

3-1994

Kalamazoo County Education for Employment Outcomes Taskforce Presents Workplace Know-How Skills for Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties

Kevin M. Hollenbeck

W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, hollenbeck@upjohn.org

Citation

Hollenbeck, Kevin. 1994. "Kalamazoo County Education for Employment Outcomes Taskforce Presents Workplace Know-How Skills for Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties." Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

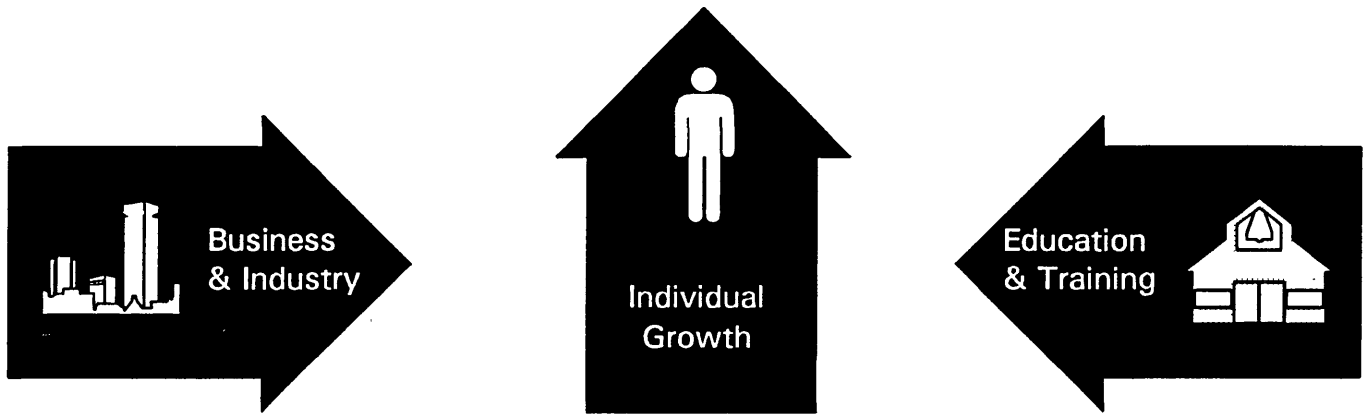
<https://research.upjohn.org/reports/14>

This title is brought to you by the Upjohn Institute. For more information, please contact repository@upjohn.org.

**Kalamazoo County
Education For Employment
Outcomes Taskforce**

presents

**Workplace Know-How Skills
for Kalamazoo & St. Joseph Counties**



**In the Interest of Creating
A Highly Effective
Workforce**

**By
Kevin Hollenbeck
March 1994**

**EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT
OUTCOME TASK FORCE**

1993-1994 MEMBERSHIP

Craig Schreuder, Chair
Deputy Director-JTPA
W. E. Upjohn Institute
for Employment Research

Sandy Burger
Divisional Human Resources Manager
The Upjohn Company

Irv Cumming
Assistant Superintendent, Vocational
Education
Kalamazoo Valley ISD

Roubert Doud
Vice President
Bronson Institute for Health Education

George Erickcek
Senior Regional Analyst
W. E. Upjohn Institute
for Employment Research

Dennis Hart
District Manager
Michigan Rehabilitation Services

Ted Hartridge
Vice President
Kalamazoo Plastics Company

Kevin Hollenbeck
Senior Economist
W. E. Upjohn Institute
for Employment Research

Jack Mann
Director, Center for Business Services
Glen Oaks Community College

Floyd McKinney
Associate Dean, College of Education
Western Michigan University

Crystal Richman
Assistant Director, School of Nursing
Bronson Methodist Hospital

Tom Rueber
Case Manager/Instructor
Youth Opportunities Unlimited

Martha Schinderle
Employment Manager
Bronson Healthcare Group

Bernie Stankewicz
Assistant Superintendent
St. Joseph County ISD

Tom Topham
EFE Workforce Entry Coordinator
Comstock Public Schools

Craig Misner
Superintendent
Parchment School District

Kelli Sweet
Coordination of Social Studies & Career
Education
Kalamazoo Public Schools

Denise Duquette
Kalamazoo Literary Council

FOREWORD

About the Task Force . . .

Early in 1993, a coalition of local community organizations was formed to accomplish a common goal—assessment of employer needs for quality workers in the Kalamazoo and St. Joseph County labor market. Operating under the umbrella of the Kalamazoo County Education for Employment (EFE) Consortium, the group named itself the "EFE Outcomes Task Force."

The purpose and goals of the Task Force are summed up in its mission statement, which follows:

The mission of the Education for Employment Outcomes Task Force is to identify and communicate the workplace know-how skills expected by employers in the local labor market and to devise implementation strategies to help potential labor market entrants develop these skills through education and training.

This report documents a study conducted by the Task Force to accomplish one of its goals: identification of **workplace know-how skills**.

The members of the EFE Task Force for 1993-94 are listed on the inside front cover of this document.

About the Participating Employers . . .

The EFE Outcomes Task Force gratefully acknowledges the participation of the following employers in the survey and focus groups that the task force conducted:

Ms. Pat Adams
Stryker Center

Ms. Janet Berghorst
Kalamazoo College

Ms. Kathy Chapman
Standard Federal Bank

Mr. Dave Allen
Michigan Gas Co.

Ms. Joyce Berns
IBA Health & Life Assurance
Co.

Ms. Phyllis Cleveland
Kalamazoo Township Offices

Mr. Patrick Allkins
Western Temporary Services

Mr. Rob Bertrand
Bee Clean Bldg. Svcs

Ms. Ginny Colvin
Maple Hill Mall

Mr. Tony Appleyard
St. Joseph County

Ms. Helen Bogatchow
AAMCO Transmission Center

Ms. Suzanne Cook
TS Print Centers

Ms. Nancy Augustitus
Charles Services

Ms. Mary Buday
Business Insight

Ms. Lynn Cowart
Parchment Schools

Ms. Colleen Ball
Target Stores

Mr. David Davey
Goodwill Industries of
Southwestern Michigan

Mr. Phil Davis
Modern Shoe Repair, Inc.

Ms. Suzette Deaux
Sturgis-Young Civic Center

Ms. Cheryl Deboer
OneWay Products

Mr. Jim Devlin
Green Bay Packaging

Mr. Jack Devries
Burroughs

Mr. Rich Donia
Certified Auto Repair

Ms. Jean Doonan
City of Kalamazoo

Mr. Bob Driver
The Upjohn Company

Ms. Karen Duckworth
Kalamazoo Center for
Independent Living

Mr. Robert Duke
Galesburg-Augusta Community
Schools

Ms. Denise Duquette
Literacy Network of
Kalamazoo County

Ms. Sue Duvall
Community Nursing Home

Ms. Brenda Ely
Michigan Employment Security
Commission

Ms. Elyse Capps
Borgess Medical Center

Ms. Dorothy Endres
BlueCare Network

Ms. Sandra Fickenschler
Visiting Nurses Assoc. of
Southwestern Michigan

Mr. Dennis Frey
Goodwill Industries of
Southwestern Michigan

Mr. Richard Fulton
Cooper Township Offices

Ms. Sandra Gilman
A-1 Printing

Mr. Rich Glidden
Hardings Markets

Mr. Curtis Haan
H&H Painting Co.

Mr. Ted Hartridge
Kalamazoo Plastics Co.

Mr. William Haug
Schoolcraft Community
Schools

Mr. Dale Hein
Kalamazoo County Human
Services Department

Mr. Art Hoekstra
Kalamazoo Deacons'
Conference

Mr. Bobby Hopewell
Life EMS

Mr. Ryan Hunt
K-Mart

Ms. Judy Johnson
Kalamazoo Public Schools

Mr. Ron Cross
Alumilite Co.

Ms. Patty Jurgenson
Snelling Temporaries

Ms. Violet Kendall
Michigan Employment Security
Commission

Mr. Rick Kinas
County of Kalamazoo

Ms. Sandy Koss
Family Health Center of
Kalamazoo

Ms. Cheryllyn Lavergne
Portage Public Schools

Mr. Howard Lindberg
Walker Parking

Mr. John Mackenzie
Mackenzies' Bakery

Ms. Jean Maile
Hospice of Greater Kalamazoo

Mr. Bill Main
Landscape Forms

Ms. Ann Marie Bouchelle
Career Management
Employment Services

Ms. Tina Mattson
Meijer Inc.

Ms. June McLaughlin
Michigan Disposal Services

Mr. Duane Meulman
U.S. Postal Service

Mr. Tim Miller
The Upjohn Company

Ms. Lisa Minott
D&M Wrecking Co.

Ms. Susan Molenaar
United Nursing Service, Inc.

Mr. Robert Straits
W. E. Upjohn Institute

Mr. John Monday
Monday Temporaries

Mr. Scott Sweet
Redwood & Ross

Ms. Jill Moreland
Arch Workshop Inc.

Mr. Thomas Thomasma
Telemark Corp.

Mr. Jack Neal
ARVCO Container Corp.

Ms. Sherri Tony
First of America

Ms. Lyda Nickell
E.L. Nickell Co.

Mr. Jim Turske
GTE North

Ms. Rosalie Novara
McKercher Rehab Center

Ms. Pam Van Dongen
Little Caesars Pizza

Mr. Bob Overlander
Don's Card Hut

Mr. Rick VanLaan
Three Rivers Hospital

Ms. Connie Schlaak
Preferred Carlson

Mr. Jim Weber
Weber Specialties Co.

Mr. Bob Schultz
Schultz Mfg. Co.

Ms. Mary Wiersema
KVISD

Ms. Judy Scott
Arboridge Care Center, Inc.

Mr. Pat White
Pavilion Township

Mr. Mike Seelye
Don Seelye Ford

Mr. Michael Williams
Douglas Community Center

Mr. Tim Seifert
Ronnigan-Petter

Mr. Dave Wright
Creative Wonders, Inc.

Ms. Jennifer Shoub
YWCA

Mr. Patrick Yoder
St. Joseph County Courthouse

Ms. Carol Shupe
Ship-Pac, Inc.

Mr. Grant Young
Special Lite Inc.

Mr. Daryl Sieplinga
YMCA

Ms. Kathy Zito
Richard Allen Medical
Industries, Inc.

Mr. Skip Sisson
Sturgis Public Schools

Ms. Edie Smith
Geiger Plastics

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| Foreword | iii |
| 1. Description of Study | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Background | 2 |
| Basic Approach | 12 |
| 2. Analyses of Workplace Know-How Skills Identified Individually by Employers . . . | 17 |
| A Taxonomy of Workplace Know-How Skills | 17 |
| Analysis | 21 |
| Caveats | 29 |
| 3. Analyses of the Focus Groups' Compilations of Workplace Know-How Skills . . . | 30 |
| 4. Analyses of the Focus Groups' Consensuses about the Most Important Workplace Know-How Skills | 31 |
| 5. Analyses Across Groups of the Most Important Workplace Know-How Skills . . . | 35 |
| 6. Measurement and Standards for Workplace Know-How Skills | 39 |
| Assessment and Measurement | 39 |
| Standards | 41 |
| 7. Recommendations and Future Actions | 44 |
| APPENDIX A - Workplace Know-How Skill Individual Survey | 47 |
| APPENDIX B - Taxonomy of Workplace Know-How Skills | 54 |
| APPENDIX C - Focus Group Consensus Lists | 65 |
| REFERENCES | 72 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | | |
|---------|--|----|
| Table 1 | A Sampling of Critical Student/Worker Outcomes Identified in State Reports | 4 |
| Table 2 | Employability Skills Profile | 7 |
| Table 3 | Most Critical Skills from Michigan Employability Skills Employers' Survey | 9 |
| Table 4 | List Ten Entry Level Skills, Behaviors and/or Competencies Employers Are Looking for in Potential Employees | 10 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(Continued)

| | | <u>Page</u> |
|----------|--|-------------|
| Table 5 | Number of Individuals Who Were Invited and Who Attended Focus Groups, By County and By Sector | 14 |
| Table 6 | Characteristics of Focus Group Participants | 15 |
| Table 7 | Skills Most Often Listed by Individuals | 22 |
| Table 8 | Workplace Know-How Skills Listed Disproportionately Often, By Characteristics of Focus Group Participants | 24 |
| Table 9 | Workplace Know-How Skills Listed Disproportionately Often, By Industrial Sector and Disproportionately Less Often | 27 |
| Table 10 | Workplace Know-How Skills That Were Listed on Eight or More Focus Groups' Compilations | 32 |
| Table 11 | Skills Comprising Focus Groups' Consensus Lists | 33 |
| Table 12 | Skills That Were on At Least Two Consensus Lists and Received At Least Ten Votes | 36 |
| Table 13 | Cross-Comparison of Skills Listed in Table 12 With Other Studies | 37 |
| Table 14 | Workplace Know-How Skills, Measures, and Standards | 42 |

THE WORKPLACE KNOW-HOW SKILLS NEEDED TO SUCCEED IN THE KALAMAZOO AND ST. JOSEPH COUNTY LABOR MARKET

1. Description of Study

Introduction

One of the goals of the Education for Employment (EFE) Outcomes Task Force is to identify the **workplace know-how skills** expected of entrants to the local labor market. The viewpoint of the Task Force is that a worker's productivity depends on the constellation of skills and knowledge that the worker possesses as well as on the characteristics of the workplace and duties that constitute the individual's job. Each worker is different and possesses different levels and types of skills and abilities. Skills and knowledge may be arrayed along a spectrum: on one end are very specific technical skills such as operating a particular piece of equipment at a particular location and at the other end are specific facts such as the name of the Emperor of Rome in 100 A.D.

