class, *(pause)* I can't think of

(Pause)

Interviewer: You just feel it is best being taught separately?

Employer: It, it needs to be taught because some people live it, and accept it and take it for granted and some don't have a clue. And it can play havoc with their self-confidence if, if these things are lacking. Some of them are not even aware. I had another student, another young man we took through HEART, and he didn't know how to speak to people. He, you'd come to his desk and speak to him, and he would answer, but he wouldn't look at you. And people resented it. He wasn't being rude, he just, when they complain, and I co, and I call him and said, "What happened?" "I don't know what you're talking about, she came and she asked me to do X,X,X, and I answered her"; but he didn't, he didn't look at her. Just making eye contact and *(pause)* when one person start complaining about you, other persons, it looks like they go and pick on you *(interviewer laughs)* or they, they start noticing thing that they never noticed before; and it became a big problem...

Interviewer: Okay.

Employer: ...until one day the MD [Managing Director] says, "Listen, I'm tired of hearing, getting complaints about his young man, is either, and then in every organization you have some people who complain and nothing happens, and you have other people who complain and it gets listened to, because of who you are.

Interviewer: Okay, yes, yes.

Employer: And when it reaches the MD, more than one 'certain people' he figures it's a big problem.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

Employer: And ahm, I said, you know, Mr. X, ahm, I have spoken to him over and over, maybe you need to speak to him. And when he called him and

spoke to him, he said, you know, he heard the story, he spoke to him and in it, in, in the discussion it came out where the guy came from, what his background was like.

Interviewer: So, that was kind of the norm for him?

Employer: It was the norm for him. Where he came from and what he sees and, and what he has lived. When, when he called me and said, "You know, I think we need to take this young man under our wings ."

Interviewer: Yes, instead of just casting him out, and he'd go nowhere because he'd still have the same issues.

Ahm, throughout my literature review for this study, I have seen the recommendation to integrate the soft skills in current courses. What are your thoughts on that approach?

Employer: I, I don't agree with that approach; it can't be. It has to be shown, 'cause some of them won't recognize it. Ahm, *(pause)* the, this young man when we used to speak to him and say, "Listen, Miss X said that you did X, X, X, "No, I didn't, she came to me and she gave me this to do and I put it down." "So, why didn't you do it?" "Because I had this to do." "Did you tell her that you had something else doing?" "But she saw me doing this, so, she should know that I'm doing this, so I can't do hers right now."

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm. Yeah.

(Pause)

Interviewer: And as far as he is concerned, he is prioritizing.

Employer: He is prioritizing, right. But the other person, who could be a, a GM [General Manager] or, or a, don't know. And he is doing X and she comes with hers and "X, do this for me", "alright, put it down."

(interviewer laughs)

Employer: And him still doing what him doing. She takes that as being rude.

Interviewer: Very much so. And that would be understandable.

Employer: But when you call him and he explains, it's very logical.

Interviewer: Very logical; yes, very much so.

Employer: But all he needed to do was explain saying, "I'm doing this now, as soon as I finish this; is that okay?"

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm. So, in that training or that course, we expose them to a lot of scenarios that would take place in organizations, so…

Employer: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: …they can actually see what we're talking about.

Employer: Absolutely. Hands-on, hands-on is, well I'm a hands-on person, I'm not a reader, where I can read things and, and I find that when you 'do', you will remember.

Interviewer: Okay.

Employer: We sent him on a course that, that taught them how to dress, and he came back and "I didn't know so many things went into choosing a tie". You know, little.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Employer: So, I, it must be taught.

Interviewer: Yes.

Employer: It can't be subtle. You have to 'hit them over the head with it'.

Interviewer: Yes, yes, yes.

(Short pause)

Interviewer: Do you have anything further to share?

Employer: No.

Interviewer: I think you've answered all of my follow-up questions…

(Employer laughs; interviewer joins in laughter)

Interviewer: …and question 4.

Employer: Which was?

Interviewer: Which was, how would you recommend the college help them to develop the soft skills? So, I guess we've covered…

Employer: Okay, absolutely.

Interviewer: Anything general…

Employer: …Have a dress-up day

Interviewer: Yes.

Employer: …Where they actually dress-up, make presentations, and have dinner, like I think that is important; I think a lot of the young persons are scared of going in a restaurant or go in a formal place and sit down and eat with knife and fork; and that helps to build confidence.

Interviewer: Yes.

(Short pause)

Interviewer: Alright, do you have anything further to share in general regarding soft skills?

