GETTING YOUTH IN THE DOOR:

Defining Soft Skills Requirements for Entry-level Service Sector Jobs

APRIL 2013

SOFT SKILLS NEEDS AND TRAINING FOR ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEES IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

Introduction and Report Overview

Educators and employers agree that there is a growing gap between the skills that companies expect from their entry-level employees and the skills that these young people possess. This skills gap is widely documented. In September 2012, the *Training Journal* noted that, "More needs to be done to educate young people about the skills employers are looking for, and this needs to be a joint effort amongst key stakeholders from across education, business, and the government."[1] To bridge this skills gap, industry leaders and researchers indicate that what is needed is more soft skills training.

Experts broadly define soft skills as a set of non-technical, professional abilities such as communication, interpersonal, and customer service skills, as well as personal traits such as integrity and responsibility that employees need to secure employment and succeed in the workplace.[2]

Despite the widely held belief that more soft skills training is needed to help close this gap, the current economic crisis has negatively impacted workforce policies and decreased industry investment in training and workforce development.[3]

As employers grapple with these consequences and seek out innovative solutions to address them, incremental technological advances have resulted in new software and the use of social media and mobile devices as new learning platforms. These tools not only allow companies to engage tech-savvy young employees in OECD countries or emerging markets, but they also provide access to new communities of learners in developing countries. Overall, they have the potential to drive down costs and increase the quality and consistency of training.

> More needs to be done to educate young people about the skills employers are looking for, and this needs to be a joint effort amongst key stakeholders from education, business, and government.
>
> —*Training Journal, September, 2012*

In this context, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and its corporate partners launched a new initiative to assess the core soft skills that companies seek in entry-level employees and to understand how they are delivered in service and retail industry training programs. The initiative has two long-term objectives. The first is to develop an e-learning tool that makes soft skills training more accessible, consistent, and cost-effective so that a greater number of young people acquire these skills for employment. The second objective is to build a cross-industry partnership around this effort. In this way, a greater number of young people will acquire these skills for employment and build a cross-industry partnership around this effort.

This report informs further thinking about the proposed initiative by researching and analyzing the current soft skills training landscape. It seeks to identify what basic soft skills competencies are required for a diverse group of entry-level employees with varying levels of education and experience, where gaps in those skills exist, what the soft skills marketplace is offering, and where opportunities for further training exist. The report is organized as follows:

Section I   Methodology
Section II   Key Findings
Section III   Soft Skills Needs and Gaps
Section IV   E-learning for Soft Skills Training: Challenges and Opportunities
Section V   Recommendations

Section I: Methodology

The information presented in this report is based on primary data and an extensive literature review of current sources from 2008 to present. Research questions were designed to:

- Determine the general profile of an entry-level employee in the service sector
- Establish a list of the most relevant soft skills for entry-level hires according to the sector
- Understand the depth of the soft skills gap as felt by the sector
- Collect information about current soft skills training implemented by the sector
- Understand the sector's use and assessment of e-learning tools

To gather a large spectrum of views and expertise on the soft skills gap and current training practices in the service sector, IYF conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with executives from Accenture, Arcos Dorados, Hilton, and Walmart; practitioners from the Mozilla Foundation; and executives and researchers from professional associations.

Additional interviews with service sector executives and human resource and development practitioners—including South Africa's major retailers, Ernst & Young, and Blackboard Inc.—yielded data that expanded and strengthened earlier interview findings. IYF also analyzed and evaluated trainings designed for entry-level employees that included a soft skills component and were provided by professional associations for service sector companies were also analyzed and evaluated.

In addition, more than 45 secondary sources, mostly publications from human resources and development professionals and business and education academic journals, were reviewed and assessed according to the questions outlined above.

Section II: Key Findings

Below are seven key findings from the interviews and literature review.

- Competencies for entry-level employees in customer service positions include the following set of soft skills: customer service; communication; teamwork and interpersonal skills; organizational and planning skills; critical thinking and problem solving; creativity; culture sensitization; presentation and professionalism; work ethics (integrity and reliability); self-assessment; and ability to receive constructive feedback.

- Although definitions of entry-level positions and employee profiles differ widely across the service sector, a common denominator is widespread concern over the lack of soft skills, especially customer service, communication, teamwork, and work ethics of new hires.

- Corporate training offerings are focused on technical skills and training manager level staff. However, the service sector, particularly retail and hospitality companies, have begun to address the soft skills gap among entry-level employees. These companies have done so to align them with company-wide values and norms, improve overall customer service and business performance, and increase retention, especially in emerging economies.

- Companies generally partner with corporate training vendors to create and deliver training, and a large array of B2B solutions exist for career-employees. Select companies develop and deliver the training themselves. Yet, civil society has a critical role to play in reaching young, low-skilled entry-level employees in developing countries where the soft skills gap most needs to be addressed to empower youth and support a profitable business environment.

