

# Soft Skills Inventory (SSI)

## Administrators' Guide

### Introduction

This brief guide provides career counselors with additional information for professionals using the *Soft Skills Inventory (SSI)*. The *SSI* helps individuals identify the essential soft skills and strategies needed to ensure employees exhibit professionalism in the workplace. Employers today want employees with both the necessary job-related skills as well as what many refer to as soft skills.

Test takers can self-score and self-interpret the *SSI* without the use of any other materials, thus providing immediate results for the respondent and/or counselor. If your students or clients need additional help with soft skill development, the *SSI* is correlated with the *Soft Skills Solutions* booklets. (Please visit [JIST.com](http://JIST.com) for more information about purchasing this book.)

If you wish to compare your clients' or student's scores with others who have completed the assessment, the *SSI* has been normed on two populations: high school/college students and unemployed adults.

### Summary and Background

According to Cross and Lanaghan (2021), soft skills are “the personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. Simply put, they are the skills an employee needs to get along and work well with others” (p. v.). Casserly (2012) found that the number one characteristic employers desire in employees is professionalism. Professionalism encompasses many of the soft skills identified in the *SSI*. The following sections will describe workplace soft skills, the importance of soft skills, measuring soft skills, and how to utilize soft skills at work.

### What Are Soft Skills?

Though many previous research studies have focused on workplace soft skills, researchers still find it challenging to describe the essence of soft skills on a job. Because the workplace has become so technological, employees are more closely linked than ever before. Soft skills are the traits that enable employees to connect with others and build professional presence. Much like emotional intelligence, which is the capacity to express our own emotions and respond to

the emotions of those around us, soft skills include both personal and interpersonal skills. Examples of soft skills include having a positive attitude, effective time management, developing collaborative relationships, communication skills, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, critical observation, and conflict resolution.

Similarly, Batchedler (2012) describes soft skills as “positive personal and professional attributes that can enhance an individual’s performance both on the job and in life.” In contrast, hard skills are those required to perform the occupational requirements of a position. They suggest:

Soft skills are not learned in a classroom or within a defined period of time. Rather, they are something that an individual learns, hones, and improves throughout their lifetime, and with the help of a mentor. Unfortunately, they are often overlooked or ignored as not being as valuable as the hard skills. Seek out opportunities to improve your soft skills; this will improve your value to an employer and will improve your ability to be successful (p. 1).

For a long time, employers tended to overlook the importance of soft skills in the workplace. However, with demand for teamwork, improved relationships with customers, and innovative teams, soft skills are now as important as hard skills. McFarlin (n.d.) suggests that when describing workplace skills, most employers emphasize hard skills and abilities, training, and knowledge of specific skill sets. Examples of hard skills include math, writing ability, IQ, amount of training, and effectiveness in using technology. Hard skills like this are easily measured and categorized, but soft skills are a bit more complex. They are more fluid than concrete and are transferable to a variety of settings, including the workplace.

Although employees often overlook the importance of soft skills, these skills continue to play a vital role in the day-to-day operations of all organizations. Because of this, organizations are finding it vital that they place equal importance on both hard and soft skills during the hiring process for new employees. In addition, organizations are encouraging current employees to develop the soft skills they lack. The *SSI* (and *Soft Skills Solutions* booklet series) can help your employees to develop more effective soft skills.

## **The Importance of Workplace Soft Skills**

Many research studies describe the relevance of soft skills in the workplace. These studies suggest that soft skills are more important than traditional hard workplace skills. One of the first research studies that demonstrated the importance of soft skills is documented in *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (Goleman, 1995). Goleman conducted and interpreted psychological research to show that Emotional Quotient (EQ), contributes to success in work and life more than IQ. Contrary to IQ, Goleman believes that EQ can be developed and improved with the right training.

Amato (2013) cites an Accountemps survey of 2,100 American CFOs. Many respondents said that employees often fail to advance at work due to poor interpersonal skills (30%) and poor work ethic (25%). Soft skills are a necessary element of career advancement, effective leadership, and strong work ethic. However, 77% of CFOs consider developing soft skills competence to be extremely challenging.