Workplace know-how skills lay in the middle of this spectrum. They are neither specific technical skills nor specific factual knowledge. In fact, they are prerequisite to both. To accomplish technical proficiency or to achieve particular academic standards requires competency in basic reading, basic communication, basic mathematics, attendance and punctuality habits, problem solving, time management and organization skills, and so forth. These are workplace know-how skills.¹

The EFE Outcomes Task Force has conducted a study to identify the workplace know-how skills that employers in Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties feel are necessary for labor market entrants to possess in order to succeed. The study defines labor market entrants

to be students leaving formal educational programs such as a public school system or a post-secondary institution; individuals trained in a "second chance" program (e.g., a Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) program, a vocational rehabilitation program, or a welfare-to-work program); or any other adults/young people looking to become gainfully employed.

Background

Several studies have been conducted at the national and state level that examine generic workplace skills. The (U.S. Department of Labor) Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) was charged with examining the demands of the workplace and assessing whether young people are capable of meeting those demands as well as advising the Secretary of Labor on the level of skills required to enter employment. Members of the EFE Outcomes Task Force reviewed many of the national studies and decided to use findings from the SCANS commission as a general basis for the task force's deliberations. (Indeed, the task force adopted the phrase "workplace know-how skills" from SCANS). In particular, SCANS suggests that "workplace know-how" is made up of five competencies and a three-part foundation of skills and personal qualities:

- o **Foundation**

Basic Skills: reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking and listening

Thinking Skills: thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning

Personal Qualities: individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity

- o **Workplace Competencies**

Resources: allocating time, materials, space, and staff

Interpersonal

Skills: working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds

Information: acquiring and evaluating data, organizing and maintaining files, interpreting and communicating and using computers to process information

Systems: understanding social, organizational, and technological systems, monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems

Technology: selecting equipment and tools, applying technology to specific tasks and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies

Other national studies include *Investing in People: A Strategy to Address America's Workforce Crisis*, by the Commission on Workforce Quality and Labor Market Efficiency; *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!*, by the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce; and *Work Place Basics: The Skills Employers Want*, by Carnevale et al. (1992).²

Several states have commissioned studies of workplace skills and moved toward the implementation of programs to include these skills in school curricula. Table 1 (taken from Weber, 1992) provides a representative list of such studies. Although not listed in table 1, Michigan may be considered at the forefront of state initiatives. Governor Blanchard commissioned an Employability Skills Task Force in 1987 that developed the Employability Skills Profile displayed in table 2. In its first months of operation, the Task Force decided that the literature and employer feedback suggested that employability skills could be clustered into Academic Skills, Personal Management Skills, and Teamwork Skills.

Table 1

**A SAMPLING OF CRITICAL STUDENT/WORKER OUTCOMES
IDENTIFIED IN STATE REPORTS**

| SOURCE | STUDENT/WORKER SKILLS IDENTIFIED |
|---|---|
| California - <i>Employability Competency System</i> (Eguez, Huie, and Rickard 1991) | Employability Competencies: reading, math, communication, and critical thinking measured via tests composed of items that address these skills within functional (occupational and "real life") contexts |
| Idaho - <i>Preparing for Idaho's Future</i> (Berman et al. 1991) | <p><u>New Basics</u>: reading, writing, math, science, computing, communication, problem solving, accessing and using information, global awareness</p> <p><u>Can-Do Attitude</u>: high self-esteem, taking responsibility, persistence, high expectations</p> <p><u>Collaborative Ability</u>: teamwork, negotiation skills, understanding democracy</p> <p><u>Adaptability</u>: toleration for change, generalists skills and attitudes, learning to learn</p> |
| Illinois - <i>Toward a World-Class Workforce</i> (Illinois Council on Vocational Education 1991) | <p><u>Business and Labor's Nine Basic Skills</u>: (1) reading, writing, and math skills; (2) communication skills, including listening and oral communication; (3) employability skills including work attitudes and responsibilities, and knowing how a business operates; (4) critical thinking, problem solving, decision making; (5) group and teamwork skills including interpersonal and social relations; (6) self-esteem, goal setting, and personal and career development; (7) keyboarding and computer literacy skills; (8) leadership skills and improving organizational effectiveness; and (9) basic concepts of technology systems</p> |
| Indiana - <i>Executive Report of the Jobs for Indiana's Future</i> (Jobs for the Future 1989) | <p>"New Basic Skills" (which parallel those posited by Carnevale, Gainer, and Meltzer 1988): Learning to learn; competence in reading, writing, and computation; communication—oral and listening skills; problem-solving, creative thinking, personal management skills—self-esteem, motivation/goal setting, employability/career development; group effectiveness skills—interpersonal, teamwork, negotiation; influence skills—organizational effectiveness and leadership</p> |
| Missouri - <i>Jobs without People</i> (Governor's Advisory Council on Literacy 1989) | <p><u>Basic Skills</u>: reading, writing, counting</p> <p><u>Life Skills</u>: understanding signs, labels, instructions, and directions</p> <p><u>Job Skills</u>: critical thinking, decision making, adapting to change</p> |

Table 1
(Continued)

| SOURCE | STUDENT/WORKER SKILLS IDENTIFIED |
|--|--|
| <p>North Dakota - <i>Maximizing Potential: For High-Quality Participation in the New Work Force</i> (North Dakota Council on Vocational Education 1989)</p> | <p><u>Applied Academic Skills</u>: reading, writing, and computation skills that reflect their actual use on the job and/or in situations that simulate specific job tasks</p> <p><u>Work Force Basic Skills</u>: learning to learn, listening, speaking, problem solving, creative thinking, personal and career development, self-esteem, goal setting/motivation, teamwork, interpersonal skills, negotiation, leadership, and organizational effectiveness</p> <p><u>Basic Living Skills</u>: individual, child, and family development; consumer and resource management</p> <p><u>Technological Literacy</u>: technological awareness and keyboarding and computer use skills</p> |
| <p>Ohio - <i>Ohio's Future at Work</i> (Ohio Department of Education 1990)</p> | <p><u>Occupational Skills</u>: those skills involving the technical abilities to perform required workplace tasks, including problem solving and critical thinking</p> <p><u>Academic Skills</u>: those core competencies (including science, mathematics and English/language) necessary to prepare for and secure a career, facilitate lifelong learning, and ensure success in a global economy</p> <p><u>Employability Skills</u>: those capacities, attitudes, and values required to enter, compete, and remain successfully in the work force including self-employment. These skills include, but are not limited to, decision making, critical thinking, teamwork, following directions, willingness to work; and job search, application and self-marketing skills</p> |
| <p>Oregon - <i>Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century</i> (Oregon Department of Education 1991)</p> | <p><u>Student Skills</u>: reading, writing, reasoning, information retrieval, problem solving, listening, speaking, critical thinking, working effectively alone and as part of a group, and knowledge of social studies, foreign language, humanities, the visual, performing, and literary arts, advanced mathematics and sciences</p> |

Table 1
(Continued)

| SOURCE | STUDENT/WORKER SKILLS IDENTIFIED |
|---|--|
| <p>Pennsylvania - A State Prepared: <i>Developing Pennsylvania's Work Force</i> (Pennsylvania Economic Development Partnership 1991)</p> | <p><u>Basic Skills:</u> read and comprehend policy and instructional manuals as well as technical materials; write sentences with correct form, spelling, punctuation, and grammar; recognize and correct errors in written materials; add, subtract, multiply, and divide; work with fractions and decimals; explain ideas clearly; and ask and answer questions and follow verbal directions</p> <p><u>Attitudes:</u> learn, be flexible, and respond quickly to change; learn and perform multiple tasks; analyze and choose from a variety of options, identify problems, recognize alternatives, and select the most appropriate alternative; operate independently after an appropriate training period; work cooperatively with people of different personalities, race, sex, across different authority levels, and organizational divisions; and be punctual, dependable, and show pride and enthusiasm in performing well</p> <p><u>Technical Skills:</u> ability to measure; type with accuracy and speed; work accurately with computers and computerized programs</p> |
| <p>NOTE: No claim is made regarding the "representativeness" of the set of reports listed in Table 2. They are meant to be only illustrative.</p> | |

Source: Weber 1992, Table 2.

Table 2

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS PROFILE

Three Categories of skills will be required of Michigan workers in the future:

| <p>ACADEMIC SKILLS (Those skills which provide the basic foundation necessary for a person to get, keep, and progress on a job)</p> | <p>PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS (Those skills related to developing the attitudes and behaviors required to get, keep, and progress on a job)</p> | <p>TEAMWORK SKILLS (Those skills needed to work with others on a job)</p> |
|---|--|---|
| <p><u>MICHIGAN EMPLOYERS WANT A PERSON WHO CAN:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand spoken language and speak in the language in which business is conducted. ● Read written materials (including graphs, charts and displays). ● Write in the language in which business is conducted. ● Understand and solve problems involving basic arithmetic and use the results. ● Use the tools and equipment necessary to get a job done. ● Access and use specialized knowledge when necessary (e.g., the sciences or skilled trades) to get a job done. ● Think and act logically by using the steps of the Scientific Method (i.e., identify problems, collect information, form opinions and draw conclusions). | <p><u>MICHIGAN EMPLOYERS WANT A PERSON WHO CAN:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify personal job-related interests, strengths, options and opportunities. ● Demonstrate personal values and ethics in the workplace (e.g., honesty, fairness, and respect for others). ● Exercise a sense of responsibility. ● Demonstrate self control. ● Show pride in one's work. ● Be enthusiastic about the work to be done. ● Follow written or verbal directions. ● Learn new skills and ways of doing things. ● Identify and suggest new ideas for getting a job done. ● Be a leader or a follower depending upon what is necessary to get a job done. | <p><u>MICHIGAN EMPLOYERS WANT A PERSON WHO CAN:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify with the goals, norms, values, customs and culture of the group. ● Communicate with all members of a group. ● Show sensitivity to the thoughts and opinions of others in a group. ● Use a team approach to identify problems and devise solutions to get a job done. ● Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results. ● Function in changing work-settings and in changing groups. ● Determine when to be a leader or a follower depending upon what is necessary to get a job done. ● Show sensitivity to the needs to women and ethnic and racial minorities. ● Be loyal to a group. |

Source: Michigan Employability Skills Profile.