- The share of technology-based training is growing. Long-term, cost-efficient solutions such as e-learning, social-media, and mLearning are increasingly integrated into blended learning solutions that enable reach and support face-to-face training in customer service skills.

- There is space for a civil society/private sector partnership and the resulting initiative to develop an e-learning soft skills training for young entry-level employees. This segment has not yet been the core focus of soft skills training.

- More research needs to be done to test blended learning soft skills training initiatives to determine the business case for investing in them. For example, do they cut recruiting costs, reduce turnover, lead to higher retention rates and upward mobility, and increase worker productivity enough to make it a solid business investment for companies?

Section III: Soft Skills Needs and Gaps

Soft skills are central to business performance in the service sector and to an employee's ability to succeed and advance in the workplace. However, despite the prerequisite soft skills that employers demand from entry-level employees and a growing training market, the soft skills gap in knowledge and training persists. This section examines the benefits of soft skills for stakeholders, synthesizes current thinking on required soft skills for young entry-level employees, and explores the soft skills gap in the context of a growing training market.

> Despite the prerequisite soft skills that employers demand from entry-level employees… the soft skills gap in knowledge and training… persists.

Soft Skills for Business Performance and Individual Empowerment

Service sector executives, vocational and academic institutions, and learning and development experts worldwide acknowledge the importance of investing in human capital. They especially understand the need for soft skills for companies, employees, and job-seekers to further productivity and growth and create a favorable business environment. In addition, employability, market organization, and business and workforce development supports macroeconomic and social development.[4] In a 2012 report titled "Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives—A Strategic Approach to Skills Strategy", the OECD encourages governments and all parties involved to acknowledge these realities in their development and business strategy, and it entices them to explore more public-private partnerships to develop new educational programs and training models.

For companies in the service sector, business performance is directly linked to human capital abilities,[5] particularly interpersonal and customer service capabilities. According to Robles, much research has been done on the importance of soft skills in the workplace; while the numbers don't always agree, there is general consensus that soft skills are a powerful indicator of long-term success. Technical knowledge is much less of a predictor of job performance.[6] A 2010 study found that 75% of long-term job success depends on people skills, while only 25% is dependent on technical knowledge.[7] Another study indicated that hard skills contribute only 15% to one's success, whereas 85% of success is due to soft skills (Watts & Watts, 2008, as cited in John, 2009). As employers are progressively looking for employees who are mature and socially well adjusted, they rate soft skills as the number one factor for entry-level success on the job (Wilhelm, 2004).

Prerequisite Soft Skills for Entry-level Employees

The definition of an entry-level position depends on the company and is varied and flexible. It is often predicated on two major factors: 1) the minimum level of qualification required and 2) the level of responsibility and customer contact the new employee will have. It ranges from an hourly-paid employee working as a sales, kitchen, or housekeeping assistant in retail or hospitality which require minimal formal qualification and prior training, to "high guest contact" positions such as a retail store manager, a front-desk manager in a hotel, or a university graduate entering the IT consultancy industry. In all cases, however, there is growing evidence that for customer-facing positions soft skills are required to access entry-level jobs.[8]

Soft skills are a set of professional competencies and personal traits required of entry-level employees. The list of minimum professional competencies and personal traits expected from entry-level employees by industry experts is provided below.

Professional Competencies	Personal Traits
• Communication skills (listening, verbal, and written) • Planning and organizational skills • Teamwork • Interpersonal skills • Critical thinking and problem solving • Investigation and research skills • Creative thinking • Decision-making skills • Multicultural sensitivity and awareness[10]	• Professionalism (includes grooming and self-respect) • Honesty and integrity • Positive attitude, motivation, and ability to learn • Dependability and responsibility • Adaptability and flexibility • Ability to take constructive feedback • Hard work and ethics[9]

The retail and hospitality industry, including organizations such as the National Retail Foundation, Hilton Worldwide, BMW India, Walmart, and Oberoi[11] consistently add customer service, communication, and interpersonal skills as fundamental entry-level requirements.[12] Leaders in these industries explain that honesty and integrity underpin their customer service philosophy and insist these traits are vital to employee success. Multinational companies also include cultural sensitization and the ability to work in a multicultural environment.[13] Technical competencies such as literacy, numeracy, and basic IT productivly skills, while distinct from soft skills, are often cited as a key requirement.

The literature suggests that when soft skills training is offered to entry-level employees, it generally includes these professional competencies and may try and teach some of the desired personal traits as well. Generally, these are the standard soft skills taught at all job levels, although the focus of the training program is tailored to the target audience—either low-skilled, entry-level employees, or skilled new hires or managers—and exercises and assessment methods are adjusted accordingly.[14] To address geographic differences in skills and cultural nuances, interview respondents suggested that local examples be embedded into the programs.