Research (Beheshtifar & Norozy, 2013; Murnane, Willett, & Levy, 1995; Picker, 2015; Yu-Hsien, 2008) shows that soft skills account for as much as 85% of an individual's success, whereas traditional hard skills (academics, corporate job training, and IQ) only account for 15%. Because research substantiates the importance of soft skills in the workplace, soft skills are quickly becoming the new yardstick for measuring success.

According to Stevenson (2010), executives need employees with excellent soft skills. She sent a Hiring Criteria Index listing 15 of the most valued project management competencies to executives nationwide. The executives completed the HCI, and the results indicated that respondents were able to clearly identify six critical core competencies: leadership, the ability to communicate at multiple levels, verbal and written skills, professional attitude, and the ability to deal with ambiguity and change. These competencies indicate characteristics important to successful project management.

David Autor (2015) argues that new technologies generally increase the importance of soft skills and ambiguous tasks. Machines are generally better than humans at performing routine, codifiable tasks according to a set of explicit rules. However, people are still much better at open-ended tasks that require flexibility, teamwork, creativity, and judgment. Often, employees skillfully perform these tasks despite lacking any explicit understanding of rules.

### **Evidence of the Need for Soft Skills**

The National Association of Colleges and Employers' (2016) Job Outlook 2017 survey found that soft skills—those not defined by job role or technical knowledge (i.e. communication and teamwork)—were high on employers' wish lists for employees. In fact, 78% of the hiring managers who answered the survey want employees who can work well as part of a team and with a variety of personality types. 77% of managers look for employees who can think critically. Other soft skills managers listed include:

- writing proficiency (75%).
- strong work ethic (72%).
- verbal communication (70%).
- leadership (69%).

A PayScale (2016) survey focused on skills hiring managers struggle to find among prospective employees:

- 60% said new employees in their organization struggle with critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- 50% said employees don't have enough attention to detail.
- 46% said new workers need to improve communication skills.
- 44% said employees lack leadership ability.
- 36% said employees need to improve team-working skills.

## Measuring Soft Skills

When seeking employment or a promotion, soft skills are as important as the hard skills that are required to achieve success on the job. The problem is that soft skills, unlike hard employment skills, are more difficult to assess. Doyle (2019) concludes that soft skills are much more difficult to both define and measure because they often revolve around interpersonal interactions or “people” skills that help employees to interact successfully with others in the workplace.

Regardless of their job, all employees must interact effectively with supervisors, co-workers, customers, vendors, patients, mentors, students, and interns. Because of this, companies seek candidates with both hard and soft employability skills when hiring for most positions. Even if employees are highly competent in performing their job duties, they will not be as effective without adequate soft skills.

According to Deming (2017), soft skills are important predictors of earnings, promotions, and career advancements over time. The problem with identifying employees with effective soft skills lies in defining and measuring soft skills. Deming concludes that, lacking effective measures, employees make indirect inferences about soft skills. Therefore, it is necessary to provide an accurate measure of vital workplace soft skills.

While all measures show some variability in their ability to measure what they purport to measure, it is easier to determine valid, reliable measures for hard skills than soft skills. This is because hard skills are valued as the most critical factor for determining success. As soft skills become more important than many hard skills, it is necessary to determine a measure of workplace soft skills.

According to Deming, the scholarly consensus on the importance of various human skills is driven by how well these skills can be measured. He concludes that employees with access to reliable, valid measures of important soft skills such as professionalism and social intelligence, they could use soft skills more effectively than IQ to better predict labor market outcomes.

Scholarly consensus indicates that organizations ought to stop relying on convenient, off-the-shelf measures of soft skills and start creating metrics that are theoretically sound. It is necessary to create carefully developed measures that can undergo rigorous testing in a variety of field settings and cleanly indicate underlying constructs.