In 1989, the Michigan Employability Skills Task Force attempted to validate the profile they had developed through a large-scale survey of Michigan employers (see Mehrens, 1989). The approach that the survey took was to ask employers to rate the importance of 86 different skills, behaviors, or attitudes "that employers seek in people they hire for jobs—regardless of job level (e.g., entry vs. advanced) or type of job (e.g., technical vs. non-technical," (quotation taken directly from the survey form, with emphasis added.) These 86 skills were classified as being either academic, personal management, or teamwork skills and the scale that respondents used indicated that the skill was "critical," "highly needed (but not critical)," "somewhat needed (but not required)," or "not needed." The survey was mailed to 7,500 Michigan employers and was completed by about 2,750. Table 3 lists the 19 skills that were rated by the employers as being the most critical.

Whereas the Michigan Employability Task Force has been disbanded and another administration has taken the reins of state government, the Employability Skills Profile continues to influence state policy. Michigan Public Act 148 of 1992 requires high school students to develop achievement portfolios and the Michigan Department of Education has developed a guide for assessing the employability skills displayed in the portfolios that ties directly to the Employability Skills Profile. (Michigan State Board of Education 1993).

Several recent initiatives at the local level have also examined workplace employability skills. A symposium that brought together several dozen chief executive officers of Kalamazoo County businesses and several dozen individuals from educational organizations was held in March 1993. Table 4 provides a compilation of the results of an exercise done by the participants in the CEO Symposium. The businesspersons and

Table 3

**MOST CRITICAL SKILLS FROM MICHIGAN EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS
EMPLOYERS' SURVEY**

(Skills listed in rank-order)

| <u>Rank</u> | <u>Item</u> | <u>Area</u> | <u>Survey Item No.</u> |
|-------------|---|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Be free from substance abuse | Personal Management | 66 |
| 2 | Demonstrate honesty and integrity | Personal Management | 57 |
| 3 | Pay attention to the person speaking (listening skill) | Academic | 1 |
| 4 | Follow directions given verbally (listening skill) | Academic | 3 |
| 5 | Show respect for others | Personal Management | 54 |
| 6 | Show pride in one's work | Personal Management | 55 |
| 7 | Punctual and in attendance | Personal Management | 58 |
| 8 | Ask questions to clarify understanding (listening skill) | Academic | 2 |
| 9 | Show enthusiasm for work | Personal Management | 56 |
| 10 | Work productively with minimal supervision | Personal Management | 67 |
| 11 | Answer questions accurately (verbal) | Academic | 4 |
| 12 | Read simple instructions | Academic | 9 |
| 13 | Show initiative | Personal Management | 60 |
| 14 | Meet or exceed work requirements (quality) | Personal Management | 61 |
| 15 | Complete tasks under stress | Personal Management | 62 |
| 16 | Demonstrate self-control | Personal Management | 64 |
| 17 | Represent organization positively | Teamwork | 75 |
| 18 | Follow organizational rules, etc. | Teamwork | 76 |
| 19 | Cooperate with others | Teamwork | 84 |

Source: Mehrens (1989), tables 3a and 3b.

Table 4

**LIST TEN ENTRY LEVEL SKILLS, BEHAVIORS AND/OR COMPETENCIES
EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR IN POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES**

| Entry Level Skills | Behaviors | Competencies |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Critical thinking (technical reading, logic) Math computations (numbers and symbols) Statistics, probability and logic Keyboarding Reading for comprehension, information and analysis Statistical processing Writing Applied math Analytical skills Basic computer skills Problem solving/brainstorming Remedial math Transferability of skills Relevant technical skills Math, science and language skills Basic employability Skills (ethics, attendance, dedication, drug free)</p> | <p>Commitment to quality Sensitivity Creativity (expression thereof) Dependability Positive attitude (self esteem) Maintaining satisfying personal life Common sense Self discipline/direction (setting priorities) Creative producer Innovative thinker Discriminating consumer Interpersonal skills Team player (group learning) Work ethic (trustworthy and honest) Flexible and adaptable Ability to learn and change Desire to work Self-marketing (personal pride) Leadership (enterprising attitude) Agenda builder Motivated Work on own (initiative) Initiative Organization Sense of humor Work with diverse backgrounds Risk taker Respect for authority (understand law/rules and why they are there) Understanding the value of work Problem solving Self directed - personal mastery Open minded Focus on task at hand Integrity for standard</p> | <p>Communications (verbal and written) Speaking and listening skills Problem solving Follow written and/or verbal directions Decision making Learning to learn Plan for and embrace change for improvement Transfer knowledge between disciplines and people Global community awareness Understanding need to recognize value of customer Finances (how businesses make money) Measurement systems Behavior systems Organizational skills Time management Importance of setting and meeting goals and deadlines Self-directed learner Business awareness Cause and effect of actions Conflict resolution Future thinking Ethics-integrity Quality producer Sensitivity to cultural diversity Disagree in peace (conflict resolution) Group problem solving—next level Implement and integrate with all programs</p> |

Source: CEO Symposium.

educators were asked to list the ten entry-level skill, behaviors, and/or competencies that employers are looking for in potential employees. Note that no attempt was made to refine or set priorities among these skills.

In 1993, the Kalamazoo Chamber of Commerce and the Kalamazoo CEO Council facilitated the formation of a Quality Council. The mission of this council is "To create an environment which will allow Kalamazoo Valley organizations to achieve world class performance." Underneath the umbrella structure of the Quality Council are councils for seven broad economic sectors. Analysis of the planning documents for these seven (sub)-councils shows that all of them place some type of employability skill development as a high priority action item. (See Quality Council 1993).

In February 1992, a planning team for the Loy Norrix Knights of the Future project conducted an employer survey. The purposes of this survey were threefold: (1) to give information to the community about the process for educational change at Loy Norrix High School, (2) to find out what employers expect of high school graduates when they employ them, what skills and qualities are most important, and (3) to find out how many employers are involved in public education. With respect to the second purpose, the planning committee reports

Employers rated the importance of dependability, work ethic, ability to follow directions, oral communication and motivation the highest. The satisfaction level in all categories fell in the "fair" range. The difference between the importance level and satisfaction level was the greatest in the categories of dependability, work ethic, motivation and written communication. (Loy Norrix Milestone Team #1 1992, p. 1).

A final local initiative of note is the development of exit outcomes by the Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS), (Vision 2000, 1993). The process that KPS has followed in

developing these outcomes included considerable community input and the outcomes that were included in the draft materials include many workplace know-how skills.

Thus it can be seen that the EFE Outcomes Task Force had considerable material from which to build its study. Rather than to re-discover the findings from previous work, the Task Force decided that its major contribution would be to validate, for educational institutions and training programs, these findings and to set priorities among workplace know-how skills and standards that employers apply to these skills.

Basic Approach

The task force used a nominal group technique to identify the "most important" workplace know-how skills expected by employers. A dozen small-group meetings were convened between mid-November 1993 and mid-January 1994. Each meeting, attended by approximately 10-12 employers, focused on a particular sector of the local economy. This was important in order to see whether employers in different sectors of the economy were interested in different workplace know-how skills. Did retailers want skills that differ from skills desired by manufacturers, for instance? Did the health care industry value skills that are different from those most valued by public sector employers?

The sectors examined were as follows:

- o Retail
- o Services
- o Health
- o Nonprofit Organizations
- o Education

- o Small Manufacturing
- o Large Manufacturing
- o Government/Public Sector

Many of the employers who attended the focus groups were nominated by members of the EFE Outcomes Task Force. The members of the Task Force were asked for suggestions about individuals who might be in a position of hiring and/or evaluating workers' productivity and who were likely to be interested in participating in the groups. In addition, the process of identifying and inviting individuals cascaded to include many other employers. As members of the Task Force invited individuals to attend the focus groups, the individuals often recommended other employers who they felt might be interested in participating.

A total of 192 individuals were invited and a total of 103 participated (53.6%). The coverage by sector and by county (Kalamazoo or St. Joseph) is given in table 5. Note that attendance was particularly high for Government, Small Manufacturing, and Services; particularly low for Large Manufacturing and Education. As might be expected, given the distance, attendance rates were lower for St. Joseph County businesses for most sectors.

Table 6 provides summary information about the individuals who attended the focus groups. The employment sizes of the participants' organizations showed considerable variation. About one-third of the organizations employed fewer than 50 individuals and a little over one-quarter employed more than 250 individuals. The remaining organizations employed between 50 and 250 workers. This distribution differs from the size distribution of firms in the two counties. It underrepresents smaller employers and overrepresents the largest employing organizations.³

Table 5

**NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE INVITED AND WHO ATTENDED
FOCUS GROUPS, BY COUNTY AND BY SECTOR**

| Sector | Participants/ Invitees | Percentage Participated | Kalamazoo: Participants/ Invitees | St. Joseph: Participants/ Invitees |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Retail | 15 / 28 | 53.6% | 14 / 21 | 1 / 7 |
| Services | 26 / 39 | 66.7 | 21 / 33 | 5 / 6 |
| Health | 13 / 24 | 54.2 | 12 / 20 | 1 / 4 |
| Nonprofits | 11 / 24 | 45.8 | 10 / 21 | 1 / 3 |
| Education | 8 / 21 | 38.1 | 7 / 17 | 1 / 4 |
| Small Mfg. | 16 / 24 | 66.7 | 13 / 19 | 3 / 5 |
| Large Mfg. | 4 / 18 | 22.2 | 4 / 13 | 0 / 5 |
| Government | 10 / 14 | 71.4 | 7 / 9 | 3 / 5 |
| TOTAL | 103 / 192 | 53.6% | 88 / 153 (57.5%) | 15 / 39 (38.5%) |

Table 6

CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

| Characteristic | Number of Participants | Percentage of parts. |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Employment size | | |
| < 10 | 11 | 10.7% |
| 10 - 19 | 8 | 7.8 |
| 20 - 49 | 16 | 15.5 |
| 50 - 99 | 18 | 17.5 |
| 100 - 249 | 22 | 21.4 |
| 250 - 499 | 15 | 14.6 |
| 500 + | 12 | 11.7 |
| Not reported (NR) | 1 | 1.0 |
| Position in firm | | |
| Mgmt., exc. HRD | 58 | 56.3% |
| HRD mgr. or staff | 21 | 20.4 |
| Supervisor | 8 | 7.8 |
| Other | 11 | 10.7 |
| NR, mult. responses | 2 | 1.9 |
| Respons. for hires/yr. | | |
| 0 | 5 | 4.9% |
| 1 - 2 | 15 | 14.6 |
| 3 - 9 | 37 | 35.9 |
| 10 - 50 | 29 | 28.2 |
| 50 + | 15 | 14.6 |
| NR | 2 | 1.9 |
| Sex | | |
| Female | 49 | 47.6% |
| Male | 52 | 50.5 |
| NR | 2 | 1.9 |
| Race | | |
| African Amer. | 8 | 7.8% |
| Caucasian/White | 93 | 90.3 |
| Hispanic | 0 | 0.0 |
| Other: Asian | 1 | 1.0 |
| Age | | |
| < 25 | 0 | 0.0% |
| 25 - 34 | 19 | 18.4 |
| 35 - 44 | 37 | 35.9 |
| 45 - 54 | 31 | 30.1 |
| 55 - 64 | 10 | 9.7 |
| 65 + | 3 | 2.9 |
| NR | 3 | 2 |

More than half of the participants were owners or management staff; about one-fifth were Human Resource Department (HRD) managers or staffpersons; and the remainder were supervisors or other staff members. There was an equal split between men and women and approximately 9 percent of the participants identified themselves as members of a minority ethnicity (mostly African American). The age distribution of the participants showed that over two-thirds of them were between 35-54 and about one-fifth were in the 25-34 range.

The intent of the process that was followed in each meeting was to consider workplace know-how skills from a very broad perspective and to funnel the discussion to more specificity. First, the meeting participants worked alone to list all of the workplace know-how skills that they felt contributed to a worker's productivity in their organizations. A copy of the form that was used for this activity comprises appendix A. Next, the participants worked together to compile a "master list" of know-how skills for the group. After the group's compilation was completed, the participants prioritized the skills by voting. Consensus was then achieved by extracting the top "vote getters."