The Soft Skills Knowledge Gap

Although now widely recognized as a requirement for hiring and job success, too many entry-level candidates lack basic soft skills. As a consequence, the skills gap between service sector's demand for qualified entry-level employees and the available supply is growing worldwide. Professional and academic literature clearly documents this increasing skills gap.[15] According to the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), 49% of HR managers indicate that the overall decline in workforce readiness of new entrants has a major strategic impact on their business; this challenge ranks 26th out of 104 major global workforce challenges.[16] This is also not a recent finding: according to Schulz (2008), "more than 40 years ago the German Engineering Association (VDI) recommended that 20% of the engineering curricula should be soft skills."

> Forty-nine percent of HR managers indicate that the overall decline in workforce readiness of new entrants has a major impact on their business
>
> —*Society of Human Resource Management*

According to the companies interviewed for this report, new hires lack communication skills and struggle with time management skills (organizational and prioritization skills) regardless of their level of education or position. Many entry-level employees lack customer service and interpersonal skills, making collaboration with colleagues and problem-solving among team members difficult.

The problem is particularly acute for young people, who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and lack the necessary soft skills—communication, teamwork and customer service—to qualify them for available jobs in the sector."[17] Major South African retailers report gaps in technical skills as

well, a gap they attribute to an education system that is failing to "provide youth with the appropriate literacy, numeracy, problem solving and critical thinking skills," and leaves new hires lacking "values such as work ethics and self-discipline".[18] According to a large survey of American HR professionals about the hiring practices of their organizations conducted by SHRM and Achieve, a non-profit education reform organization, 20% of low-skilled workers need remedial education in basic math and communications.

Moreover, the growing soft skills gap not only spans industries, but also cuts across developed, emerging, and developing markets worldwide. According to Tom Hill, President of Professional Education at Blackboard Inc., "The employer often sees a significant gap between the hard and soft skills that a graduate brings to the workplace, with many new employees lacking the soft skills needed for professional success." Interview respondents reported, for example, great differences in values and attitudes towards customers among US-based entry-level employees, while entry-level employees adopt different body language and attitudes towards guests depending on the country. These companies also noted that entry-level employees in emerging markets may be technically overqualified, but they struggle with client relations and communications.

The Soft Skills Training Gap

Despite the sector's understanding and acknowledgement of the soft skills gap, and the now widely accepted notion that soft skills can be acquired through various delivery channels and further developed and improved through workplace practice and everyday life,[19] companies continue to make greater training investments in technical and leadership skills than in soft skills training for entry-level employees. The literature indicates that soft skills training is typically scattered, insufficient or quasi non-existent in higher education programs across the globe. Additionally, companies worldwide do not consistently train their employees in soft skills as a strategy to decrease turnover costs and improve customer satisfaction; therefore, they impact their own profitability and long-term growth. According to a 2011 CEGOS survey in Europe, priority is mostly given to job-related technical skills.[20] In its 2011 State of the Industry, the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) noted that G500 companies are the ones investing most in learning and development, and that all companies invest more in managerial skills, technical, and compliance training. If there is soft skills training, it is first to support management and supervisory development, not entry-level employees.[21]

Interview respondents for this report indicated that the decision to offer training to new employees is often left to store or property managers and typically consists of more technical than soft skills. In most cases, no specific soft skills training is offered during the on-boarding phase nor extended to entry-level, hourly employees. Where soft skills trainings is provided, it relies heavily on in-person training by HR managers or supervisors, making it more time and cost intensive.

> In most cases no specific soft skills training is offered during the on-boarding phase nor extended to entry-level, hourly employees.

One of the reasons soft skills training is not always actively pursued by companies is that soft skills and training benefits are difficult to quantify. Doing so necessitates the creation of performance tools to evaluate the quality of the training, "return on learning"[22] and the subsequent return on investment (ROI) for the company.[23] The challenge of quantitatively measuring a company's ROI in soft skills training has led organizations such as Accenture, SHRM, and PricewaterhouseCoopers to support the growing use of "human capital analytics" to integrate HR and L&D decisions into overall business strategies. Predictive analytics recognize and assess workforce trends by identifying patterns across hiring, turnover, performance, engagement, and workforce planning. These analytics allow executives to align HR management information across company operations to inform strategic decisions.[24]

Despite the economic downturn, companies are now acknowledging the need for soft skills training, especially for entry-level employees. Companies increasingly turn to vendors to create and deliver such soft skills training, which has caused

the market to grow steadily, particularly in more advanced skill sets.[25] Skillsoft, the leading training company that acquired many smaller vendors in 2011 and 2012,[26] values the overall global corporate training market (IT, technical skills, soft skills, and compliance training) at US$48 billion. Forbes values the US market at US$13 billion.[27] According to Simba Information Inc., leading soft skills trainers raised their revenues from US$1.89 billion in 2006 (27.1% of the market) to US$2.07 billion in 2007, with a 1.4% projected compound annual growth rate between 2007 and 2012. There are also a myriad of small and mid-sized design, content, and delivery enterprises, such as Monarchmedia.