## **The Need for the SSI**

Employers need employees who possess a combination of effective hard and soft skills. Deming (2017) says that today's economists focus on the importance of soft skills for labor market success. Research indicates that these skills—also called *non-cognitive skills*—are important drivers of success in school and the workplace. There is a lack of understanding surrounding soft skills and how to define, measure, and develop them. He concluded that non-cognitive or soft workplace skills describe but are not predicted by IQ or achievement tests.

The *Soft Skills Inventory (SSI)* meets the need for a brief assessment that provides soft skills measures. The *SSI* helps people explore their efficiency in utilizing soft skills, which teaches them to be a valuable employee, utilize their strongest soft skills, and develop a plan for enhancing areas of soft skill weakness. The *SSI* is vital in the workplace because employees in the twenty-first century need a solid foundation of both hard and soft employment skills.

Research indicates that, while current and prospective employees often possess measurable academic backgrounds and know how to perform tasks required for their job, they lack the soft skills necessary for success in the modern workplace. Both educational institutions and employers are calling for school reforms that require schools to provide training in both career-related academics and the soft skills necessary to succeed in today's global workplace. The soft skill set used for the *SSI* consists of six scales: Goals Achievement, Communication Skills, Professional Presence, Self-Management, Collaborative Relationships, and Leadership & Ethics.

Even though soft skills are important for employees to possess, it is difficult to find an assessment that accurately measures workplace soft skills. The *SSI* helps people explore and identify the specific areas where they have strong soft skills and weaker areas that can be developed with skill enhancement.

The *SSI* is intended for use in any program that provides career counseling. These include job search assistance and vocational guidance like comprehensive career guidance programs, employment counseling programs, rehabilitation counseling programs, college counseling centers, college career and placement offices, high school guidance programs, outplacement programs, prisons and parole-oriented programs, military transition programs, school-to-work programs, welfare-to-work programs, and employee development programs.

## **Administration and Interpretation of the SS/**

The SS/ has been designed for ease-of-use. It can be easily scored and interpreted by the respondent. The assessment consists of 48 items grouped into six scales that are representative of the six soft skills most valued by employers. Each assessment also includes scoring directions, an interpretation guide, and a success plan for setting and working toward achievable goals.

The SS/ can be administered to individuals or to groups. It is written for individuals at or above the eighth-grade level according to the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level Scale. Since none of the items are gender-specific, the SS/ is appropriate for a variety of audiences and populations.

### ***Administering the SS/***

The SS/ can be self-administered, and a pencil or pen is the only other item necessary for administering, scoring, and interpreting the inventory. The first page of the inventory contains spaces for normative data including name, date, phone, and email. Instruct each respondent to fill in the necessary information. Then read the description and directions on the first page while all respondents follow along. Test administrators should ensure that each respondent clearly understands all the instructions and the response format. Respondents should be instructed to mark their responses directly on the inventory booklet. The SS/ requires approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

*The SS/* is simple to take and can be easily scored and interpreted. Each assessment contains 48 statements that describe employees who possess excellent workplace soft skills. Each statement asks the test taker to rate how well the statement describes them on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from “Very Descriptive” to “Not Descriptive.” The SS/ also includes scoring directions, a scoring profile, descriptions of the six workplace soft skill categories and an interpretive guide that helps test takers connect their results to various strategies that can help them become more efficient in navigating the twenty-first century workplace. In addition, space is provided for test takers to develop an action plan to set goals for personal and professional development.

The SS/ uses a series of steps to guide the respondent. In Step 1, instruct respondents to circle the response that best represents their answers for each of the 48 statements. Then, ask respondents to read each statement and circle the response that best describes them based on the following Likert scale levels:

**3 = Very Descriptive    2 = Somewhat Descriptive    1 = Not Descriptive**

Each of the scales measured by the SS/ is made up of eight items that characterize the skills and abilities needed to develop effective soft skills.