The analyses that are presented in this report will follow this sequencing. The next section of the report discusses the results of the individual listing of skills. Next, the "master lists" will be compared and contrasted across the groups. Next, the skills that received votes as being among the most important and the consensus lists of skills will be analyzed. Finally, analyses of the data across groups is presented. The final section of the paper indicates future directions that the Task Force intends to pursue given the major findings of this study.

2. Analyses of Workplace Know-How Skills Identified Individually by Employers

The first part of the focus group meeting involved having participants list individually all of the workplace know-how skills that are necessary for a worker to be productive in their respective organizations. This activity may be viewed as equivalent to giving employers a survey and having them identify, in an open-ended fashion, workplace know-how skills of importance to them. As might be expected, participants listed many, many different skills. All together, participants identified around 150 different skills.⁴ In order to analyze these skills, the author developed a taxonomy of workplace know-how skills. This taxonomy comprises appendix B. It was necessary to develop a taxonomy that differed from the SCANS report and its characterization of know-how skills because local employers identified many skills or characteristics that were not encompassed in SCANS.⁵

A Taxonomy of Workplace Know-How Skills

After examining the lists of skills that employers had completed, the author decided that they could be classified into 6 areas: basic academic skills, personal characteristics, task achievement competencies, organizational behaviors, interpersonal skills, and job search skills. The first set of skills--basic academic skills--comprise areas of cognition expected by employers. This set of skills includes the basic communication skills of reading, speaking, writing, and listening; basic mathematics such as arithmetic, measurement, the metric system, fractions, and decimals; basic fundamentals of business economics; computer literacy and facility with office equipment; mechanical aptitude and technical literacy; and other miscellaneous fields of knowledge. Following are some direct quotes concerning basic academic skills from employers who participated in the study:

You can't be in business today if you don't know the "keyboard."

It is amazing the number of math errors that are made daily. There seems to be an inability to analyze a situation to see that a mistake has been made.

(It's) amazing to me how many people can't multiply and divide.

In many cases, you are lucky to see 6th grade levels in math skills.

(Employees) must be able to write a business letter that presents the business positively.

The skills that workers must have in our organization are speaking, writing, listening, reporting, recording, and clarifying information.

Must have basic writing skills--grammar and spelling.

Must have telephone skills. Be courteous and represent our organization to the public in a positive manner.

In listening, a worker must be able to hear, to understand, and to represent another person's point of view, without necessarily agreeing with it.

The second set of skills correspond closely to personal characteristics as identified by SCANS. Employers identified characteristics that could be classified under the major categories of honesty and integrity; self-confidence; creativity; trainability or commitment to learning; positive attitude; and other. The third set of know-how skills are labeled task achievement competencies. They represent methods or processes that individuals bring to the achievement of any given task. They are skills or attributes that can be employed in almost any work setting as well as in a learning activity. The set of skills is comprised of attendance, punctuality, and appearance; effort; flexibility; problem solving and decisionmaking; efficiency; organization and neatness; and orientation to high quality. Following are some of the things that employers had to say about personal characteristics and task achievement competencies:

Personal Characteristics

I'm finding less and less dependability.

I look for "enthusitude;" enthusiasm and good attitude.

We lose patience after we explain something several times and it still doesn't get through.

Attitude counts for a lot and . . . when you find someone with it, send him over.

If I find a person with a good attitude, I am willing to work on his/her other problems.

No second chance when it comes to honesty.

You have to have a willingness to receive new training.

Must have a sense of humor; don't take self too seriously.

No one seems to be willing to take responsibility in today's society.

Task Achievement Competencies

Being flexible enhances your successful future in our organization.

Employees need to understand how their absences affect other employees in their group.

We look for people who commit to quality control, accuracy, and honesty.

Our organization rewards people for innovative solutions to problems.

Messy office area is a bad signal to customers.

Our motto is, "if you have time to lean, you have time to clean."

The fourth set of skills concerns how individuals behave with respect to their organization or employer. In particular, focus group participants suggested that productive workers understand and support the organization's mission; develop effective and respectful relationships with supervisors; and abide by organizational policies and procedures. The fifth

set of skills define how workers relate to others. In the workplace, individuals relate to two general populations—co-workers and customers. The major categories within this set are teamwork skills, customer orientation, sociability, and leadership. The sixth and final set of skills that some employers noted as important know-how skills or qualities involve job search skills and job history characteristics. Some relevant comments from employers follow:

Behaviors with respect to Organizations

In some instances, the disrespect for supervisors is unbelievable. This may be the single most important reason for dismissal of employees in the retail setting.

(In retail sector), people don't appreciate the need for product knowledge--they think all you need is "a line of bull."

Employees need to understand that each individual represents the whole organization.

It is important for employees to understand the global mission of the organization and their personal role—where they fit in.

Individuals must take (constructive) criticism well without holding resentment. They must "not flip out."

It is critical that workers recognize basic safety risks.

Employers expect workers to have a basic knowledge of the industry; to know the market.

Interpersonal Skills

(In health care), individuals must respect their co-workers and patients.

Workers must be able to recognize situations and resolve them without verbal violence.

Workers must be effective team players. They must have the ability to work with diverse groups and reach a consensus.

(In education), sometimes people in a service field forget who the customer is.

Leadership is important--knowing how and when to lead is as important as knowing how and when to follow.

Job Search Skills

There is nothing worse than when an applicant comes in for an interview and knows nothing about what we do.

If they can't dress neatly for the job interview, we don't talk with them.

If someone takes the time to dress in shirt and tie when they come to inquire about employment, I automatically grant an interview.

Analysis

The survey forms with the individual listings of skills were collected after each focus group, coded according to the taxonomy that was developed, and entered onto the computer. The taxonomy comprises 148 skills or characteristics, but not all were equally likely to be listed by focus group participants. The following summary gives a sense of the extent to which there was overlap:

- o 19 items in the taxonomy were listed by a single employer
- o 30 items were listed by 2 to 5 employers
- o 30 items were listed by 6 to 10 employers
- o 38 items were listed by 10 to 20 employers
- o 31 items were listed by more than 20 employers

Table 7 arrays the 31 items that were listed by more than 20 employers and indicates what percentage of the focus group participants listed each. The particular skills that were listed most often were attendance, basic math, verbal/speaking, reading, and writing, all of which were listed by over half of the participants. Skills or characteristics that were listed by

Table 7

**SKILLS MOST OFTEN LISTED BY INDIVIDUALS
(In Taxonomic Order)**

| | | <u>Percent</u> |
|--|---|----------------|
| <u>Basic Skills</u> | | |
| 0101 | Basic reading | 51.5% |
| 0102 | Basic verbal/speaking | 53.4 |
| 0103 | Writing | 51.5 |
| 0104 | Listening | 49.5 |
| 0106 | Telephone | 31.1 |
| 0201 | Basic math (+, -, X, /, fractions, decimals) | 60.2 |
| 0401 | Computer literacy | 29.1 |
| <u>Personal Characteristics</u> | | |
| 1101 | Honesty | 40.8 |
| 1102 | Responsibility | 21.4 |
| 1301 | Creativity | 20.4 |
| 1403 | Lifelong learning; willingness to learn | 28.2 |
| 1501 | Positive attitude | 22.3 |
| 1504 | Initiative; self-starter; motivation | 31.1 |
| <u>Individual Work Competencies</u> | | |
| 2101 | Attendance | 62.1 |
| 2102 | Punctuality | 38.8 |
| 2104 | Appropriate attire | 28.2 |
| 2201 | Hard work; effort ("work ethic") | 22.3 |
| 2301 | Flexibility | 41.7 |
| 2401 | Problem solving | 47.6 |
| 2402 | Decisionmaking; judgement | 22.3 |
| 2405 | Analytical skills; logic | 20.4 |
| 2501 | Time management | 35.9 |
| 2602 | Well organized | 28.2 |
| <u>Behavior with respect to Organization</u> | | |
| 3101 | Understands & embraces mission; understands "big picture" | 33.0 |
| 3202 | Takes and follows directions | 30.1 |
| 3301 | Safety awareness | 27.2 |
| <u>Interpersonal Skills</u> | | |
| 4101 | Teamwork skills | 46.6 |
| 4102 | Works well w/co-workers | 38.8 |
| 4203 | Service attitude | 26.2 |
| 4301 | Interpersonal; sociability | 23.3 |
| 4303 | Respects diversity | 23.3 |

between 40 to 50 percent of the participants were listening, problem solving, teamwork, flexibility (ability to handle multiple tasks or change priorities), and honesty.

In addition to listing important skills, participants provided information about themselves and their organizations. In particular, they reported employment size, their position in the organization, the number of hires per year in which they were directly involved, the percentage of workers in the organization who received their formal education or training in the local area, their gender, race, and age. These characteristics were correlated with the skills listed in order to determine whether or not there were systematic relationships between participant characteristics and particular skills. This analysis was intended to answer questions such as: Do large businesses emphasize particular skills more than small business? Do men emphasize different skills from women? Do younger employers look for particular skills or characteristics?

Table 8 presents the results of this statistical analysis. In particular, it lists for each characteristic (size of business, position in the organization, and so forth), the skills that were listed more often than would be expected from that characteristic's proportion of the sample and the skills that were listed less often than expected (differences are statistically significant). For example, males comprised 51.5 percent of the sample, but males accounted for almost 60 percent of the individuals who listed basic reading skills on their survey. About 40 percent of the individuals who listed basic reading skills were women. The statistical test indicated that the difference between men's responses and women's responses (60 versus 40) is significant, so table 8 lists basic reading skills as an item for which males listed disproportionately often.

Table 8

**WORKPLACE KNOW-HOW SKILLS LISTED DISPROPORTIONATELY
OFTEN, BY CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
(In taxonomic order)**

| <u>Characteristic</u> | | | | |
|--|------|------------------------|------|------------------------------|
| <u>Employment Size:</u> | | | | |
| | | <u>Larger firms</u> | | <u>Smaller firms</u> |
| | 0103 | Writing | 0106 | Telephone skills |
| | 0201 | Basic math | 0108 | Spelling |
| | 0501 | Mechanical ability | 0202 | Measurement |
| | 1501 | Positive attitude | | |
| <u>Position in Firm:</u> | | | | |
| | | <u>Owner/top mgmt.</u> | | <u>HRD and other</u> |
| | 1507 | Pride | 0401 | Computer literacy |
| | 3106 | Knowledge of industry | 1101 | Honesty; integrity |
| | 4302 | Conflict resolution | 1401 | Trainability |
| | | | 2301 | Flexibility |
| | | | 4102 | Works well w/co-workers |
| <u>Number of New Hires/Year, where Respondent has Direct Involvement</u> | | | | |
| | | <u>High</u> | | <u>Low</u> |
| | 0501 | Mechanical ability | 0202 | Measurement |
| | 2102 | Punctuality | 0402 | Keyboarding |
| | 3103 | Takes ownership | 1101 | Honesty; integrity |
| | 3203 | Takes criticism well | 3106 | Knowledge of industry |
| | 4101 | Teamwork | | |
| | 4203 | Service attitude | | |
| <u>Percentage of Staff Formally Educated/Trained in Local Area:</u> | | | | |
| | | <u>High</u> | | <u>Low</u> |
| | 0501 | Mechanical ability | 0201 | Basic math |
| | 1401 | Trainability | 2303 | Stress mgmt. |
| | 2103 | Work availability | 2602 | Well-organized; neat |
| | | | 3101 | Supports organizations goals |
| | | | 3106 | Knowledge of industry |
| | | | 4305 | Negotiating skills |

