

Power Skills for Success

Executive Summary
Spring 2023

INTRODUCTION

Power skills are competencies such as communication, problem-solving, self-motivation, collaboration, and creativity. These critical aptitudes are also called “interpersonal skills,” and they are essential for professional success. Unlike hard skills, which involve specific and quantifiable

abilities that people learn through instruction to show *what* they know, power skills reflect *how* these abilities are performed.

Power skills enable individuals to engage with others effectively and demonstrate what they know professionally.

THE SURVEY

SCADask surveyed high school educators to understand what they know about power skills and which skills they believe to be most necessary for success in higher education and throughout their students’ future professional careers.

In total, 462 high school educators from 32 countries responded to the survey. Although most (81%) represented the U.S. and Canada, the sample also included educators from China, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico,

Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam. Of the respondents, 56% had more than 20 years of experience in education.

While 46% taught art or design, 26% taught electives like theater, robotics, religion, computer science, or art history. 23% supported other areas like life skills, college counseling, values education, or career guidance. The vast majority of educators worked with high school students; only five percent taught grades 6–8.



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INSIGHTS ON SKILLS

Initially, 59% of respondents reported being unfamiliar with the term power skills. However, when shown some examples of skills such as collaboration, work ethic, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, 73% of respondents said they believed student development of power skills was “very important.” Overall, respondents rated communication as the power skill with the most practical, applicable uses (23%).

Self-motivation was rated the most important power skill for success in higher education. However, 32% also indicated that self-motivation is the hardest to teach. In contrast, 28% asserted that strong work ethic was most important to professional success.

Communication and collaboration are two skills whose value fluctuated across the two domains. For success in higher education, only five percent of respondents stated that communication was the most important power skill. However, for professional success,

communication was given considerably more weight, with 18% ranking it as most important. Similarly, collaboration was ranked most important by just two percent of those surveyed; but for professional success, 11% rated it most important.

Adaptability scored the most consistently across the two domains, with 14% saying it was critical for success in higher education and 17% likewise declaring it critical for employment. This theme carries on beyond higher education and employment: 24% claimed adaptability is most important for lifelong success.

Finally, survey participants identified three skills that were not specifically addressed in the survey, but are believed to be crucial for both higher education and professional success: persistence, empathy, and critical thinking or problem-solving.

Educators from 32 countries define adaptability as the power skill that is most indispensable for lifelong success.

Top power skills in higher education and employment

Self-motivation

Self-motivation is the ability to take initiative and to act as a self-starter, without relying on external sources of motivation or direction. It was rated as the most important power skill for success in higher education.

Strong work ethic

Strong work ethic is to be dedicated, have the ability to stay focused and complete tasks on time. It was rated as the most important power skill for professional success.

Communication

Communication is the ability to craft clear, concise, and relevant messages for others to understand. It was rated as more important for professional success than for higher education.

Adaptability

Adaptability is the capacity to adjust to new conditions and environments. Consistent across both domains, adaptability was rated as the most important skill for lifelong success.

 HIGHER EDUCATION

 EMPLOYMENT

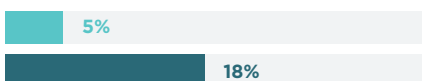
Self-motivation



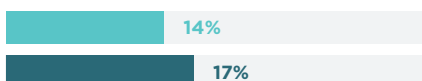
Strong work ethic



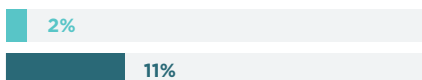
Communication



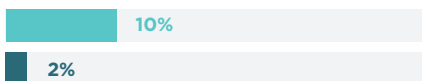
Adaptability



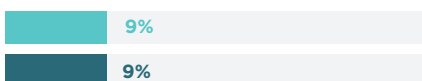
Collaboration



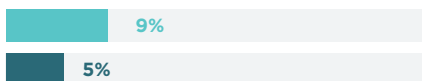
Time management



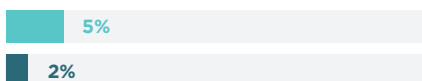
Emotional intelligence



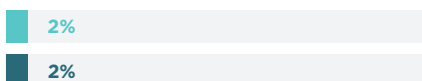
Creativity



Commitment



Organization



SUMMARY

The data revealed key findings that merit further attention. Since self-motivation was given a high rating as well as singled out as difficult to teach, future research might investigate whether self-motivation can be taught or encouraged, and if so, how. Case studies analyzing organizations undertaking this work would provide valuable context for further research.

Adaptability was given moderately high scores by respondents across both higher education and professional success. Similarly, communication was rated as the most applicable, practical power skill across all domains. Therefore, institutions that can teach these critical skills well would have high value to social and professional organizations.

Survey respondents also asserted that, although communication and collaboration are not necessarily central to higher education success, their importance to professional success increases significantly after college.

Therefore, it stands to reason that higher education institutions that support the development of these power skills benefit both their graduates and their prospective employers—and further, that high schools would serve students well by laying the groundwork for the acquisition of these skills.

Future research might evaluate what type of coursework and support systems aid the development of skills like communication and collaboration in college students. Similarly, researchers could survey educators to better understand which universities do this work well.

SCADask is an applied research unit of the Savannah College of Art and Design that generates timely research at the intersection of commerce, creativity, and culture. *To learn more, or to partner with SCADask, contact research@scad.edu.*

Educational institutions that support the development of power skills can prepare individuals for lifelong success.