In Step 2 respondents add their scores for each color-coded scale. Step 3 provides a chart that allows test-takers to chart their scores from 8-24. Results

are recorded on the *SSI* profile. This profile helps respondents to better understand their scores. Step 4 helps test takers interpret and understand what their scores mean. It provides descriptions of the six scales, suggestions, and journaling questions to help test takers explore and write about their soft skill strengths and weaknesses. Encourage test takers to complete all questions. Step 5 encourages test takers to develop an action plan and apply what they have learned to help them become more productive employees. Lastly, a variety of Internet and print resources are provided to help respondents and administrators gather additional information about developing workplace soft skills.

### ***Understanding and Interpreting SSI Scores***

The *SSI* yields content-referenced scores in the form of raw scores. A raw score, in this case, is the total of the numbers circled for each of the eight self-reported soft skills and skill statements for the six scales. The performance of individual respondents or groups of respondents can only be evaluated in terms of the mean scores on each of the scales.

For each of the scales on the *SSI*:

**Scores from 8-13 are LOW** and indicate that you need to do more to develop soft skills in this essential category, and you need coaching to become a more effective employee. The activities in Step 4 will help you to develop specific soft skills for becoming a better employee.

**Scores from 14-18 are AVERAGE** and indicate that you have developed some soft skills in this essential category, but you could use some additional coaching to become a more effective employee. The activities in Step 4 will help you to develop specific soft skills for becoming a better employee.

**Scores from 19-24 are HIGH** and indicate that you have developed a great deal of soft skills in this essential category. Congratulations! The activities in Step 4 will help you develop even more sophisticated soft skills for becoming a better employee.

Respondents generally have one or two areas where they score in the high or high-average categories. Respondents should concentrate on exploring their strengths and weaknesses first. However, they should also look for ways to use their scores to increase their chances of workplace success. To encourage this, instruct respondents to complete all activities in Step 4. This will help them to think about important action steps to develop more effective soft skills.

Remember that it is not necessary to score high on every scale on the *SSI*. This assessment is designed to help people explore their strengths as well as weaknesses in the six essential workplace soft skill categories. Some respondents may need to strengthen only one area to be successful. Skills areas

where respondents exhibit high scores can be developed to further enhance their professional presence.

On the other hand, some respondents may score in the average or low ranges for most or all the six scales. If this is the case, the person may need to do a lot of work to develop more effective workplace soft skills. Step 4 of the inventory provides activities that are designed to help test takers enhance any or all of their soft skills.

### ***Scales Used on the SSI***

Because the primary objective of this instrument is to help people explore their strengths and weaknesses in a variety of soft skills, the *SSI* is organized around six scales that represent the soft skills most critical for employee success. These scales are representative of the topics presented in the *Soft Skills Solutions* booklets. They are as follows:

#### **I. Goals Achievement**

High scores in this category indicate that you set goals to guide you in the direction you need to go. You use goals to help you stay focused on the future and keep you motivated to continue when you encounter setbacks. You set goals to help you achieve, not just hope for, what you want in life. You have a mentor who helps you in working to achieve your career goals.

#### **II. Communication Skills**

High scores in this category indicate that you possess strong communication skills. You are skilled at navigating difficult situations by communicating well with hard-to-please coworkers, customers or clients, and bosses. You use effective verbal, nonverbal, and written communication skills to arrive at a positive outcome.

#### **III. Professional Presence**

High scores in this category indicate that you demonstrate professional presence at work. You present yourself in a manner that reflects positively on you and your organization, greet all people professionally, and maintain a professional image. You are courteous and ensure that you use e-mail and phone etiquette appropriately.

#### **IV. Self-Management**

High scores in this category suggest that you possess the ability to manage yourself in the workplace. You understand the importance of time management by prioritizing your work, getting tasks completed on time, and planning and scheduling projects. You recognize and manage interruptions at work while completing tasks and remaining productive. You are reliable, punctual, and take the initiative when possible. You are responsible and accountable for organizing and committing to your work.

## **V. Collaborative Relationships**

High scores in this category indicate that you form and maintain collaborative relationships with others at work. You appreciate being part of a successful team and display the characteristics of a capable team player. You abide by the corporate hierarchy, understand policies, and know what you need to do to move up. You work well with others in the workplace and know how to resolve conflicts.