Table 8
(Continued)

| <u>Characteristic</u> | | | | |
|-----------------------|------|--------------------------|------|---------------------|
| <u>Sex:</u> | | <u>Females</u> | | <u>Males</u> |
| | 0104 | Listening | 0101 | Basic reading |
| | 0105 | Grammar | 0201 | Basic math |
| | 0106 | Telephone | 0501 | Mechanical ability |
| | 0107 | Accurate documentation | 4301 | Interpersonal |
| | 0108 | Spelling | | |
| | 0205 | Calculator | | |
| | 0407 | Office skills | | |
| | 0605 | Research skills | | |
| | 1503 | Enthusiasm | | |
| | 1904 | Courtesy | | |
| | 2104 | Appropriate dress | | |
| | 2301 | Flexibility | | |
| | 2302 | Multiple tasks | | |
| | 2403 | Set priorities | | |
| | 2501 | Time management | | |
| | 2701 | Accuracy | | |
| | 3201 | Respect the management | | |
| | 3203 | Takes criticism well | | |
| | 3303 | Follows co. policies | | |
| | 3304 | Respects confidentiality | | |
| | 4103 | Helps co-workers | | |
| | 4201 | Customer orientation | | |
| | 4203 | Service attitude | | |
| | 4303 | Respects diversity | | |
| | 4305 | Negotiating skills | | |
| | 5202 | Job experience | | |
| <u>Race:</u> | | <u>Minority</u> | | <u>White</u> |
| | 1504 | Initiative | 0201 | Basic math |
| | 2405 | Analytic skills | 1102 | Responsibility |
| | 3101 | Understands mission | 1301 | Creativity |
| | 4303 | Respects diversity | 2603 | Attention to detail |
| | | | 3301 | Safety awareness |

Table 8
(Continued)

| <u>Characteristic</u> | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| <u>Age:</u> | <u>Younger</u> | | <u>Older</u> | |
| | 0106 | Telephone | 0101 | Basic reading |
| | 0107 | Accurate documentation | 0202 | Measurement |
| | 1101 | Honesty; integrity | 4304 | Relates well to others |
| | 1301 | Creativity | | |
| | 2109 | Own transportation | | |
| | 2403 | Set priorities | | |
| | 2602 | Well-organized; neat | | |
| | 3103 | Takes ownership | | |
| | 3301 | Safety awareness | | |
| | 3303 | Follows co. policies | | |
| | 4101 | Teamwork | | |
| | 4201 | Customer orientation | | |
| | 4302 | Conflict resolution | | |

The reader is urged to exercise caution in interpreting table 8. The table is based on simple correlations only, which leads to the following kind of problem. Because males made up a larger proportion (and females a smaller proportion) of business owners, individuals representing manufacturers, and younger individuals, it is uncertain as to whether any relationship between gender and importance of a skill is caused by gender, position in the firm, industry, or respondent age.

Table 9 summarizes a similar kind of analysis between industrial sector and skills. For several of the (broad) industrial sectors, the table enumerates those skills that were listed more often than would be expected statistically and those that were listed less often. A caveat here is that the process of organizing the focus groups resulted in several instances where individuals from organizations in one of the sectors could not attend the meeting

Table 9

**WORKPLACE KNOW-HOW SKILLS LISTED DISPROPORTIONATELY OFTEN, BY INDUSTRIAL SECTOR AND DISPROPORTIONATELY LESS OFTEN
(In taxonomic order)**

| <u>Sector</u> | | <u>Listed More Frequently</u> | | <u>Listed Less Frequently</u> |
|-----------------------|------|------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------|
| <u>Retail:</u> | 1102 | Responsibility | 0101 | Basic reading |
| | 1401 | Trainability | 0102 | Verbal |
| | 1503 | Enthusiasm | 0103 | Writing |
| | 1904 | Courtesy | | |
| | 2103 | Work availability | | |
| | 2104 | Appropriate dress | | |
| | 4203 | Service attitude | | |
| | 4306 | Friendliness | | |
| <u>Health Care:</u> | 0107 | Accurate documentation | 0201 | Basic math |
| | 1406 | Self-assessment | 1301 | Creativity |
| | 2101 | Attendance | 1403 | Willingness to learn |
| | 2102 | Punctuality | 3202 | Takes direction |
| | 2104 | Appropriate dress | | |
| | 2402 | Decisionmaking | | |
| | 3201 | Respect for mgmt./chain of command | | |
| | 3303 | Follows co. policies | | |
| | 3304 | Respects confidentiality | | |
| | 4302 | Conflict resolution | | |
| <u>Education:</u> | 1403 | Willingness to learn | 0101 | Basic reading |
| | 2104 | Appropriate dress | 0401 | Computer literacy |
| | 3101 | Support organizational goals | 1101 | Honesty; integrity |
| | 3202 | Takes direction | 2101 | Attendance |
| | 4101 | Teamwork | 2501 | Time management |
| | 4201 | Customer orientation | | |
| | 4305 | Negotiating skills | | |
| <u>Manufacturing:</u> | 0101 | Basic reading | 0106 | Telephone |
| | 0102 | Verbal | 0401 | Computer literacy |
| | 0103 | Writing | 2104 | Appropriate dress |
| | 0202 | Measurement | 2501 | Time management |
| | 0203 | Metrics | | |
| | 0301 | Business finance | | |
| | 1101 | Honesty; integrity | | |
| | 1201 | Self-esteem | | |
| | 2101 | Attendance | | |
| | 2201 | Effort; hard work | | |
| | 2301 | Flexibility | | |
| | 3301 | Safety awareness | | |
| | 4101 | Teamwork | | |
| | 4302 | Conflict resolution | | |

Table 9
(Continued)

| <u>Sector</u> | <u>Listed More Frequently</u> | | <u>Listed Less Frequently</u> | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <u>Nonprofits/Services:</u> | 0108 | Spelling | 2103 | Work availability |
| | 0402 | Keyboarding | 2104 | Appropriate dress |
| | 1404 | Transfer learning | 2201 | Hard work; effort |
| | 1501 | Positive attitude | 3101 | Support organizational goals |
| | 2106 | Drug free | | |
| | 2402 | Decisionmaking | | |
| | 2403 | Set priorities | | |
| | 2602 | Well-organized | | |
| | 4201 | Customer orientation | | |
| <u>Public Sector/Government:</u> | 0106 | Telephone | 1403 | Willingness to learn |
| | 0402 | Keyboarding | 2102 | Punctuality |
| | 1103 | Work w/o supervision | 2301 | Flexibility |
| | 2101 | Attendance | 2401 | Problem solving |
| | 5202 | Relevant work experience | 2501 | Time management |
| | | | 4101 | Teamwork |

scheduled for that sector, but rather came to a different group. Because of the procedures that were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants' surveys, it was not possible to regroup the data by appropriate sectors. Thus the data in table 9 correlates skills with the intended sector of the focus group.⁶

The participants in the retail focus groups tended to place most importance on skills/characteristics such as trainability, enthusiasm, courtesy, appropriate dress, friendliness, and service attitude. They place less emphasis on the basic communication (reading, speaking, writing) skills.⁷ The participants in the health sector placed emphasis on accurate documentation skills, attendance, punctuality, appropriate dress, respect for management, following corporate policies and procedures, and respect for confidentiality. They placed less emphasis on basic mathematics, creativity, or willingness to learn.

Participants from the education sector emphasized commitment or willingness to learn, appropriate dress, understanding the mission of the organization, teamwork skills, customer orientation, and negotiation skills. Of less importance were basic reading, attendance, or time management skills. Manufacturing representatives listed basic communication skills, measurement skills and ability to work in the metric system, business finance and economics, attendance, hard work and effort, safety awareness, and teamwork. Of lesser emphasis to manufacturers were time management skills, telephone skills, and appropriate dress.

The nonprofit and service sector representatives emphasized keyboarding, ability to transfer learning, being drug free, decisionmaking skills, setting priorities, being well-organized, and customer orientation. Of less importance were work availability, appropriate dress, hard work and effort, and understanding the overall mission. Finally, in the public sector, participants tended to list telephone skills, keyboarding, independence, attendance, and relevant past work experience. Of lesser importance were punctuality, flexibility, problem solving, or time management skills.

Caveats

There are many reasons to be careful about interpreting the individual lists of skills. Since the participants were working by themselves, the terminology that they used was not standardized. Sometimes participants used different words to convey the same skill and sometimes used the same words to convey different skills. Classifying their responses required many judgements. Furthermore, the individual lists were developed after only a brief description of the purpose of the focus groups and definition of workplace know-how

skills. In some cases, participants identified very specific technical skills such as an ability to operate a specific type of machine.

3. Analyses of the Focus Groups' Compilations of Workplace Know-How Skills

The next part of the meeting involved compiling the individual lists into a single list for each group. This compilation often involved group discussion and agreement about whether particular skills duplicated others that had already been listed. Furthermore the discussion and examples refined, for each group, the definition of what constituted a workplace know-how skill. Thus these compilations get around the problem of using different terms to convey the same skill (at least for each group) and also eliminated most of the job-specific skills.

The compilation processes across the 12 groups resulted in listing, at least once, a total of 113 skills from the taxonomy. (That is, a total of 35 of the skills identified by at least one individual were not added to the groups' list.) Again, considerable overlap across the groups would be expected and indeed the following distribution occurred:

- o 35 of the skills/characteristics in the taxonomy did not appear in any of the groups' compilations
- o 43 skills/characteristics appeared on the lists of 1 or 2 groups
- o 19 skills/characteristics appeared on the lists of 3 to 4 groups
- o 35 skills/characteristics appeared on the lists of 5 to 7 groups
- o 16 skills/characteristics appeared on the lists of 8 or more groups

Table 10 lists the 16 skills/characteristics that were on the lists of 8 or more groups. Note that basic mathematics was on the list for every group and problem solving was on the compiled lists of all groups, except for one. Verbal skills, writing skills, honesty and integrity, and teamwork skills were on 10 group compilations.

4. Analyses of the Focus Groups' Consensuses about the Most Important Workplace Know-How Skills

Compilation of the lists took up most of the meeting time, but the last activity that took place in each focus group was a consensus building process, which was accomplished by voting. Individuals in each group were asked to vote on the 7 "most important" of the (listed) know-how skills. This voting process again honed down the list of skills. Aggregating across all focus groups, 732 votes were cast.⁸ A total of 95 of the 113 skills that had been identified by the groups in the compilation activity received at least one vote as one of the "most important" skills. (Conversely, 18 of the skills that were identified by at least one group in its compilation process, received no votes as being among the 7 most important skills.)

In each group, the top vote getters were listed and identified as part of the group's consensus list of the most important skills.⁹ In addition, each member of the focus group was offered the "right" to argue for the addition of one skill to the consensus list (or for the deletion of one skill). The consensus lists from the groups comprise appendix C. Of the 95 skills that received at least one vote in the process, 58 different skills were identified on at least one of the groups' consensus lists.