Corporate training providers who define soft skills more broadly and incorporate them into leadership, management, industry-specific, and compliance skills training dominate growth in the soft skills training market. In addition to instructional content, vendors typically provide a learning management system (LMS) platform and propose to customize their services for each corporate client. In doing so they bind their clients to one customizable technological solution for all current and future course requirements.

In a trend that is well documented and potentially problematic, the academic and nonprofit sector minimally supports soft skills training offerings. When sector-supported trainings are offered, they are typically decentralized, led by professional associations in select locations, and lack visibility. The National Retail Federation Foundation (NRFF), for example, offers only instructor-led delivery, a minimal course catalog, and four national professional certifications. They do not offer e-learning solutions. They gear their offerings towards young, low-skilled employees and career-changers in the US market. Similarly, the American Hospitality and Lodging Educational Institute (AH&LEI) offers its Skills, Tasks and Results Training program to low-skilled workers, or those re-entering the workforce. It is delivered in person. Finally, JobStart 101 is widely accessible online, but its courses target college graduates. Globally accessible online open courses also have limited reach and are primarily associated with US-based universities.

This trend presents multiple challenges. First, B2B solutions by a few major vendors limit the choice of training solutions on the market. Second, young, entry-level employees are not typically targeted by widely accessible soft skills training programs. Finally, since civil society is largely absent as a soft skills training provider for companies, its expertise, knowledge of local environments, and access to young people remains underutilized by the industry.

Section IV: E-learning for Soft Skills Training—Challenges and Opportunities

E-learning training solutions are currently one of the most sought after workforce development strategies. To harness the advantages that e-learning solutions for soft skills training can bring to companies and employees and ensure effective and efficient training, industry and learning experts advocate for blended learning approaches that integrate in-person interaction, mentoring to support entry-level employees, and the increased use of mLearning and social media within companies to enhance reachability.

Training can be delivered via three channels: trainer-led or instructor-led training (TLT or ILT) live and online; computer-based training (CBT); or web-based training (WBT). The latter includes Web 1.0 tools as well as virtual classrooms, online learning tools, social media, podcasting and increasingly mobile-learning tools. Currently, 70% of soft skills training content is instructor-led, yet ASTD asserts that the trend is moving toward technology-based instructional solutions, especially through social media tools and mLearning. They predict such tools will continue to shape the future of learning.[28] This case is particularly true in emerging markets such as India where companies are experimenting with a variety of e-learning tools such as webinars, learning management systems, virtual classrooms, and social media to deliver training and support professional development.[29]

Regardless of how the content is delivered, either as a blend or purely e-enabled, companies must select a platform and a learning or content management system, such as BlackBoard, Sakai LMS, Moodle, SkillSoft's SkillPort, or Wordpress. These systems can be provided with fees for service by a third-party vendor, or an organization can select and customize

an open-source solution. In the mLearning space, various solutions exist, including HTML 5 or OSLO (open-standard learning objects), mobile apps, and mobile web-based solutions.

According to industry experts and current literature on the topic, e-learning has considerable advantages for companies seeking to train, expand, and retain their workforce. The primary advantages include

- *Creating cost-efficiencies.* E-learning tools decrease the costs associated with purely trainer-led approaches by allowing multiple employees to reuse the same content, thus decreasing material reproduction costs.[30]

- *Maximizing content use.* Participants can reuse and review e-learning content as often as they wish, making for a better and more intense learning experience.[31]

- *Meeting tech-savvy Gen-Y and Millennial expectations.* E-learning enhances the technology and fast-paced environment young professionals experience personally and expect professionally.[32]

- *Harmonizing training principles and outcomes across a company.* E-learning allows harmonization of training processes by disseminating the same content across training entities and within a company so that there is less variation in expected training outcomes than with decentralized training responsibilities.[33]

- *Providing flexible training opportunities.* When integrated into daily work practice, e-learning provides on-the-spot or just-in-time learning opportunities that improve job performance and create new value.[34]

- *Increasing organizational flexibility.* E-learning can either be self-paced or live, thus avoiding disruptions in the workplace and giving learners opportunities to review the material at any time.

Despite the obvious advantages, e-learning as a training solution also presents considerable challenges.