## **VI. Leadership & Ethics**

High scores in this category indicate that you are an effective leader and demonstrate ethical behavior. You display the characteristics of a leader and constantly look for ways to enhance your leadership skills. You make ethical decisions based on a system of moral principles and know how to behave in ethical situations. You rely on a code of ethics when making decisions and both understand and fit into the company's culture.

## **Illustrative Case Using the SSI**

Megan is working as an office manager for a large corporation. She has been in her current position for five years and is beginning to wonder why she has been passed over for promotions. She feels like she does a lot of work and gets her work done on time, but never seems to get promoted. Her evaluations are okay but not great. She goes back through her past evaluations and notices a trend. The positive aspects of her evaluations all say the same thing: Megan does an adequate job, is nice to co-workers and customers, and needs very little supervision. On the other hand, the negative aspects of her evaluations suggest that she needs to improve her professional presence within the organization. Her supervisor recommends she complete the *Soft Skills Solutions* program to develop professional presence by enhancing her soft skills. To begin, she completed the SSI to explore her soft skill strengths and weaknesses.

Her scores on the SSI are as follows (scores range from 8-24):

**Goals Achievement - 17**  
**Communication Skills - 19**  
**Professional Presence - 18**  
**Self-Management - 20**  
**Collaborative Relationships - 16**  
**Leadership & Ethics - 13**

Megan's SSI results show two scores in the high range: Self-Management and Communication Skills. These scores suggest that Megan has developed effective soft skills in these two areas but can benefit from further developing them. Remember that Megan's objective is to heighten her professional presence. To do so, she decides to develop more effective time management skills (self-management). She plans to better manage interruptions and better structure her priorities. Megan has good communication skills but believes she can be a better communicator if she starts to listen more attentively and embraces criticism more readily.

On the other hand, Megan scored in the low range on the Leadership & Ethics scale. This suggests that she needs to work on being an effective leader and demonstrating ethical behavior in the workplace. Megan feels like she is not a natural leader but believes that with practice she can get better at leading and motivating others. She decides to start seeking out leadership opportunities by asking her supervisor for leadership prospects. She begins by learning to lead teams to accomplish small tasks. She can then move from small tasks to larger projects. She aims to display the characteristics of a leader and constantly seek opportunities to enhance her leadership skills, including taking a leadership course offered by her organization.

Megan believes that she makes ethical decisions based on a system of moral principles. She feels like she needs to continue to behave well in ethically challenging situations. She needs to develop a code of ethics and rely on this code when making decisions. Megan also feels like she needs to make more of an effort to understand and fit into her company's culture. She believes that attending retreats and after-work activities will help.

The career counselor working with Megan should aim to help her enhance strengths and develop areas of weaknesses to create a more professional presence. The career counselor should share the suggestions and journaling items provided in Section IV to help Megan build and/or enhance her skills in deficit areas.

## Research and Development

This section outlines the stages involved in the development of the *SSI*. It includes guidelines for development, item construction, item selection, item standardization, and norm development and testing.

### ***Guidelines for Development***

The *SSI* was developed to fill the need for a quick, reliable instrument to help people explore their career readiness and ability to demonstrate excellent workplace soft skills.

The *SSI* consists of six scales, each containing eight representative statements. It provides test takers with information about their ability to positively impact the workplace by demonstrating great soft skills. The *SSI* was developed to meet the following guidelines:

1. **The instrument should measure a wide range of soft skill areas.** To help people identify their workplace soft skills, six scales were developed to represent essential workplace soft skills reviewed in the literature. The six scales on the *SSI* include Goals Achievement, Communication Skills, Professional Presence, Self-Management, Collaborative Relationships, and Leadership & Ethics.

