

# Hard Skills Vs. Soft Skills: Examples And Definitions

## **Hard skills vs. soft skills isn't an either/or proposition: it's a both/and package**

When considering new hires, many companies look first to see if that employee has the practical knowledge to do the job. After all, you wouldn't hire a master gardener to fight fires in high-rise buildings, would you? However, while the hard skills are important, savvy companies know that excellent employees have another skillset that may be harder to cultivate: soft skills. What's the difference between the two? Turns out, hard skills vs soft skills isn't an either/or proposition. It's a both/and package worth cultivating in potential and long-term employees alike. Here's your guide to these two skillsets.

## **Hard skills vs. soft skills: An introduction**

Before you can write a job description or design a learning program, it's crucial to thoroughly understand the difference between hard skills and soft skills. How can you train or hire for something that is only a vague concept?

Fortunately, the difference between hard skills and soft skills is pretty clear. One is easy to measure and define, while the other is a bit harder to pin down. Hard skills are those talents and abilities that can be measured. They are usually specific to a particular job, and they can be learned through schooling or on-the-job-training. Soft skills are less defined skills that often apply not only to one specific job but are universal.

Think of hard skills as those you list on a resumé or the areas in which you hold certifications. Soft skills are those that help you build longer-lasting coworker and customer relationships. The importance of hard skills vs. soft skills should not be underestimated.

## **What are soft skills?**

Soft skills are skills and abilities that are much harder to measure and a bit fuzzier to define. These are interpersonal skills that help people get along with each other and collaborate. Challenging to train explicitly, soft skills include things like character, ability to work on a team, and overall understanding of and participation in your company culture.

Employees just entering the workforce or transitioning to a new career may struggle with soft skills, especially as they relate to fellow employees.

## **What are examples of soft skills?**

Reviewing different examples of soft skills can help you better understand this concept. LinkedIn looked at the five most in-demand soft skills of 2020 and came up with this list generated by recruiters and those in HR:

- Creativity
- Persuasion
- Collaboration
- Adaptability
- Emotional intelligence

Of these skills, emotional intelligence is arguably the hardest to teach. This includes a person's ability to empathize with others, regulate their own behavior, and develop self-awareness. Emotional intelligence also indicates a level of intrinsic motivation that contributes to a strong work ethic.

Other examples of soft skills include:

- Communication
- Listening
- Punctuality
- Organization
- Teamwork
- Ability to "read a room"
- Flexibility
- Patience
- Time management
- Multitasking
- Attention to detail
- Responsibility
- Strategic thinking
- Problem solving
- Good decision making
- Conflict resolution
- Innovation
- Social skills
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity

Some recruiters or HR personnel might define these vaguely as "people skills."

## **Why are soft skills important to train for?**

Developing soft skills matters. A Carnegie Mellon Foundation study found that 75% of long-term job success depends on the level of soft skills employees had. Another LinkedIn study found that 57% of employers value soft skills more than hard skills when making new hires.

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Put simply, you can be a certified expert in your field, but that won't matter much if you just can't work with your fellow employees.



## What are hard skills?

Hard skills are much easier to quantify and measure. These are things that employees are specifically trained for, like a plumber who learns to fix a leaky faucet or a nurse learning to draw blood.

Through specific instruction and trial-and-error, hard skills form the backbone of the job.

## What are examples of hard skills?

Hard skills include things an employer can test for or measure, such as:

- Proficiency in a foreign language
- Sales
- Affiliate marketing
- Inventory control
- Surgical proficiency
- Business analysis
- Cloud computing
- Blockchain
- Proficiency in specific computer programming
- Coding
- Bookkeeping
- Cash flow management

The list of hard skills is as long as the number of different professions in the world.

For new employees with little practical experience or track record, these can be measured in terms of test scores and recent degrees or certifications.

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## **Why are hard skills important to train for?**

The importance of hard skills is that they provide the backbone of the services your business provides or the products it creates. You would not hire a heart surgeon without the hard skills to perform heart surgery, or someone to design a bridge who only had experience in retail. Hard skills training ensures that your employees are equipped to do good work in their field.

What's the best approach to this type of training? The answer to that depends on your employees and what skills they need. Starting with a training needs analysis can help target specific hard skills, which can then help you decide which approach will work best.

The goal is to offer hard skills training that is relevant, engaging, and supportive of the types of hard skills your employees need to do their job.

## **Blending hard skills and soft skills**

Truly, the best way to train employees is not to pit hard skills vs soft skills but to develop both in tandem. The good news is that many of the same tools used to train for hard skills can easily be modified to work on soft skills development.

This might be as simple as modifying training modules to be completed in teams, highlighting teambuilding and collaboration. You might also include time for reflection and refinement in each training session. This gives employees practice in analyzing what they did well and identifying their growing edges.