- *Increased time and cost for content development.* E-learning development is more time-intensive and costly than a trainer-led approach. Although sources on this are varied, some estimates report that it takes an average of 79 hours and costs US$10,054/hour to create one finished hour of a basic e-learning training course. This is compared to 43 hours and US$5,934/hour for an average TL-training project.[35] However, e-learning development costs decrease when enough employees are trained using the same content; a number which is arguably not difficult to achieve given the potential to easily disseminate and scale e-learning content.

- *Limited opportunities for physical practice.* E-learning is limited in largely offering knowledge as opposed to physical practice of newly acquired skills. While simulations are designed to assist in supporting uptake of skills learned, understanding and applying soft skills in the workplace takes considerable time, actual practice, and reflection.[36] This is particularly true for young, entry-level employees from disadvantaged backgrounds that may have minimal educational qualifications or professional interactions.

- *Increased risk of low learner engagement and drop out.* When e-learning content is poorly designed or not integrated with meaningful in-person interaction or follow-up coaching or mentoring, it can result in disengaged learners and potentially higher drop-out rates.[37]

In order to harness the advantages of e-learning for soft skills training while minimizing these challenges, industry experts and researchers recommend using a blended learning approach that is supported by mentoring and coaching. Blended learning uses a combination of technology-based and instructor-led instruction that focuses on informative and interactive e-learning, live online sessions, and in-person practice.

Companies that use blended learning approaches typically rely on multiple delivery channels by incorporating e-learning with experiential and/or face-to-face training as well as on-the-job training, coaching, mentoring and webinars.[38/39] To avoid any workplace disruption, companies use short, two-hour face-to-face or live online instructor-led sessions and combine them with e-learning modules.[40] Based on the learner-in-control principle, it is recommended to create a "community of learning" among the participants and embed experiential activities such as action projects that reflect the learner's workplace realities to improve the performance of e-learning modules.[41] Ideally, video training and game simulations are added to web-based and online solutions to increase interactions and present real-life scenarios to learners.[42]

> Industry leaders and experts recommend using a blended-learning approach that is supported by mentoring and coaching.

A coaching or a mentorship system is meant to increase the e-learning benefits for both employees and companies.[43] Indeed, bringing the experiential addition to stand-alone e-learning training through mentoring enhances direct skills acquisition, gives learners opportunities to apply the skills on the job, promotes employee commitment to the company, and facilitates training performance assessment. It not only "tightly couples e-learning with personal learning objectives", but because it demands more involvement from both the learners and their companies, the work performance outcomes are greater than mere blended techniques.[44]

Section V: Recommendations

Based on interview findings and in-depth analysis of current literature on soft skills, there is a clear need for both more soft skills training, particularly for entry-level employees, and more interactive, scalable training solutions. Low-skilled, entry-level employees have not been the focus of many corporate training programs and, where soft skills are provided, they are integrated with technical and basic compliance training. For its part, the nonprofit and academic sectors are not central players in creating and providing scalable soft skills training solutions in partnership with industry leaders. This gap impedes the transition from education to employment for youth worldwide that increasingly do not have the requisite soft skills to secure decent employment. The ability for the private sector to work together with civil society to harness the power of technology to develop and provide accessible and effective learning platforms and tools that support a blended learning strategy must be leveraged.

The following three recommendations are presented as strategies for addressing current market gaps and improving soft skills training for entry-level employees in the service sector.

1

Develop an e-enabled product targeting a specific audience. The bulk of current soft skills research focuses on the skills needed by tertiary graduates, and industry-led training programs focus largely on managerial and technical skills development. Given this scenario, there is a pressing need for soft skills training for low-skilled job-seekers who are secondary school completers or dropouts, vocational training, or college graduates from two-year degree programs. Such a product could reach a broad global audience that may include low-skilled or inexperienced youth in the United States; potential Gen-Y tech-savvy hires in OECD or emerging countries; and first-time, young employees in developing countries. The preferred product model to achieve this is a blended learning product that includes e-learning and/ or mLearning modules teaching cross-industry core soft skills reinforced by webinars for on-the-go and just-in-time learning, face-to-face meetings and embedded workplace practice and ideally supported by coaching/mentoring for advice, advancement, motivation, and retention. The preferred product would also allow for cost effective adaptation to make it relevant for a diverse group of young people with differing levels of education and soft skills.

2

Make soft skills training comprehensive and discreet for young, entry-level employees across the service sector. New employees, above all the ones in high customer-contact positions, should be given the opportunity to systematically benefit from a specific and industry-relevant soft skills training that includes transferable soft skills, such as customer service, communication, and teamwork skills. Given the short and long term benefits of improved customer service due to soft skills training, an overall training plan should give employees the opportunity to access e-learning or mLearning tools during work hours. Tracking when employees login, access data, and complete modules online would allow L&D departments or supervisors to control the overall activity. Face-to-face instruction that gives employees a chance to practice these skills with guidance and feedback provided from a senior employee would support skills acquisition. The soft skills training should be provided pre-hire by a qualified organization or at the time or post-hire immediately following an initial probationary/trial period by the employer. In all cases, the training must be clearly differentiated from any new-entry orientation or compliance training.