2. **The instrument should be easy to use.** *The SSI* uses a three-point Likert scale in a question-answer format that allows respondents to quickly determine their levels of workplace soft skills. The easy-to-use format makes it simple to complete, score, and interpret the assessment and helps respondents explore their strengths and weaknesses in achieving career goals, communicating effectively, creating a professional presence, managing self and time, developing collaborative relationships, and leading and demonstrating ethical behavior.
3. **The instrument should be easy to administer, score, and interpret.** The *SSI* utilizes an accessible format that guides test-takers through the five steps necessary to complete the *SSI*.
4. **The instrument should apply to people of all genders.** Norms for the *SSI* have been developed for people of all genders.
5. **The instrument should contain items applicable to people of all ages.** Norms developed for the *SSI* show an age range of 17-60. Separate norms were developed for students and employed adults.

### ***Scale Development***

The scales on the *SSI* are correlated with the booklets in the *Soft Skills Solutions* (Cross and Lanaghen, 2021) series. Table 1 shows the correlation between the booklets and the scales on the *SSI*.

<b>Table 1 Correlations between <i>Soft Skills Solutions</i> and <i>SSI</i> Categories</b>	
<b><i>Soft Skills Solutions</i> Booklets</b>	<b>Individual <i>SSI</i> Categories</b>
Booklet 1: <i>Goals &amp; Attitude</i>	Goals Achievement
Booklet 2: <i>Professional Communication Skills</i>	Communication Skills
Booklet 3: <i>Professional Etiquette &amp; Image</i>	Professional Presence
Booklet 4: <i>Keys to Self-Management</i>	Self-Management
Booklet 5: <i>Teamwork &amp; Motivation</i> Booklet 6: <i>Workplace Relationships &amp; Conflict Negotiations</i>	Collaborative Relationships
Booklet 7: <i>Leadership &amp; Ethics</i>	Leadership & Ethics

As indicated by the correlation between the *Soft Skills Solutions* booklets and the *SSI* demonstrated in Table 1, the scales on the *SSI* share many characteristics with frameworks developed for researching and exploring workplace soft skills. These research programs reinforce the choice of the six scales included in the *SSI*.

## **Item Selection**

A large list of items representative of the six major scales on the *SSI* was developed and later revised. Items that did not correlate well were then eliminated. In developing items for the *SSI*, Liptak used language that is currently being used in the career and job search literature, research, and job training and counseling programs. After the items were developed, they were reviewed and edited for clarity, style, and effectiveness in allowing respondents to identify and explore the quality of their workplace soft skills. Items were additionally screened to eliminate any reference to gender, sex, race, culture, ethnicity, or religion.

## **Item Standardization**

The *SSI* is designed to measure important workplace soft skills as well as teach strategies and tactics to close the gap between respondents' current and desired workplace soft skill competencies. To create a normative data set that provides an accurate representation of the soft skills necessary in today's workplace, high school, college, and unemployed adult populations completed drafts of the *SSI*. Experts in the field of career counseling sorted the resulting items into categories to ensure item standardization. From this research, a final pool of 10 items for each category on the *SSI* was administered for statistical validation.

This initial research yielded information about the relevance of items to each *SSI* scale, respondents' reactions to inventory format and content, and respondents' reactions to ease of *SSI* administration, scoring, and profiling. The data was then analyzed with Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficients to identify the items that best represented the scales on the *SSI*. Based on this analysis, eight items were selected for the final version of the assessment. The items accepted for the final form of the *SSI* were again reviewed for content, clarity, and style. Careful examination was conducted to eliminate any possible gender, sex, racial, cultural, ethnic, or religious biases.

## **Reliability**

Reliability is often defined as the consistency with which a test measures what it purports to measure. Evidence for the reliability of a test may be presented in terms of reliability coefficients, test-retest correlations, and interscale correlations as exhibited in Tables 2, 3, and 4. In Table 2, the *SSI* showed statistically significant internal consistency validity with Cronbach's alpha correlations ranging from 0.879-0.910. All six of these correlations were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. To establish test-retest reliability, 49 people in the sample population were re-tested one month after the original testing using the *SSI* (See Table 3). Test-retest correlations for the *SSI* ranged from 0.804-0.922. All these correlations were also statistically significant at the .01 level, demonstrating that the *SSI* retains reliability across time. Table 4 shows the correlations between *SSI* scales. The correlations between scales were low, indicating that there was very little overlap in item content. Understandably, the *SSI* showed the largest interscale correlations between the Collaborative Relationships and Communication Skills scales (0.223) and the Goals Achievement and Self-

Management scales (0.151). All other interscale correlations were much smaller, substantiating the evidence that the *SSI* scales are independent of one another. In fact, many of the scales had negative correlations.