Table 10

**WORKPLACE KNOW-HOW SKILLS THAT WERE LISTED ON EIGHT
OR MORE FOCUS GROUPS' COMPILATIONS**

(In taxonomic order)

| <u>Basic Academic Skills</u> | | <u>Number of Focus Groups</u> |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 0101 | Basic Reading | 9 |
| 0102 | Verbal | 10 |
| 0103 | Writing | 10 |
| 0104 | Listening | 8 |
| 0106 | Telephone | 8 |
| 0201 | Basic Math | 12 |
| <u>Personal Characteristics</u> | | |
| 1101 | Honesty/Integrity | 10 |
| 1301 | Creativity | 8 |
| 1403 | Willingness to learn | 8 |
| <u>Task Achievement Competencies</u> | | |
| 2104 | Appropriate Dress | 9 |
| 2301 | Flexibility | 10 |
| 2401 | Problem Solving | 11 |
| 2501 | Time Management | 8 |
| <u>Behaviors with Respect to Organizations</u> | | |
| 3101 | Understand and accept "big picture" | 9 |
| 3301 | Safety Awareness | 8 |
| <u>Interpersonal Skills</u> | | |
| 4101 | Teamwork | 10 |

Table 11 provides an unduplicated listing of the 58 skills or characteristics that comprised the consensus lists and gives the number of groups for which the skill was in the consensus. The maximum number of times that a particular skill could have been in the consensus list would be 12. None of the skills, however, were in all 12 consensus lists. The table shows that basic verbal/speaking skills and teamwork skills were in the consensus list

Table 11

SKILLS COMPRISING FOCUS GROUPS' CONSENSUS LISTS
(In Taxonomic Order)

| | | <u>No. Groups</u> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| <u>Basic Academic Skills</u> | | |
| 0101 | Basic reading | 6 |
| 0102 | Basic verbal | 8 |
| 0103 | Writing | 7 |
| 0104 | Listening | 4 |
| 0105 | Good grammar | 1 |
| 0201 | Basic math | 6 |
| 0202 | Measurement | 2 |
| 0203 | Metrics | 1 |
| 0204 | Making change | 1 |
| 0206 | Graphs/charts | 1 |
| 0301 | Business finances | 1 |
| 0302 | Economics | 1 |
| 0401 | Computer literacy | 1 |
| 0502 | Technical literacy | 1 |
| <u>Personal Characteristics</u> | | |
| 1101 | Honesty | 6 |
| 1102 | Responsibility | 3 |
| 1201 | Self-esteem | 1 |
| 1401 | Trainability; ability to learn | 2 |
| 1403 | Willingness/interest in learning | 4 |
| 1501 | Positive attitude | 2 |
| 1503 | Enthusiasm | 1 |
| 1504 | Initiative | 3 |
| 1507 | Desire to excel; pride | 1 |
| 1904 | Politeness | 1 |
| <u>Task Achievement Competencies</u> | | |
| 2101 | Attendance | 7 |
| 2102 | Punctuality | 2 |
| 2103 | Work availability | 1 |
| 2104 | Appropriate attire | 1 |
| 2201 | Hard work; effort | 3 |
| 2202 | productive | 1 |
| 2204 | Sense of urgency | 2 |
| 2301 | Flexibility | 2 |
| 2401 | Problem solving | 6 |
| 2402 | Decisionmaking | 1 |
| 2404 | Common sense | 3 |
| 2405 | Analytic skills; logic | 1 |
| 2406 | Sets goals | 1 |
| 2501 | Time management | 2 |
| 2503 | Resource management | 1 |
| 2505 | Aware of/controls costs | 1 |
| 2602 | Well-organized | 2 |
| 2701 | Accurate; consistent quality | 2 |

Table 11
(Continued)

| | | <u>No. Groups</u> |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <u>Behaviors with respect to Organization</u> | | |
| 3101 | Understands and embraces mission | 2 |
| 3103 | Takes ownership; empowered | 4 |
| 3201 | Respects management/supervision | 1 |
| 3202 | Takes direction | 1 |
| 3303 | Understands and follows co. policies | 1 |
| 3304 | Respects confidentiality | 1 |
| <u>Interpersonal Skills</u> | | |
| 4101 | Teamwork skills | 8 |
| 4102 | Works well w/co-workers | 3 |
| 4201 | Customer orientation | 7 |
| 4203 | Service attitude | 2 |
| 4301 | Interpersonal; socialibility | 3 |
| 4303 | Respects diversity | 3 |
| 4304 | Relates well to others | 1 |
| 4401 | Leadership | 1 |
| <u>Job Search Skills/Job History</u> | | |
| 5103 | Fill out application | 1 |
| 5201 | Steady work history | 1 |

for 8 of the groups and writing skills, attendance, and customer orientation were in the consensus list for 7 groups. Half of the groups included reading, basic math, honesty and integrity, and problem solving in their consensus lists.

One way to interpret the entries in table 11 is that the skills/characteristics that are on multiple consensus lists represent workplace know-how skills that are fairly general and are probably critical to most organizations. The entries that are on consensus lists for only one or two groups are less general; they are important enough to be voted among the "most important" skills/characteristics of at least one group, but they are probably considered critical only to some organizations. The fact that there are so many entries in table 11 shows that there is considerable diversity of opinion among employers.

5. Analyses Across Groups of the Most Important Workplace Know-How Skills

Can we come to a consensus across the groups? One particular decision rule that might be suggested is as follows:

- o Skill receives a vote as being among the most important skill from at least 10% of the focus group participants; which translates to at least 10 votes, and
- o Skill is on the consensus list of at least 2 groups

The 23 skills listed in table 12 meet these criteria. Note that the skills are listed in taxonomic order, which is not necessarily in order of their importance.

Notice that there is overlap among the tables and lists of most important skills. Many of the skills/characteristics in table 12 were also among those that were listed in the SCANS report; that were among the most important skills from the Michigan employability skills employer survey; that were most often listed by employers in the first focus group activity; that were on the most group compilations; and that were on the list of skills/characteristics getting the most votes for consensus. However, note also that some of the skills were absent from the other tables and arose through the compilation or voting process. Table 13 demonstrates the degree of overlap.

Among the 23 skills or characteristics listed in table 12, 5 of them are basic academic skills: the four aspects of communication—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—plus basic mathematics. Table 13 shows that the importance of these skills is reasonably consistent throughout the literature and the individual steps of this study. The exception is that the Michigan Employability Skills employer survey found relatively more emphasis on

Table 12

**SKILLS THAT WERE ON AT LEAST TWO CONSENSUS LISTS
AND RECEIVED AT LEAST TEN VOTES**

Basic Academic Skills

- 0101 Basic reading
- 0102 Basic verbal/speaking
- 0103 Written
- 0104 Listening
- 0201 Basic math (+, -, x, /, fractions, decimals)

Personal Characteristics

- 1101 Honesty; integrity
- 1102 Responsible; reliable
- 1403 Lifelong learner; willingness to learn
- 1504 Initiative; self-starter; motivation

Task Achievement Competencies

- 2101 Attendance
- 2102 Punctuality
- 2301 Flexibility
- 2401 Problem solving
- 2404 Common sense
- 2501 Time management
- 2701 Consistently accurate; quality concept

Behaviors with respect to Organization

- 3101 Understands and embraces mission; understands "big picture"
- 3103 Takes ownership; empowered

Interpersonal Skills

- 4101 Teamwork skills
 - 4102 Works well with co-workers
 - 4201 Customer orientation
 - 4301 Interpersonal; socialability
 - 4303 Respects diversity
-

Table 13

**CROSS-COMPARISON OF SKILLS LISTED IN TABLE 12
WITH OTHER STUDIES**

| Skill/Characteristic | | SCANS Report | Michigan Employability Profile ^a | Mich. Emp. Skills Employer Survey ^b | CEO Symposium ^c | Table 7 | Table 10 |
|---|---|-----------------|---|---|-------------------------------|---------|----------|
| <u>Basic Academic Skills</u> | | | | | | | |
| 0101 | Basic reading | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 0102 | Basic verbal | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 0103 | Writing | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 0104 | Listening | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 0201 | Basic math | X | X | | X | X | X |
| <u>Personal Characteristics</u> | | | | | | | |
| 1101 | Honesty; integrity | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 1102 | Responsibility | X | X | X | X | X | |
| 1403 | Lifelong learner; willingness to learn | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 1504 | Initiative; motivation | | | X | X | X | |
| <u>Task Achievement Competencies</u> | | | | | | | |
| 2101 | Attendance | | | X | X | X | |
| 2102 | Punctuality | | | X | | X | |
| 2301 | Flexibility | | | X | X | X | X |
| 2401 | Problem solving | X | X | | X | X | X |
| 2404 | Common sense | | | | X | | |
| 2501 | Time management | X | | | X | X | X |
| 2701 | Consistent accuracy; quality | | X | X | X | | |
| <u>Behaviors with respect to Organization</u> | | | | | | | |
| 3101 | Embraces organizational mission | | | | | X | X |
| 3103 | Takes ownership | | | | | X | X |
| <u>Interpersonal Skills</u> | | | | | | | |
| 4101 | Teamwork skills | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 4102 | Works well with co-workers | X | X | X | | X | |
| 4201 | Customer orientation | | | | X | | |
| 4301 | Interpersonal; socialibility | X | | | X | X | |
| 4303 | Respects diversity | X | X | | X | X | |

^a Michigan Employability Profile reproduced in table 2.

^b Skills/characteristics that were analyzed to be most critical to employers; listed in table 3 above.

^c See table 4.

listening and speaking and less on reading, writing, and math. Otherwise there is broad agreement on the importance of these five skills. Not shown in either table are two other skills, which are classified as basic academic skills in the taxonomy, that achieved rather broad agreement about their importance in other studies, even though they did not quite meet the criteria for table 12. These are telephone skills and computer literacy.

Among the personal characteristics, most studies agree on the importance of honesty and integrity, responsibility, and willingness to learn (SCANS uses ability to learn). This study and the Michigan Employability Profile employer survey emphasize initiative and motivation as well.

Table 12 lists 7 items under the rubric of task achievement competencies. Here flexibility, problem solving, and time management skills are most consistently cited. The present study and the Michigan Employability Skills employer survey demonstrate the importance to employers of attendance, punctuality, and consistent accuracy or attention to quality. Interestingly, the importance of "common sense" arose through the compilation and voting process. It is not among the SCANS foundation skills or competencies, not among the Michigan Employability Skills Profile or employer survey material, nor was it listed by a significant share of employers in the first round of the focus groups.

The two skills listed in the table under the heading of behaviors with respect to the organization are noticeably absent from SCANS and the Michigan Employability Skills profile. The focus group participants indicated that productive workers understand and embrace the mission of the organization and feel empowered in their jobs. The latter means workers feel like they have a share in the responsibility and management of the organization.

Three other skills in this general group that are not listed in table 12, but which are important to employers according to prior studies are following company's policies and procedures, maintaining safe work practices, and respecting confidentiality.

Finally, among interpersonal skills, studies are consistent about the importance of teamwork skills, working well with co-workers, interpersonal skills, and respecting diversity. This study brought out the importance of customer orientation.

6. Measurement and Standards for Workplace Know-How Skills

Assessment and Measurement

It is one thing to have employers identify the workplace know-how skills and personal characteristics that are valued and it is quite another to determine means of measuring these attributes. It is even more difficult to achieve a consensus on standards for the skills or characteristics. Nevertheless, the Task Force attempted to get focus group participants to indicate measurable standards for the skills by having them report a "standard" for each skill that they listed on their individual survey forms and for each skill that they nominated for the group's compilation.

Employers felt that some items could be easily measured through a formal test or assessment, whereas other items were more difficult, if not impossible, to measure. In between these extremes were skills or characteristics that could be demonstrated by particular actions and skills or characteristics that could be assessed by direct measurement of productivity.

In short, analyses of the data that we collected suggested six methods of measurement. These methods were:

- o paper and pencil achievement tests
- o performance tests (e.g., typing tests)
- o events regularly monitored by employers (e.g., attendance, accidents)
- o productivity measures (e.g., customer complaints, on-time shipments)
- o demonstrations of skills/characteristics through documentation of specific actions
- o subjective assessments

These assessment methods are ordered in terms of their quantitateness and rigor.¹⁰

Generally, participants felt that the basic academic skills could and should be assessed by achievement or performance tests. Some employers felt that problem solving was a know-how skill that could be formally tested or could be demonstrated by documenting specific actions on the job.

Regular employer monitoring of employees could generate measures for a number of skills/characteristics: incidents of tardiness or absences measure punctuality and attendance, attendance at formal training measure willingness to learn, incidents of theft measure honesty and integrity, and number and type of accidents measure adherence to safety. Employers indicated that the only way to measure some skills/ characteristics was to track productivity. For example, teamwork skills could be measured by on-time shipments by a production team or by scrap rates for the team. Customer orientation and service attitude could be measured

by customer complaints. Accuracy and attention to detail could be measured by scrap or re-work rates.

For many of the workplace know-how skills, employers acknowledged that the best way to assess the skill was through documentation of a specific action. Flexibility, problem solving, common sense, time management, accuracy and quality, understanding and embracing the organizational mission, teamwork skills, customer orientation, and respecting diversity are among the skills that could be measured by having workers document specific instances that demonstrate the skill.

Standards

Beyond the problem of identifying methods to measure workplace know-how skills is the process of establishing standards of performance. The Task Force attempted to get focus group participants to enumerate the standards used in their organizations. Table 14 lists the skills that seemed to best lend themselves to measurement and specific standards. The top panel of the table lists skills where there was wide agreement about standards and the bottom panel lists skills where agreement about standards was less universal.