3

Establish a public-private partnership to combine and leverage expertise and experience. A joint effort between service sector companies and civil society organizations, such as IYF, that have a solid understanding of youth and industry needs and a robust life skills program, would leverage the experience of working with young people in local markets to provide soft skills training courses that meet the needs of this dual audience. Partners could collectively assess how relevant the blended learning model is for diverse groups of young people and how much adaptation is necessary to ensure positive outcomes. Finally, the partnership could work together to make the business case for soft skills training through a ROI analysis that looks at recruitment costs, turnover, productivity, and advancement.

WORKS CITED

Accenture (2010) Accenture Learning BPO Services Brochure. Published by Accenture. Web. *http://www.accenture.com/ SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/257Accenture_Learning_BPO_Services_brochure.pdf*, accessed 1/09/2013.

Adams, Jean (2010). A Four-Level Model for Integrating Work and e-learning to Develop Soft Skills and Improve Job Performance. *The IUP Journal of Soft Skills, Vol. IV No. 4*, pp. 48-68.

American Society of Training and Development (ASTD): *State of the Industry, 2011—ASTD's Annual Review of Workplace Learning and Development Data*. Published by ASTD. Web. *http://wed.siu.edu/public1/courses/469/eTopics/191101_State_of_the_Industry_Report_ ASTD_Research.pdf*, accessed 1/10/2013.

Bersin, John (2012). Corporate E-learning Market Gets a Jolt as Online Universities Grow. *Forbes online*, 9/15/2012. *http://www.forbes.com/ sites/joshbersin/2012/09/15/corporate-e-learning-market-gets-a-jolt-as-moocs-grow*, accessed 1/15/2013.

Bush, Christopher E. (2012). News & Pub—The Case for Soft Skills Training. Monarchmedia website, Spring 2012; *http://www.monarchme-dia.com/enewsletter_2012-2/case-for-soft-skills.html* accessed 12/30/2012.

Chapman, Brian (2012). *How Long Does It Take to Create Learning?* (Research Study). Published by Chapman Alliance LL.C. *www.chapmanalliance.com*

Corporate Training & Development Advisor (2006), Vol. 11 No. 12, p. 1-5, and (2007), Vol. 12 No. 7, p. 1-5; front covers.

Curran, Mary (2010). Not-so-soft-skills. *Adults Learning, Vol. 21 No. 5*, pp. 30-31.

Gowland-Mwan, John, Oywaya Nkurumwa, Agnes and Stephen Wambugu Maina (2010). Building Jus-Kali Operators' capacity in Soft Skills For Faster Economic Development. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century, Vol. 25*, pp. 43-57.

Hopp, Armin (2012). Soft Steps Towards Digital Learning. *Training Journal, January*, pp. 51-54.

Jones, Chris (2012). The Great Skills Debate—Opinion. *Training Journal, September*, pp. 8-9.

Kalman, Frank (2012). Leverage Monitoring to Teach Entry-Level Workers Soft Skills. Clomedia website, 6/15/2012; *http://clomedia.com/ articles/view/leverage-mentoring-to-teach-entry-level-workers-soft-skills/1*, accessed on 12/30/2012.

Leigh, Wilhelmina, Lee, Deitra and Melinda A. Lindquist (1999). *Soft Skills Training: An Annotated Guide to Selected Programs*. Published by Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Matthews, Paul (2011). Can You Learn Soft Skills From E-learning? *Training Journal, December*, pp. 34-37.

Marsh, Garry (2012). Soft Skills and the Future. *Training Journal, February*, pp. 39-41.

Marshall, Francis (2012). Time to Firm up Those Soft Skills. Training Journal, December, pp. 55-59.

McMurtrey, Mark E., Downey James P., Zeltmann, Steven M. & William H. Friedman (2008). Critical Skills Sets of Entry-Level IT Professionals: An Empirical Examination of Perceptions from Field Personnel, *Journal of Information Technology Education, Vol. 7*, pp. 101-120.

Nickson, Dennis, Warhurst, Chris, Commander, Johanna, Scott A Hurrell, and Anne Marie Cullen (2012). Soft skills and employability: Evidence from UK retail. *Economic and Industrial Democracy, Vol. 33*, pp. 65-84.

OECD (2012). *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Skills Strategy*. OECD Publishing. Web (read-only). *http://www. keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/better-skills-better-jobs-better-lives_9789264177338-en*, accessed on 12/31/2012.