Employer: No, nothing general, ahm, I think we covered it all; it is something, as I said, some people see it in the homes, so they take it for granted and don't even realize that they are doing it. And I find that most of the people who come across my desk at this level, the entry-level, don't have it. And they can speak, but if they go under pressure, you'll hear the speak breakdown. Yeah, if they get flustered, you hear the speech breakdown.

(Pause)

Interviewer: Alright, thank you so much.

Appendix K: Sample Student's Interview Transcript

Interview Transcript of Participant #3

Interviewer: Thank you for consenting to participate voluntarily in the interview. According to researchers, in the competitive job market, employers want employees who have more than technical skills. The consensus is that, employees should have soft skills. Soft skills refer to the nontechnical skills or personality traits, for example, communication and decision making skills. The interview is soliciting your perception of the soft skills that students need for employment. I will ask questions and allow you adequate time to respond to each in details. Do not hesitate to speak honestly and openly. Please elaborate on your Respondent. Here is the first question.

Do you think that students need to possess soft skills for employment?

Respondent: Well, I do believe that students…students need soft skills because gone are the days when only your academic record can get you a job. They want to know who they are employing…aamm… in their work place. They want to know the person as a whole and see if they can fit into the work environment and work with others adequately.

(Pause)

Interviewer: Thank you. What are the soft skills that you believe student should strive to achieve for employment?

Respondent: Well, I think…well I think that one of the most important one…aahmm… is to have a good work ethic…ethic…ethic…yes… because …aahm… when you are in a job…aahm… there will be…(pause)…aahh… you must be motivated really to do the work. You must know what you are doing or even if you don't know what you are doing, try and find out what you need to do and do it to the best of your abilities. And another one is having good communication skills, and that involves both listening and speaking–if you can't speak to whoever you are working with or working for, then there are…there are going to be …to be barriers there. And you need to be able to listen and… and listen to instructions carefully and even if you don't get the instructions you should be able to say what part of it you don't get, and what part you do get, and get more clarification on the things that you don't get. And another one is good time management, because when you're working you're going to have a lot of assignments to do and you need to be able to prioritize them and to say, "Ok, I am going

to do this one today, this one tomorrow" and you need to plan…plan it out so that when they are due you don't have a backup of all of them. And another one is flexibility–when you are working you should not be able to do one thing, you should be able to do a lot…a number of… even if when you get there you only can do a certain amount of thing, you know what else they might need and you could learn and that would…aahh… (pause) …that would make it better for you because if they do need persons for promotion they would say "Ok, this person is a good candidate, because even though they came here to do this, they ended up learning how to do that and we can put these persons in this position, knowing that even when they don't know anything they can learn it and still do what they need to do and more". Aahmm… yeah, and working in teams, cause when you…when you join an organization, you automatically become a part of a team and you…you need to know how to work with other persons and how to interact with them and how to deal with difference of opinion. Because there will be difference of opinion, and you should know how to deal with them. And yes, I think those are the major ones.

Interviewer: Those are the major ones. Okay, well said. Alright, thank you. Aahm… now based on my study and research of soft skills, I have come across a number of soft skills that have been noted as commonly required regardless of the industry that you work with. So, what I have done is to have a pre-prepared rating scale and I am going to give you this rating scale and ask you how you would rank the soft skills in terms of importance. (Pause) The soft skills would be based on the rating scale 1–10; 1 would be considered the most important, and 10 the least important. So, I will give you a few minutes and allow you to rate them. At the end, you can explain why you have rated them in that order.

(Long pause–student completing rating scale)

Interviewer: Are you ready now?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok, you can go ahead now.

Respondent: Aahm… I ranked communication as number 1…as being important, because as I said before you should be able to…to express yourself …aahm…orally, written and using nonverbal cues. And it is one that is really important, because you need to be able to talk to the persons…talk to your boss or the persons around you effectively and you should able to understand what they are saying to you, and know what nonverbal cues to