For basic academic skills, employers generally use successful completion of high school courses as their measure (presumably verified by transcripts). A number of employers indicated that they have been disappointed with the actual skill levels of labor market entrants, even when they had completed appropriate high school courses, and these employers have begun applicant screening using existing or customized tests. Different employers had slightly different performance standards for keyboarding; but the modal response was that individuals assessed on this skill must have a minimum of 40 wpm (net).

Table 14

WORKPLACE KNOW-HOW SKILLS, MEASURES, AND STANDARDS

| Skill | Measure | Standard |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| <u>High Level of Agreement Among Employers</u> | | |
| 0101 | Basic reading | -- Completion of high school courses |
| 0103 | Writing | -- At least 10th or 11th grade English and math |
| 0105 | Grammar | -- Performance on achievement test |
| 0108 | Spelling | |
| 0201 | Basic math | |
| 2101 | Attendance | -- Percentage of days scheduled to work for which individual does attend |
| | | -- At least 95% (about 1 absence/month) |
| 2102 | Punctuality | -- Number of tardiness incidents within first few months on the job |
| | | -- At most 2 |
| 1101 | Honesty; integrity | -- Number of incidents of theft or cheating |
| | | -- At most 0 |
| 3304 | Respects confidentiality | -- Number of breaches of confidentiality |
| | | -- At most 0 (or 1) |
| 2104 | Appropriate dress | -- Number of incidents with inappropriate dress or hygiene |
| 2105 | Personal hygiene/cleanliness | -- (For applicants) at most 0 |
| | | -- (For employees) at most 1-2 |
| 0402 | Keyboarding | -- Typing speed |
| | | -- At least 40 wpm (net) |
| 0104 | Listening | -- Number of times that directions for a given task have to be repeated |
| 1401 | Trainability | |
| 3202 | Follows directions | |
| | | -- At most 1-2 repetitions |
| <u>Standards Mentioned by Small Number of Employers</u> | | |
| 0301 | Business finances | -- Completion of high school courses |
| 0302 | Economics | |
| 0305 | Business law | |
| 0202 | Measurement | -- Ability to use a ruler |
| | | -- Measurements to at least 1/32nd of " |
| 2501 | Time management | -- Percentage error in time estimation for completing a task |
| | | -- At most \pm 20% |
| 3201 | Respects supervision/management | -- Number of incidents in which disrespect is shown |
| | | -- At most 1-2 |

Table 14
(Continued)

| Skill | Measure | Standard |
|-------|---|---|
| 3301 | Compliance with company policies and procedures | -- Number of incidents of noncompliance -- At most 0 |
| 4101 | Teamwork | -- Number of times that personnel reassignments must be made -- At most 1 |
| 4203 | Service attitude | -- Number of customer complaints -- At most 2 |
| 5201 | Exhibit steady work history | -- Duration of previous job(s) -- Unless young person, at least 12 months |

Some employers indicated that their standards for poor attendance and tardiness depended on the overall "tightness" of the labor market to some extent. When the labor market is tight, i.e., when unemployment is low, standards are reported to be more lax. The measure that many employers use for attendance is the percentage of days for which the worker is scheduled that the worker actually comes to work.¹¹ Employers seemed to agree that the minimum standard was around 95% (which is about 1 absence/month). Employers felt that the first few months of employment was the time period when they monitored tardiness most closely. Employers felt that 3 or more incidents of tardiness during this time period would jeopardize employment.

Honesty and respecting confidentiality can be measured by incidents of dishonesty and breaches of confidentiality. Employers had little tolerance for either. Employers uniformly indicated that they had zero tolerance for theft or cheating (such as falsifying time cards) and for breaches of confidentiality. (Some employers indicated that the first breach of confidentiality may be dealt with through disciplinary measures short of dismissal.)

A measure for appropriate dress and personal hygiene would be incidents in which an individual was not attired appropriately or had not exhibited appropriate personal hygiene. Employers indicated that the standard that they held for job applicants was zero tolerance (that is, jobs are offered only to applicants who are appropriately dressed and clean). Employers reported themselves to be somewhat more lenient with existing workers, for whom 1 or 2 incidents would be dealt with through disciplinary or supervisory measures. However beyond that, employment would likely be terminated.

The final skill listed in the top panel of table 13 is listening or following directions. Employers indicated that repeating directions for a (fairly simple) task¹² once or twice was a reasonable standard, but having to repeat directions more often than that was not acceptable.

The lower panel in the table gives measures and standards that were mentioned by one or two participants, but which were not discussed fully in the focus groups. They thus may or may not represent employer opinion in general.

7. Recommendations and Future Actions

Members of the EFE Task Force reviewed findings from several recent national, state, and local studies of employability skills and conducted a focus group process designed to validate those findings for the local labor market. Through this process, the Task Force discovered that local employers feel there are many different skills and personal characteristics that are important contributors to productivity in the workplace. But among

these skills and characteristics, there are about two dozen that were identified as the most important. As might be expected, these two dozen overlap considerably with findings from prior studies.

Part of the reason for forming the EFE Outcomes Task Force was the sense among many groups in the community that individuals entering the labor market in Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties were deficient in at least some employability skills. This perception was confirmed in the employer focus groups, where participants not only identified important workplace know-how skills, but also indicated that many job applicants and workers that they encountered lacked these skills.

After conducting this study, the problem that the Task Force finds itself confronting is how to improve the system. Can local education and training providers improve curricula or instructional methods to better impart workplace know-how skills to individuals being prepared for the labor market? The first step in answering this question is to determine what education and training providers are currently doing. Thus coincident with this study, the task force is preparing an inventory of area education and training programs. This inventory is examining curricula offered by local providers to determine the extent to which workplace know-how skills are present.

After the inventory is completed and analyzed, the Task Force intends to bring together employers and educators and trainers to work on implementing a system that addresses these skills. Options range from facilitating dialog between the staffs from the institutions that prepare individuals for work and employers to a portfolio or passport system, in which labor market participants provide certified evidence of the attainment of particular

skills or characteristics. In any case, the task force is convinced that little change to the status quo can be affected without the active involvement and support of both educators and trainers and employers.

APPENDIX A

Workplace Know-How Skill Individual Survey

EFE Outcomes Task Force

Identification of Workplace Know-How Skills

We are interested in knowing what **workplace know-how skills** your firm/organization expect from recently-hired workers or individuals seeking employment. We use the term "workplace know-how skills" to differentiate from purely academic knowledge such as calculus, Japanese, or 14th century European history and from specific technical skills such as operating a lathe, key entry of data, or operating an x-ray machine.

Please list below **all** workplace know-how skills that contribute to a worker's productivity in your firm/organization. Also, to the extent that you can, please indicate the standards that you employ for these skills. For example, if you were to list "maintain technology" as a workplace know-how skill, then the standard might be "read and comprehend instruction manuals provided with technology."

| <u>Workplace Know-How Skill</u> | <u>Standard</u> |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ |
| 6. _____ | _____ |
| 7. _____ | _____ |

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

19. _____

20. _____

21. _____

22. _____

23. _____

24. _____

25. _____

26. _____

27. _____

28. _____

29. _____

30. _____

31. _____

32. _____

33. _____

34. _____

35. _____

36. _____

- 37. _____
- 38. _____
- 39. _____
- 40. _____
- 41. _____
- 42. _____
- 43. _____
- 44. _____
- 45. _____
- 46. _____
- 47. _____
- 48. _____
- 49. _____
- 50. _____

When you finish listing skills, please complete the (brief) personal survey on the last page of this package.

Part of our mission is to analyze individuals' responses to see if there are systematic relationships between the lists that are generated and the characteristics of group participants. All data will be **confidential**.

1. Approximately how many workers are employed by your firm/organization? (Do not include temporary agency workers; do include part-time workers and do include all locations).

| | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|-------|
| < 10 | _____ | 100-249 | _____ |
| 10-19 | _____ | 250-499 | _____ |
| 20-49 | _____ | 500 + | _____ |
| 50-99 | _____ | | |

2. What is your position in the firm/organization?

| | |
|---|-------|
| Management, except for HRD | _____ |
| Human Resources Department, manager or staff | _____ |
| Supervisor | _____ |
| Other | _____ |

3. For approximately how many new employees per year, would you have some responsibility in the hiring process?

| | | | |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| 0 | _____ | 10-50 | _____ |
| 1-2 | _____ | 50 + | _____ |
| 3-9 | _____ | | |

4. Approximately, what percentage of your employees received their formal education or training in the Kalamazoo/St. Joseph County area?

_____ %

5. What is your sex? M _____ F _____

6. Race/ethnicity? African American/Black _____
Caucasian/White _____
Latino/Hispanic _____
Other _____

7. Age? <25 _____ 45-54 _____
25-34 _____ 55-64 _____
35-44 _____ 65 + _____

APPENDIX B

Taxonomy of Workplace Know-How Skills

Taxonomy of Workplace Know-How Skills

Basic Skills

- 01 Communication
- 02 Mathematics
- 03 Business Finance; Economics
- 04 Computer/Office Machinery
- 05 Machinery/Mechanical Ability
- 06 Other Subject Matter

Personal Characteristics

- 11 Honesty; Integrity; Responsibility
- 12 Self-esteem; Self-respect
- 13 Creativity
- 14 Trainability; Commitment to Learning
- 15 Positive Attitude
- 16 Independence
- 19 Other

Individual Work Competencies

- 21 Attendance and Punctuality; Appearance
- 22 Effort; Productivity
- 23 Flexibility
- 24 Problem Solving; Decisionmaking
- 25 Efficiency
- 26 Organization; Neatness
- 27 Quality Orientation

Behaviors with respect to Organization

- 31 Understands/supports mission
- 32 Relationship to supervisor
- 33 Abides by Regulations & Policies

Interpersonal Skills

- 41 Teamwork
- 42 Customer/Marketing
- 43 Interpersonal
- 44 Leadership

Job Search Skills/Job History

- 51 Interviewing/Application Skills
- 52 Job History

Basic Skills

01 Communication

- 0101 Basic reading
- 0102 Basic verbal/speaking
- 0103 Writing
- 0104 Listening
- 0105 Good grammar usage (avoidance of slang; foul language)
- 0106 Telephone skills/etiquette
- 0107 Accuracy in documentation
- 0108 Spelling
- 0109 Other, n.e.c. (penmanship, tell time, time cards)

02 Mathematics

- 0201 Basic math (+, -, x, /, fractions, decimals)
- 0202 Measurement
- 0203 Metrics
- 0204 Making change
- 0205 Use calculators
- 0206 Graphs/charts
- 0209 Other, n.e.c.