### **Validity**

Validity is often defined as the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. Evidence of validity for the *SSI* is presented in the form of means and standard deviations from several populations.

### **Students**

Table 5 shows *SSI* scale means and standard deviations for the high school and college students who completed the *SSI*. Women scored highest on the Leadership & Ethics scale (M = 19.80), followed by the Collaborative Relationships scale (M = 18.57) and Goals Achievement scale (M = 18.29). Women scored in the high range on the Leadership & Ethics scale. This suggests that women tend to be effective leaders and demonstrate ethical behavior. They can effectively lead others in the completion of tasks and seek out ways to enhance their leadership skills. They make ethical decisions based on their own systems of moral principles and know how to behave in ethically challenging situations. Their scores on the Collaborative Relationships and Goals Achievement scales were in the very high average range. This suggests that they are competent at developing collaborative relationships with others and tend to set goals to help them stay focused on their professional future and remain motivated when they encounter setbacks.

Women scored lowest on the Communication Skills scale (M = 17.08). This suggests that they need to develop competence in navigating difficult situations by communicating better with coworkers, customers or clients, and bosses. They need to develop effective verbal, nonverbal, and written communication skills to enhance their professional presence in the workplace.

Men scored lower than women on four of the six scales. They scored highest on the Professional Presence scale (M = 19.03), followed by the Collaborative Relationships scale (M = 18.27) and Communication Skills scale (M = 18.11). Men scored in the high range on the Professional Presence scale, suggesting that men tend to demonstrate professional presence when at work. They present themselves in a way that reflects positively on both themselves and their organizations. They greet people professionally and maintain a professional image. They are courteous and ensure that they use e-mail and phone etiquette appropriately. Men scored in the very high average range on the Collaborative Relationships and Communication Skills scales. This suggests that they possess good communication skills and can build successful collaborative relationships at work.

Men scored lowest on the Goals Achievement scale (M = 16.06). Although this score was average, it was much lower than their other scores. This suggests that they should develop competency in setting and completing goals to guide them in

their careers. They need to work on setting and using goals to help them focus on their professional futures and remain motivated when they encounter setbacks.

Overall, students completing the *SSI* scored in the very high average range for all six scales. Their highest combined score was on the Leadership & Ethics scale (M =18.81). This suggests that, while they already possess effective leadership skills, they should further develop their competencies to score in the high range on the Leadership & Ethics scale. Their lowest combined score was on the Goals Achievement scale (M =17.18), suggesting that they should prioritize setting and utilizing goals to further their careers and be more productive in the workplace.

### ***Unemployed Adults***

Table 6 shows *SSI* scale means and standard deviations for unemployed adults who completed the *SSI*. Women scored highest on the Collaborative Relationships scale (M =19.44), followed by the Leadership & Ethics scale (M = 17.84) and Communication Skills scale (M = 17.46). Women scored in the high range on the Collaborative Relationships scale, suggesting that they tend to form and maintain successful collaborative relationships with others at work. They appreciate being part of a successful team and abide by the corporate hierarchy, understand policies, and know what they need to do to move up. They work well with others and know how to resolve conflicts. Women scored in the high average range on the Leadership & Ethics and Communication Skills scales. This suggests that they are skilled at developing collaborative relationships and can use their relationship-building abilities to become effective leaders and communicate well with others. However, because these scores were in the average range, women should further develop these skills to become even more effective.

Women scored lowest on the Professional Presence scale (M =16.40). This score is in the average range, suggesting that women should work to improve their professional presence. They need to develop competencies in presenting themselves in a manner that reflects positively on their organizations, greeting all people professionally, and maintaining a professional image.