use and what not to use, so that what you are saying does not come off as offensive. Critical thinking…I ranked that as number 1 because …in a work environment, critical thinking is really important, because (pause)… you are… (pause)…what should I say? (speaking to self softly). You will be working with other persons and there will be … there will be a time that there will be some discussion as to what needs to be or what…what has to be done and they are going to be bouncing ideas off each other and you need to know how to take those ideas and how to put them into place, and yeah. Decision making I put that as a 1 as well, because during…when working you will have to make some form of…of decision and you need to know which one is the best one to use based on information that is put before you. And decision making…you need to gather that information that is needed, put it together and analyze it and say "Ok, based on what is in front of me, this is what needs to be done". And interpersonal...I put that as a 1 cause …when working you are not working by yourself or for yourself, you are working for someone and working with someone, so you need … you need to be able…be able to know how to interact with these persons. Interacting with these persons aren't necessarily going to be the same, because the same way how you really talk to your workers that you are close to is not really the same way you need to speak to your boss. So, you need to be able to know the difference between them and know how to act to each other. Aahm…negotiation ... I put that as a 3 ... it is important, yes, but not all work situations really call for you to negotiate, but when it is needed though, it is important to know both or … or how many sides there are and be able to…to…to be able to talk and say what you want and listen to what the person is saying and what you are saying, and be able to come to a middle agreement that is beneficial to you and to the other person. Problem solving ... I put that as a 1 because working with other persons there will be problems, because we are all humans and we have our difference in opinion, and all of that, and you need to know how to behave or know how to act in certain situation when there is a problem. And if… (pause)… there is a problem with whoever or whatever, you need to be able to speak to that person or speak to the relevant persons about this problem and see what can be done to solve this problem that is beneficial to both parties. Self-confidence ... I put that as a 1 because you are going to work, you need to believe that you can do the work that is put before you and more. Because if you start to doubt yourself, then, your work will show that and… (pause)…ahh… yes, your work will show that you don't believe in yourself and that would make you look bad to your bosses, because they would say, "Ok we put this person here, they have the ability but they just don't know how to put it in the work and that is not what we want in the company". Aaahm… self-management...I labeled that as a 3;

it is important but I think that… (pause)… ok… it is important, but I still put it as a 3. Self-management ... where you…be able to plan whatever you need to be done, all those activities, or…well, activities and that other work that your boss gives to you, you should be able to …to…to…aaahmm….to…to…you should be able to…to prioritize… prioritize them and say "Ok, I am going to do this and lay them out in order of importance or the ones you can do… and the ones you that you can do, you have enough time to work on those and to do those to the best of your ability". Team work, I ranked that as 1, cause as I said before when you are going into work you are part of a team, so you should be able work with other persons, work in groups, know…know how to deal with persons, cause when you are a group and you have a group activity, there will be difference of opinions, and need to know how to deal with…with persons. They have different personality, so you need to know that this person is that way so I can say certain things, this person is that, I can do that. So you need to know how to deal with persons…in… in the organization. Good work…. work ethic ... I ranked that as number 1, because no one wants someone to go into their work and do nothing. They want a person to…to do what they are assigned to do and more. If it is possible…. and if it is allowed, and yeah, they need to know how to work and how to fit into a business or workplace situation…yes, and know how to deal with their work…oh yes.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. Now I want you to look at that same list and based on your exposure on the work experience, how did you apply each soft skill, rate them from 1–10.

Respondent: Alright, so for communication I would still put that as 1 because going into a new organization you don't really know anybody, you should be able to talk to these persons who you are working with, talk with your supervisor, know what … what is required of you and what you need to do and any…any questions that I may have to ask him or anybody else that is working and I was… (pause)…and I was able to talk to him and whoever that…whoever else that worked in the organization. Aaahh…critical thinking I rated as 1…

Interviewer: Just for clarification, you are to put the soft skills in order from 1–10 based on importance or necessity on the job.

Respondent: So…

Interviewer: So, are you ready now? Ok, elaborate on why each was given a particular rating based on your experience.

Respondent: Alright, I ranked communication as number 1 because from the moment you step…but for…I should do it in first person? First person?