Platt, Gary (2008). The Hard Facts About soft skills Measurement. *Training Journal, August*, pp. 53-56.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers Saratoga (2012). *Key Trends in Human Capital 2012. A Global Perspective*. PriceWaterhouseCoopers. *www.pwc.com/ hrs*, accessed 11/30/2012.

Rao, M.S. (2012). Myths and Truths About Soft Skills. *T+D, May*, pp. 48-51.

Remer, Krista and Jennifer Wilson (2010). Taking a Hard Line on Soft Skills. *Accounting Today, Feb. 15- March 14*, p. 30.

Roberts, Bill (2008). Hard Facts About Soft Skills E-learning. *HR Magazine, January*, pp. 76-78.

Robles, Marcel M. (2012). Executive Perception of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly, Vol. 75 No. 4*, pp. 453-465.

Sail, Rahim and Khadijah Alavi (2010). Social Skills and Social Values Training for Future K-workers. *Journal of European Industrial Training, Vol. 34 No. 3*, pp. 226-258.

Schulz, Bernd (2008). The Importance of Soft Skills: Education Beyond Academic Knowledge. *NAWA: Journal of Communication, June*, pp. 146-154.

Seedat, Salma (2013). International Youth Foundation's Feasibility Study. Unpublished.

Sissons, Paul (2012). *Lost in Transition—The Changing Labour Market and Young People Not In Employment, Education or Training*. Published by Work Foundation.

Society for Human Resource Management (2011). *SHRM Workforce Forecast—The Top Workforce Trends According to HR Professionals*. SHRM.

Society for Human Resource Management India (2012). *Best Workplaces 2012—Case Studies on HR Best Practices*. SHRM India.

T+D Editorial Team (2011). In Practice—Interview with Ronnie E. Kramer & Tim Hill—Soft Skills: A Case for Higher Education and Workplace Training, *T+D, November*, p. 16.

Weber, Melvin R., Crawford, Alleah, and Don Dennison (2012). North Carolina Human Resource Professionals' Perceptions of Soft Skill Competencies. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism, Vol. 11 No. 3*, pp. 225-238.

Simba Information Report (2009). *Corporate Training 2009: Focus and Analysis—Report Information; August 1 2009. http://www.market-research.com/Simba-Information-Reports-v3481/Corporate-Training-Forecast-2027392/*, accessed 1/4/2013.

SSI Investment II (2011). Press release: SSI Investments II Limited Announces SkillSoft Acquisition of Element K Business from NIIT; 10/14/2011. *http://www.skillsoft.com/about/press_room/press_releases/October_14_11_Acquisition.asp*; accessed 1/10/2013.

END NOTES

1. Jones (2012); see also Tom Hill, president of professional education at Blackboard Inc. in a 2011 interview with T+D magazine.

2. See Wilhelmina Leigh, Deitra H. Lee, and Melinda A. Lindquist (1999): Soft skills "are the nontechnical skills, abilities and traits that workers need to function in a specific employment environment"; or Robles (2012) soft skills are "made up of the combination of interpersonal (people) skills and personal (career) attributes". Rao (2012) adds that "hard skills are technical competencies and domain knowledge, while soft skills are a combination of people skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and emotional intelligence."

3. Accenture (2012) *Turning the Tide: How Europe Can Rebuild Skills and Generate Growth*. "Eighty six percent of European employers have cut or frozen spending on skills and training in the last year despite a continued concern over skills shortages *http://clomedia.com/articles/ view/study-majority-of-european-employers-cut-skills-and-training-investments* accessed 12/30/2012. ASTD (2012) *State of the Industry 2011*, p. 10-11. "ASTD estimates that U.S. organizations spent about $171.5 billion on employee learning and development in 2012. This figure is significantly lower that pre-recession."

4. Sail & Alavi (2009) demonstrate the need to "train the trainers" to enhance apprentices' employability skills in Malaysia; Gowland-Mwan, Oywaya Nkurumwa & Wambugu Maina (2010) show that improving soft skills of Kenyan micro and small service and agricultural enter-prises in the informal sector help to meet government development targets.

5. Accenture (2010); PwC (2012).

6. Robles (2012).

7. Klaus (2010)

8. Nickson, Warhust, Commander, Hurrell & Cullen (2012).

9. To come to these results, various skills listings from the industry (National Retail Foundation; BMW-India entry-level soft skills require-ments; Walmart-hourly paid entry-level position's description; Ernst & Young & You Model; JobStart 101 whose content was created for College Students by Accenture); IYF's Passport to Success; and from the literature (Hansen&Hansen (2012); Marsh (2012); Robles (2012); McMurtrey (2008)) were compiled in a spreadsheet, and organized in generic, for College students and for lower-skilled entry-level employees. Rankings were then computed and each skill was given a score –the lesser the score, the higher the skill's relevance.