Men scored lower than women on four of the six scales, and all their scores were in the average range. They scored highest on the Collaborative Relationships scale (M =18.17), followed by the Self-Management (M = 17.77) scale and Communication Skills scale (M = 17.38). Their score on the Collaborative Relationship scale suggests that, while men tend to be most competent in forming and maintaining collaborative relationships with others at work, they should continue to develop these skills. They appreciate being part of a successful team and abide by the corporate hierarchy, understand policies, and know what they need to do to move up. They work well with others in the workplace and know how to resolve conflicts. Men also scored in the average range on the Self-Management and Communications Skills scales. This suggests that they are effective in managing themselves in the workplace and

demonstrating communication skills. However, they should continue to develop these skills to be even more effective.

Men scored lowest on the Professional Presence scale (M = 16.68). Although this score was average, it was much lower than their other scores. This suggests that they should work to better demonstrate professional presence at work. They need to work on presenting themselves in a manner that reflects positively on the organization, greeting all people professionally, and maintaining a professional image.

Overall, unemployed adults completing the SS/ scored in the average range for all six scales. Their highest combined score was on the Collaborative Relationships scale (M =18.79). This suggests that, while they are developing skills in building workplace relationships, they should continue to develop these skills. They scored lowest on the Professional Presence scale (M =16.54), suggesting that they should prioritize presenting themselves in a more professional manner in the workplace, maintaining a professional image, and demonstrating professional email and phone etiquette.

<b>TABLE 2 SS/ Internal Consistency (Cronbach’s Alpha Correlations)*</b>	
<b>Scale</b>	<b>Correlation Coefficient**</b>
Goals Achievement	0.901
Communication Skills	0.910
Professional Presence	0.887
Self-Management	0.904
Collaborative Relationships	0.879
Leadership & Ethics	0.908

\* N = 75 Students and Unemployed Adults

\*\* Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level

**TABLE 3 SS/ Stability (Test-Retest Reliability)\*+**

Scale	Correlation**
Goals Achievement	0.889
Communication Skills	0.804
Professional Presence	0.828
Self-Management	0.870
Collaborative Relationships	0.922
Leadership & Ethics	0.919

\* N = 49

+ One Month after original testing

\*\* Correlations were significant at the 0.01 level

**TABLE 4 SS/ Interscale Correlations (N = 76)**

Scales	Goals Achievement	Communication Skills	Professional Presence	Self-Management	Collaborative Relationships	Leadership & Ethics
Goals Achievement	1					
Communication Skills	0.105	1				
Professional Presence	-0.127	-0.218	1			
Self-Management	0.151	-0.121	0.142	1		
Collaborative Relationships	-0.143	0.223	-0.116	-0.119	1	
Leadership & Ethics	-0.122	-0.128	0.148	-0.134	-0.161	1

**TABLE 5 SS/ Means and Standard Deviations for Students**

Scales	Total (N = 231)		Female (N = 116)		Male (N = 115)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Goals Achievement	17.18	3.2	18.29	3.1	16.06	2.9
Communication Skills	17.59	3.0	17.08	3.0	18.11	2.9
Professional Presence	18.16	2.6	17.29	2.2	19.03	2.6
Self-Management	17.21	2.8	17.22	3.0	17.21	2.7
Collaborative Relationships	18.42	3.0	18.57	2.8	18.27	3.1
Leadership & Ethics	18.81	3.0	19.80	2.5	17.80	3.1

**TABLE 6 SS/ Means and Standard Deviations for Unemployed Adults**

Scales	Total (N = 249)		Female (N = 121)		Male (N = 128)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Goals Achievement	17.00	3.1	17.03	3.2	16.96	3.1
Communication Skills	17.41	2.8	17.46	2.8	17.38	2.8
Professional Presence	16.54	2.3	16.40	2.2	16.68	2.4
Self-Management	17.39	2.7	16.99	2.7	17.77	2.7
Collaborative Relationships	18.79	2.7	19.44	2.3	18.17	2.9
Leadership & Ethics	17.52	3.0	17.84	3.2	17.21	2.6

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## About the Author

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