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm *(in background)*

Respondent: Because from the moment that I step through the door, I had to speak with per…p…with persons… from the persons who work outside the office, who work inside of the office, my supervisor, his boss and any other employee that works there. Talking…well, communicating is the one that was mostly done. 2, I have work ethic, because the supervisor wants to see someone who shows willingness and… shows willingness to do the work and they really do want to do work. And number 3, I have team work, because most …well all of the work that was given to us they were done as a group. There were five of us and the five of us worked together on every…every task that was given. Aahm… number 4 ... problem solving ... as I said we were working as a team and all…every problem or situation that was given to us we had to…to say "Ok, we are going to…" …"wait problem … "(talking to self in a soft voice)… (Pause)…aahh…well we… (pause)…well looking at it from an assignment point of view, when we are given the work we are going to say, "Ok, we…where we will choose this route…well we chose the best route together in completing the task. Aahh…number 5, I have interpersonal…ahhm… that is working with others and as I said, we all work into a group so we had to know how to deal with each other and our differences of opinion and ideas, and so forth. And I have 6 as self-confidence, because… (pause)…having con...well believing in yourself and your abilities really is important because when you work in a team and …and we have work to do we…aahhm…you might have the right answer, but you don't really believe in yourself that much to say "Ok, this is the right answer, this is what we should be doing" and you don't say anything and you probably…the whole team probably end up staying there for the entire time not knowing what to do and you have the right answer. Aamm…number 7 ... critical thinking ... ok, as working in a group you need to think of the best way possible to do the activity. You need to find well…the simplest one and the one that is most effective to do it and that need to think and say "Ok, how am I going to do this? What do I need to do? And how…how do I go about doing it?" And number 8 I have decision making ... after … after you have…you have really thought about what you need to do you say…you say to yourself that "Ok, we have laid down everything and this is what we need to do, this is the simplest, the quickest and the most effective route to do all that we need to do". And number 9, I have self-management...and … well self-management …ahhm… you…you well, I need to be able to … to plan out …aahm…all

the activities… all the assignments that we had to do to really put them…prioritize them really and to say, "Ok, we're going to do this then, do that" then, we do whatever else that we have to do and work together and… well we put of our self-management skills together and we got them done (Laughing). And number 10, negotiation ... there wasn't much negotiation … negotiating going on, so that is why it is at number 10. "I don't think anything to say about negotiation" *(to self in lowered voice).*

Interviewer: Is that it?

Respondent: That is it.

Interviewer: Thank you, well done. Now based on the soft skills you believe that students should possess, which of these soft skills would you say you possess and which would you say your fellow colleagues possess? You can share yours first ... elaborate on them ... then you can refer to scenarios in which your colleagues…aahm.. demonstrated these skills.

Respondent: Well, for me, I…I did have a good work ethic, I wanted to work. Anything that… that needed to be done I wanted to do it and I needed…I didn't…I didn't…it did not really matter how much it is or what work it was, I wanted to do…I wanted it…I wanted something to do. The whole idea of work experience is really getting the experience of work and I wanted work to do and I did that. Good communication ... I am not big on communication skills, but during the work experience, I have improved. I see where I have improved on my communication skill because I am able to speak to persons and speak clearly as to what I want or what I really do not understand based on the instructions that were given or whatever. I was able to communicate well with the persons that I shared work space with. Aaahm…time management ... well as…I….I…I would say that I did have good time management because everything that was given to us, I tried to make sure that it was done in a timely manner; it was quick, but it was still done properly. And flexibility ... there wasn't really much needed…need for flexibility because most of what we did I already knew…everything was mainly IT-based, so what we were given was mainly IT and I knew how to work my way around that.

Interviewer: Just to interject here, would you say that you possess flexibility, even though you did not get a chance to exercise that skill?

Respondent: Aahm…yes, I would say that I possess flexibility because I did have basic knowledge of the work environment that is outside of IT because I… (pause)… worked as an assistant before on a summer job before, so I have

that idea of how to be someone's assistant (smiling), how to answer the phone and how to take messages, and how to…to write up reports and so on and so forth. And working in team ... that was…that was the big one, because most of what we did was in teams or well…well…I was able to…to…work with other persons…well to better work with other persons because… I was…well I like working by myself really but working in…in…in a group it…I like that better than working by myself because I can bounce ideas off other persons to say, "Ok, I have this idea, they have an idea as well, maybe we can put those ideas and we could work something even better". Aaahh…that's all on my list.

Interviewer: Okay, based on the list I gave you, is there any other soft skill that you think you possess?

Respondent: Possess…Aahh…well… aahh… well, self-confidence ... I have developed some level of self-confidence in myself in what I can do. I was really worried about that going into the work experience, cause I was saying to myself, "What I am going there to…what am I going there to do? Is what I know enough to work there?" And what I did know was more than (smiling) enough to work there, and that gave me the confidence I need to say that after the …after I am finished with school I can put myself in a work environment and know that my abilities will work.
Aahm…(pause)… well, decision making ... because when we are given a task, certain decisions had to be made to say, "Ok, we are going to do this or we are going to do this", this way because of… (pause)…because…this is the simplest way we can do it or this is the way that it could be done to get it done. Aahh…well…I think that's it.

Interviewer: Do your colleagues share the same skill set?