10. This list is based on the rather concise list of the National Retail Foundation; BMW-India entry-level soft skills requirements; Walmart-hourly paid entry-level position's description; Ernst & Young & You Model; JobStart 101 as well as Hansen&Hansen (2012); Marsh (2012); Robles (2012); McMurtrey (2008). IYF Passport to Success's curriculum in professional abilities is longer.

11. SHRM India (2012).

12. Walmart defines the "ability to get results" as "showing care and concern when serving customers and other colleagues, asking questions in order to understand and meet their needs, using policies and information in order to exceed their expectations, and also finding and using the right resources (people, products, tools) at the right time in order to resolve their requests."

13. Marsh (2012) lists "Understanding and managing diversity" as the first soft skill "that will be the most important to businesses in the future".

14. Curran (2010).

15. See for instance Adams (2010); Bush (2012); Hansen & Hansen (2012); Robles (2012); Weber, Crawford & Dennison (2012).

16. SHRM (2012)

17. Jones (2012).

18. Seedat (2013)

19. In an interview with IYF, Accenture, for instance, insisted that such skills can be "taught" to fill the gap. See also Marshall (2011); Rao (2012); Hansen & Hansen (2012); Robles (2012). Rao asserts that soft skills "can be acquired through observation, reading, teaching, training, experience, practice, and from other sources".

20. Marshall (2011).

21. ASTD (2011).

22. Adams (2010).

23. Gary (2008); Adams (2010); CIPD (2011); Marshall (2011) and Bush (2012): "The key is determining the desired outcomes for soft skills trainings first, and then selecting both the best ways to measure those outcomes and the appropriate tools and methods to collect and track those metrics. Whether you're providing soft skills training completely online or in a blended learning situation, e-learning technologies can play a central role in outcome measurement and tracking." (Bush, 2012), from: Monarchmedia website.

24. PwC (2012).

25. ASTD (2011).

26. SkillSoft Ltd, formerly SkillSoft PLC, leader in e-learning and soft-skills, acquired among others Element K, another training leader, for $110 Mio cash, in 2011, and Mindleaders, whose catalog had over 4000 courses, in 2012.

27. Bersin (2012), web.

28. ASTD (2011), p. 12. Citing the results of one 2010-2011 survey, Hopp notes that those new tools will be introduced by at least 25 per cent of multinational companies in the coming years; see Hopp (2012).

29. CIPD (2011).

30. Robert (2008); Marshall (2011); ASTD (2011).

31. ASTD (2011).

32. This was confirmed by Walmart in interview with IYF. Various other sources point out to this argument: "To attract the younger generation, we need to make learning fun, interesting and easy, and one way to do that is through technology" said Jennie Carlson, executive VP and director of HR for U.S. Bancorp in 2008 (as cited by Roberts (2008)) or "From Day One, we are provided soft-skills training opportunities that align with the particular phase of our career." (Van Pelt, a Gen-Y accountant praising the soft-skills training she receives at her firm, as cited by Remer & Wilson (2010)).

33. Roberts (2008).

34. Adams (2010); Ash (2011).

35. Chapman (2010). This 2010 research study ran by Chapman Alliance sought to determine the cost of creating learning; for that purpose 249 companies, representing 3,947 learning development professionals who have created content consumed by 19,875,946 learners, were surveyed.

36. Matthews (2011); Hilton in an interview with IYF referring to specific guest-contact situations better taught face-to-face.

37. Adams (2010) refers to this major issue as the "e-learning mismatch problem". According to her, the use of first generation e-learning—characterized as being mostly "technology driven, organized, and instructor-in-control, and relying on memorization"—is best suitable for hard skills. Soft skills training should be based on second generation e-learning tools which are, by contrast, "pedagogy driven, self-organizing, learner-in-control, self-assessment and practice; engagement through provocation and ideas".

38. Marshall (2011); Kalman (2012).

39. See for instance, Roberts (2008) reporting on Delaware North Companies Inc.'s training program; this hospitality and food services company based in Buffalo, N.Y., with 4.000 employees worldwide developed for its managers' soft-skills training a blended solution based on "self-paced interactive training via the web, followed by virtual classes" and "face-to-face meetings and group projects."

40. Marshall (2011).

41. Marshall (2011); Matthews (2011).

42. Both Ash and Marshall (2011) insist upon the "power of video training" "for soft skills such as customer service, communication and leadership". Furthermore "game-like simulations and 3-D worlds" "have the potential for teaching soft skills" (Roberts (2011)), are "fun" and interactive (Marshall (2011)).

43. See Adams (2010), Kalman (2012) and also Ronnie E. Kramer president of educational training and consulting firm Communication Dynamics Inc., in an interview with T+D magazine in November 2011.

44. Adams (2010).