03 Business Finance; Economics

- 0301 Business finances (p&l; cost acctg.)
- 0302 Economics
- 0303 Work with budgets (personal or business)
- 0304 Purchasing experience
- 0305 Business law

04 Computer Literacy/Office Machinery

- 0401 Computer literacy
- 0402 Keyboarding
- 0403 Software
- 0404 Hardware
- 0405 Office machines
- 0406 Cash registers (POS systems)
- 0407 Office skills (filing, typing, message taking)

Basic Skills
(Cont'd)

05 Machinery/Mechanical Ability

- 0501 Mechanical ability
- 0502 Technical literacy
- 0503 Using tools/machinery appropriately
- 0504 Statistical process control (SPC)
- 0509 Other, n.e.c. (inc. blueprint reading)

06 Other Subject Matter/Technical Knowledge

- 0601 Good grades
- 0602 Geography
- 0603 Scientific principles
- 0604 Artistic/display ability
- 0605 Research skills; information retrieval; look for information
- 0609 Other, n.e.c. (inc. specific educational credentials)

Personal Characteristics

11 Honesty; Integrity; Responsibility

- 1101 Honesty; integrity
- 1102 Responsible; reliable
- 1103 Can work without supervision
- 1104 Trustworthy
- 1105 Admit mistakes; don't hide them; accountability
- 1106 Fairness

12 Self-esteem; self-respect

- 1201 Self-esteem; self-respect
- 1202 Self-control
- 1203 Self-confidence

13 Creativity

- 1301 Creativity
- 1302 Intuition

14 Trainability; Commitment to Learning

- 1401 Trainability; knowing how to learn
- 1402 Career development
- 1403 Lifelong learner; willingness to learn; interested in learning
- 1404 Able to transfer learning
- 1405 Interesting in/participates in cross-training
- 1406 Learn from mistakes; self-assessment

15 Positive Attitude

- 1501 Positive Attitude
- 1502 Doesn't make unnecessary complaints
- 1503 Enthusiasm; energy; hustle
- 1504 Initiative; self-starter; motivation
- 1505 Sense of humor
- 1506 Ambitious
- 1507 Desire to excel; pride
- 1508 Assertive

Personal Characteristics
(Cont'd)

19 Other

- 1901 Patience
- 1902 Maintains health; physical strength to perform
- 1903 Memory
- 1904 Polite; well-mannered
- 1905 Adult behavior; no horseplay
- 1906 Personal life — free of problems
- 1907 Desire to help others; giving
- 1908 Risk taking
- 1909 Other (inc. courage, optimism)

Task Achievement Competencies

- 21 Attendance and Punctuality; Appearance
 - 2101 Attendance
 - 2102 Punctuality
 - 2103 Work required hours; availability
 - 2104 Appropriate attire
 - 2105 Personal hygiene/cleanliness
 - 2106 Drug free
 - 2109 Other, n.e.c. (transportation, driver's license)

- 22 Effort; Productivity
 - 2201 Hard work; effort
 - 2202 Productive
 - 2203 On task; keep personal business out of workplace
 - 2204 Appreciation of necessity of hard work; sense of urgency; see job as opportunity
 - 2205 Stick-to-itiveness; persistence

- 23 Flexibility
 - 2301 Flexibility
 - 2302 Able to handle multiple tasks
 - 2303 Stress management
 - 2304 Open to change

- 24 Problem Solving; Decisionmaking
 - 2401 Problem solving
 - 2402 Decision making; judgement
 - 2403 Set priorities; making lists
 - 2404 Common sense
 - 2405 Analytical skills; logic
 - 2406 Sets goals/objectives for self; goal-oriented
 - 2407 Asks questions appropriately
 - 2408 Troubleshooting; diagnosing
 - 2409 Planful; plans ahead

Individual Work Competencies
(Cont'd)

25 Efficiency

- 2501 Time management
- 2502 Time lines
- 2503 Don't waste resources
- 2504 Energy efficient
- 2505 Aware of and controls costs

26 Organization; Neatness

- 2601 Keeps work station neat; clean
- 2602 Well-organized
- 2603 Attention to detail; observant

27 Quality Orientation

- 2701 Accurate; consistent quality
- 2702 Thorough; follows-up
- 2703 Accepts quality concept; has goal of 100%

Behaviors with respect to Organization

31 Understands/Supports Mission

- 3101 Understands and embraces organization's mission; understands "big picture"
- 3102 Identifies/supports goals; loyalty
- 3103 Takes ownership; empowered
- 3104 Finds work to do, when necessary
- 3105 Product knowledge; terminology; job knowledge
- 3106 Industry knowledge; terminology
- 3107 Makes suggestions; looks for improvement

32 Relationship to Supervisor

- 3201 Respects supervision/management; understands chain of command
- 3202 Takes and follows directions
- 3203 Takes constructive criticism

33 Abides by Rules/Regulations

- 3301 Safety awareness
- 3302 Awareness/support of regulations affecting organization
- 3303 Understands and follows company policies and procedures
- 3304 Respects confidentiality

Interpersonal Skills

41 Teamwork

- 4101 Teamwork skills
- 4102 Works well with co-workers
- 4103 Helps co-workers; willing to train/teach

42 Customer/Marketing

- 4201 Customer orientation
- 4202 Able to empathize with customer; tolerance
- 4203 Understands importance of customer; service attitude
- 4204 Marketing skills
- 4205 Sales

43 Interpersonal Skills

- 4301 Interpersonal; socialability
- 4302 Conflict resolution
- 4303 Respects diversity
- 4304 Relates well to others; supportive
- 4305 Negotiating skills
- 4306 Friendliness
- 4307 Tact; diplomacy

44 Leadership

- 4401 Leadership skills; how to lead and how to follow
- 4402 Motivator
- 4403 Management capability

Job Search Skills/Job History

51 Interviewing/Application Skills

5101 Shows interest in working

5102 Interviewing skills

5103 Fill out application completely and accurately

52 Job History

5201 Steady work history; want to hold job for a long time

5202 Relevant job experience (inc. cash handling experience)

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Consensus Lists

Focus Group Consensus Lists

| <u>Focus Group and Date</u> | <u>Most Important Workplace Know-How Skills</u> |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Retail 11/9/93 | Listening Seeing job as opportunity Communication Trainability Flexibility Being well-organized Grammar Basic math Initiative Logic/common sense Time management Enthusiasm |
| Retail 11/11/93 | Teamwork Honesty Work ethic Attendance Taking ownership Interpersonal skills Customer orientation Flexibility Problem solving |
| Services 11/12/93 | Attendance Basic math Punctuality Honesty; integrity Teamwork Basic reading Technical literacy Interpersonal skills Decisionmaking Initiative Taking ownership Willingness to learn |

| <u>Focus Group and Date</u> | <u>Most Important Workplace Know-How Skills</u> |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Health 11/16/93 | Problem solving; critical thinking Attendance Teamwork Willingness to serve Respect for organizational policies Respect confidentiality Job application skills Being well-organized Appropriate dress Flexibility] Dependability; accountability Honesty Efficient use of resources Writing Communication: speaking, listening |
| Nonprofit Organizations 11/18/93 | Attendance Honesty; integrity Productivity]Time management Respects diversity Courtesy Listening |
| Education 11/19/93 | Verbal/speaking Writing Working well with co-workers Problem solving Positive attitude Customer orientation Teamwork |
| Small Manufacturing 11/23/93 | Reading Basic math Measurement Verbal/speaking Writing Work ethic Dependability Teamwork Interpersonal; socialibiliity Problem solving |

| Focus Group and Date | Most Important Workplace Know-How Skills |
|---|---|
| Manufacturing and Nonprofits 12/3/93 | Sensitivity to others Quality Attendance Problem solving Willingness to learn Basic math Verbal communication: speaking and listening Teamwork Measurement Responsibility Goal orientation Following directions Customer orientation Economics |
| Public Sector 12/7/93 | Interpersonal skills; interaction w/public Basic math Writing Attendance Common sense Time management Respect for supervision/management Reading Trainability Desire to work; productivity Leadership |
| Services 12/9/93 | Logic Belief in excellence Common sense Taking ownership Reading Honesty Basic verbal Writing Customer service Positive attitude Computer literacy; keyboarding Ability to learn Teamwork Keeping personal life free of problems |

| <u>Focus Group and Date</u> | <u>Most Important Workplace Know-How Skills</u> |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Mixed Sectors 1/11/94 | Teamwork Writing Verbal/speaking Honesty Attendance Customer orientation Basic math Understand and embrace organization's "big picture" Ability to learn Cooperation Initiative Business finances; accounting Responsibility Respect diversity |
| Mixed Sectors 1/13/94 | Listening Writing Problem solving Teamwork Respect diversity Reading Self-esteem Work process Customer orientation Accuracy/quality Verbal/speaking Work ethic |

ENDNOTES

1. Note that they are also **learning know-how skills**.
2. Weber (1992) reviews these national studies.
3. The U.S. Department of Commerce report *1990 County Business Patterns* provides the following size distribution for establishments in Kalamazoo County:

| <u>Employment Size</u> | <u>Number of Establishments</u> | <u>Percentage of Establishments</u> |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| < 10 | 3675 | 68.5% |
| 10 - 19 | 826 | 15.4 |
| 20 - 49 | 536 | 10.0 |
| 50 - 99 | 181 | 3.4 |
| 100 - 249 | 109 | 2.0 |
| 250 - 499 | 26 | 0.5 |
| 500 + | 14 | 0.3 |

There are many reasons why the task force data is discrepant with these data. First of all, these data are on an establish basis, and the study's data is on a firm level. Second, the *County Business Patterns* data excludes government, railroad, and self-employed workers and it furthermore pertains to Kalamazoo County only.

4. The 103 focus group participants identified and listed a total of 2,007 skills. The minimum number of skills listed for a participant was 6 and the maximum was 48.
5. Note that the taxonomy that was developed differs also from all other studies that were reviewed by the Task Force. Again, this was because the responses were broader.
6. In perhaps half of the groups, all participants were from the "correct" sector. In the other half, 80-90 percent of the participants were from the "correct" sector.
7. Note that placing less emphasis (i.e., mentioning a skill less often than would be expected) does not mean that the skill is not important to the respondents from organizations in that sector. This analysis is attempting to separate "more important" from "less important".
8. Some groups voted on fewer than 7 skills; some individuals voted for fewer than their group's number of skills; and some individuals voted for more than 7.
9. In all cases, the skill received at least 3 votes from the group.

10. Subjective assessments may provide the most valuable information if they are accurate and unbiased. However, the accuracy and lack of bias are conditional on identifying a knowledgeable individual who is willing and able to give an accurate assessment and on the questions asked of the individual.

11. The "cost" to an employer of experiencing an absence is reallocating work or finding a replacement on short notice. Thus vacations were not considered an absence as long as they were scheduled ahead of time. Illnesses, however, were considered to be absences.

12. One focus group defined this to be a task with 4-5 steps.

REFERENCES

- Berman, P., et al. 1991. *Preparing for Idaho's Future*. Boise: The Idaho Education Project, Boise State University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 336 298).
- Carnevale, A. P., L. J. Gainer, and A. Meltzer. 1988. *Work Place Basics: The Skills Employers Want*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 299 462).
- Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. 1990. *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* Rochester, NY: National Center on Education and the Economy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 323 297).
- Commission on Workforce Quality and Labor Market Efficiency. 1989. *Investing in People: A Strategy to Address America's Workforce Crisis*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 307 506).
- Eguez, J., C. Huie, and P. Rickard. 1991. *Employability Competency System: Final Report*. San Diego, CA: Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 337 656).
- Governor's Advisory Council on Literacy. 1989. *Jobs without People: The Coming Crisis for Missouri's Workforce*. Jefferson City, MO: Governor's Advisory Council on Literacy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 319 952).
- Illinois Council on Vocational Education. 1991. *Toward a World-Class Workforce*. Springfield: ICOVE. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 338 820).
- Jobs for the Future, Inc. 1989. *Executive Report of the Jobs for Indiana's Future*. West Somerville, MA: Jobs for the Future. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 312 447).
- Kalamazoo County Quality Council. Unpublished planning documents. 1993.
- Loy Norrix Knights of the Future Milestone Team #1. "Employer Survey Results." Unpublished document. February 1992.
- Mehrens, William. "Michigan Employability Skills Technical Report." Michigan State University Working Paper, November 1989.

- Michigan State Board of Education. 1993. "Student Portfolio: A Guide for Assessing Employability Skills." Lansing, MI: Michigan State Board of Education.
- North Dakota Council on Vocational Education. 1989. *Maximizing Potential: For High-Quality Participation in the New Work Force*. Bismarck: NDCOVE. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 311 283).
- Ohio Department of Education. 1990. *Ohio's Future at Work*. Columbus: OH DE. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 323 407).
- Oregon Department of Education. 1991. "Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century." Salem: OR DE.
- Pennsylvania Economic Development Partnership. 1991. *A State Prepared: Developing Pennsylvania's Work Force*. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Economic Development Partnership.
- Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. 1992. *Learning a Living: A Blueprint for High Performance*. Washington, DC: Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, U.S. Department of Labor. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 346 348).
- U.S. Department of Commerce. 1990. *1990 County Business Patterns*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Vision 2000. 1993. "Exit Outcomes Project Informational Update." Unpublished document.
- Weber, James. 1992. "Selected Contemporary Work Force Reports: A Synthesis and Critique." Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.