Respondent: Well, yes, they did…they shared all of them… all of them… aamm…were willing, all of them wanted to work and they did have communication skills because we were all able to speak to each other, speak to our boss and everybody else. Aahh… time management ... every task that we have …that we got we got them…we did them to the best that we could and in the quickest time that we could. And (pause)… well than to say that we had excellent time management, because when we got the work (smiling) and we went back he…aamm…our supervisor was saying that maybe we should go a little slower (laughs)… 'til he could something else to give us when we are finished, so we were just literally sitting there and type extremely slow (laughs) so that time would pass until he gave us something to do. And work in teams ... we all worked in teams and we were able to do that effectively. (Pause) Self-confidence ... I think they

had more self-confidence than I did and I … I was able to feed off their confidence and say, "They can do it, I can do it too". And…yeah.

Interviewer: What are the soft skills that you think you would need to improve?

Respondent: Improvement…I think my communication skills do need some improvement, even though it has improved, it could go a little bit further, because as I am able to communicate, but there is still room for improvement in my speech and my writing and my ability to understand, because I do have a hard head (laughs). Aaahm…time management ... as I may be able to work with time, but I am still think that I could do more in…in…in less time, less procrastinating and get things done quicker, even though that are done quick, they still can do faster. And…mmmm…(pause)…my self-confidence, as I said before, even though it had improved to a point I still think that I can push myself more to say that, "Ok, I can do this and I can do more than what I think I can do". And… (pause)…aamm…I think that's it.

Interviewer: Ok, does your current course of study help you to develop the soft skills you need for employment?

Respondent: Aahmm…well, yes, I do think so, because most…well…well…well, first let me say the soft skills it has… (pause)… helped me to develop. That is working in a team …aahm… time manage …and time management. Those are the ones that really stick out because most of what we get is group project and we…well I was able to work in a group and we were able to dissect everything and say, "Ok, you get this to do, and I get this to do" and at the end of it we were able to all come together with our individual pieces and say, "Ok, this is the final project, I did what I was supposed to do and nothing else" and…yeah. And time management...we have a lot of courses and each course has their individual course works, so in order to not have them backed up really, you need to say, "Well, I needed to deal with each…I needed to deal with each of them as they come and not procrastinate and leave them for later and I have my…and I think …I have developed from my course some level of time management.

Interviewer: So, 2 main (pause) skill sets?

Respondent: Yes, those are the 2 main ones.

Interviewer: How do you recommend that the community college help students develop the relevant soft skills, especially since you only mention 2 and there are a number of them you yourself recommended?

Respondent: Ok, well I…well I…there are some courses that …that teach …that teach you communication, so I probably should have said that as the important one, because we do have courses like…aaamm…oral communication that teaches us how to…how to speak…speak to persons and how to write speeches based on different occasions and… aaamm… to…and that showed us how to…how to improve our oral, written and nonverbal cues to say, "Ok, that this is how you are supposed to speak, this is how you are supposed to write, this is how…this is how you are supposed to… (pause)… act really during a given situation, and all that". So, that was an important one. And how the college can improve really, aamm… (pause)…they… (pause)…they…well, I think that they…they do everything really in theory because they say "Ok, when…when you are going into the working world, you are suppose to have communication skills, know how to make decision, negotiate, prob…problem solving, time management and all of that". They mainly like tell you what you need but not really how do you achieve them. Which…how you really unlock all of those soft skills that you might have to fit yourself into a working world. So I think that more needs to be done practically to…to get students more in touch with their soft skills rather than the hard …rather than the hard skills that they place more …so much emphasis on. Since the hard skills aren't what employers are really going for, they are going for the soft skills as well. So, you need to spend time developing soft skills as well along with the hard skills that is the main focus.

Interviewer: How would you recommend that they achieve that?

Respondent: I recommend aahhmm…(pause)… well, we do have courses in communication so, that for me is a good step right there and… (pause)...problem solve… (pause)…I guess you could say that math could give you some level of …of problem solving, because you do need to…to…to aaahmm…to…to analyze the problem in front of you, but outside of the math environment aahh…let's see… (pause)… aaahm… (pause)…aahh…well, they could have workshops really and not just have persons come to us and tell us that we need these types, but ex…really explain to us or have demonstration to say that, "Ok, when you are having whatever problem, this is…this is a way you that you can unlock your decision making potential or your problem solving or your time management". They put you…they put you in a scenario and say how you would …how you would…aaamm… go about doing this or making a presentation based on whatever scenario and say, "Ok, this is probably a way that you could do it, this is a way …a way that you can do it", to say that when whoever is really watching you could say, "Oh, since you do it like that may be they could do it this way" and this helps them to get

thinking…to thinking really that ….aamm… that there are…there are more ways to solve a problem than this that are in front of you. They get them thinking, yeah. Aaahm…

Interviewer: So it is a practical, hands-on workshop?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Any other strategy? …(pause)…outside of the workshop?

(Pause)

Respondent: Aahm…(pause)…aamm…I guess during …during classes really you …you can have the …the teachers there speaking to students…aaammm…(pause). I will think about that one (lowered voice). Aaahm…

Interviewer: I will allow you some time to think about it… (lowered voice).

Respondent: Aahm ….the teachers…aamm…(pause)…well, they could use the teachers as examples for… to…for examples for the students to say, "Ok, this is how you are suppose to communicate, this is how you are suppose to deal with persons, because some teachers they really don't know how to deal with persons and I… as a student or anybody else sees this they might think it is an appropriate behavior to go with, when it really isn't. So, they need to get the teachers more involved and what are those soft skills that they need, because some of them…I don't think they even know what soft skills are (smiling), so, they need to get the teachers more on board with that and speak more about soft skills with their …with their students. Because during IT really, they keep saying that you work in IT you don't really talk to anybody, but that really isn't true, you do have some persons who, well, technical support, so you need to be able to speak to these persons and all of that. So, that should be even put to say that, "Ok, you are not just going to go out there and sit in front of a computer, you need to know how to speak to these persons; and I am speaking to you this way… and this is well…well you can use me as an example how you are going to speak to these persons. You need to be kind…aamm… and well, yeah, to be kind and able to speak to these…them and able to understand and able to put…put things that you know in a simple way and give it to them. Because, they might not have the same level of knowledge, well in IT that you have and they might not have…they might not understand what you are saying so you might have to break it down and give it to them".

Interviewer: So, you recommend workshops, and teachers as examples or models that the community college can use to help students to develop these skills?

(Pause)

Interviewer: Is there anything else, any other idea?

Respondent: Aahhh…(pause)… well…even though I said that…that more is done in theory, but I still think that they need to go more in-depth theory-wise because we all learn differently. Some people might learn hands-on, some people might learn from reading and just giving say to a person that is a soft skill, you need good communication, good problem solving, goo …aamm…complete work in a team, they might need to know what that is really, so you need to break it down and say, ok this is what they are …and this is how you might go about achieving them. And there are different ways you can do them and what to do and what not to do in a given situation of really… (pause) …to really (pause)…develop your soft skills or to see if you really have these soft skills, and if you don't have them, you can do this to work on those soft skills.

(Pause)

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add; not necessarily in relation to the last question, but overall, on the subject of soft skills?

Respondent: Well, I would like to say that …(pause)… more emphasis needs to be put…needs to be put on soft skills because when…when most persons are in school they more…they…their main focus is really getting through, passing the courses and getting a degree and they leave out these key things that employers are really looking for. They go in front of them, give them their résumé and ask them something off the résumé that they would like to put them in a situation, 'like how you would deal with this', they don't know how… they don't know how to answer that because they don't really know or have or think that they have good decision…because they didn't think that they were really needed. And then that would cause them not to have the job. And I think that more needs to be done; more emphasis needs to be put on the soft skills, because as I said pretty earlier, that it is not what is on your résumé any more. They want to know you as a complete person ... what are your …your personality, your attitudes, how you feel about certain things, how you would deal with certain things and you don't put that on your résumé. So, they need to see it in you, and they need to tell persons that when you are going for a job, they really need to know who…to know who you are as a person, so when you go …you as a

person…you as a person, you need to know who you are before you can go explain that to somebody else. Because what you…what you say about yourself may not be…may not be what you…well…may not be… well, how you say it may not come across to the person so it comes across the wrong or whatever. So they need to be able to express that side of them to their employers. Aaamm… well, that is pretty much what I have to say really.

Interviewer: Thank you for participating…

Respondent: You're welcome.

Interviewer: It was really interesting and invaluable and I will forward to you the verbatim transcription. Then you can review it and return it in 10 days. And you are free to make any corrections to your thoughts. If you feel that you have missed out something or you want to express it a different way, this is the period that I am allowing you to make sure that whatever I report reflect your own thoughts and experience.

So, thank you very much for your participation.

Respondent: You are very welcome.