

RESEARCH REPORT

WHAT DO EMPLOYERS THINK ABOUT SOFT SKILLS?



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CAP Youth Empowerment Institute, Kenya (CAP YEI) is a non-government organization started in 2010 to train and support vulnerable youth in order to secure dignified livelihood opportunities. This is done using the Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST) model. BEST is a market based, demand driven employability skills

training model that works by paying close attention to employer needs, designing and co-delivering skills training programs that address these needs and helping to link trained youth and employer partners through an active support and mentorship system. The model lays an equal emphasis on offering technical skills as well as on soft skills. In adapting its model to Kenya, CAP YEI has partnered closely with the Mastercard Foundation through a collaboration that started in 2011 and continues today. This research is an important extension of this partnership. CAP YEI has also entered into many new partnerships with diverse organisations including GIZ, USAID, EU and others to further address the challenge of youth unemployment.



The Technical and Vocational Education and Training Curriculum Development, Assessment and Certification Council (TVET CDACC) is a body corporate established under the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Act, No. 29 of 2013 laws of Kenya. The Council is mandated to undertake design and development of curricula for the TVET training institutions' examination, assessment and competence certification, and to

advise the Government on related matters. This is in line with Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2015 that embraces Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) system.

Abstract

Many graduates of TVET institutions, as well as trainers and parents, consider gaining hard (technical) skills to be the most important learning outcome. However, employers are looking for a blend of both hard and soft skills; they are looking for graduates who are ethical, and self-coordinated, and who have good communication skills. The lack of these soft skills in the graduates has resulted in many of them missing out on employment opportunities, or failing to do well when they are hired. Many TVET institutions do not have trainers with soft skills to properly train students, even though these are skills that are in demand with employers. Therefore, most TVET graduates lack sufficient competences to enter or survive in the labor market.

Soft skills are described as career traits that employees should possess, such as leadership skills, communication skills, a positive work attitude and teamwork. In the twenty-first century workforce, soft skills are critical for the business sector. In Kenya, the general sentiment of employers is that graduates fail to meet labor market expectations because they are lacking in soft skills. The soft skills gap is said to have caused the high unemployment statistics of graduates. This study sought to find out the employers' perspectives on soft skills and contribute to the body of knowledge on the critical soft skill factors that skill graduates should have from the employers' point of view. The objective of this study was to explore and examine the importance of soft skills competencies in the Kenyan workplace, and to identify critical soft skills that are needed by Kenyan employers. The study also sought to establish how and to what extent employers signal the demand for soft skills when it comes to hiring new employees. The findings of this study will be helpful to TVET institutions and other institutions of higher learning because the findings reported will help them identify the most critical soft skills that these institutions should emphasize in their curriculum in order to lead to improved learning and livelihood outcomes.

A word on Terminology

Many terms are used to refer to soft skills, although most of them hold a broadly similar meaning. These include 'life skills', '21st century skills' and 'transferable skills', among others. The authors of this report have chosen to use the term 'soft skills'. Where other terms are used in the report, this is often in reference to a specific study or to the CAP YEI curriculum, which uses the term 'life skills' to refer to soft skills. In all cases, for the purpose of this research, the terms 'soft skills', 'life skills' and 'transferable skills', where used, should be understood to have the same meaning.

Foreword

This is the final report of a research project carried out by the CAP Youth Empowerment Institute (CAP YEI) and the TVET Curriculum Development Assessment and Certification Council (TVET CDACC) in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. The purpose of the research was to gain an understanding of employers' understanding and perception of soft skills in Kenya, and to find out which soft skills the employers value most in their employees. The research builds on many years of work by the three organizations in the field of youth employability; work which has very often highlighted soft skills as a critical factor in the success of programs that seek to address the challenge of youth unemployment.

For instance, research commissioned by GIZ YouMatch (a regional program that addresses the challenge of jobs mismatch in Africa and the Middle East) in 2017 focused on the potential of soft skills scalability through the public education system. The research, which was carried out by the same researchers (Ondieki, Kahihu and Muthoni) responsible for the current study, built partly on the Mastercard Foundation 'Skills at Scale,' 2017, research that had recommended important ideas for life skills scale up. The GIZ research demonstrated that it is possible to successfully integrate a life skills curriculum into the Government TVET system and achieve learning outcomes similar to those of a private organization like CAP YEI. The research however raised a number of issues, including the need to answer the question, *What is life skills?* from an employer's perspective. Answering this question allows for a better alignment of skills curricula with those skills, attitudes and behaviors that employers expect employees to model in the world of work.

This research also contributes to ongoing efforts to address the pressing challenge of youth unemployment by shining a light on the critical question of employer engagement in skills delivery and support, as well as in addressing the important challenge of skills mismatch. For CAP YEI the findings provide an important validation of its life skills curriculum from the point of view of employers and will contribute to the regular reviews that the organization carries out to make its programs and model more relevant to the needs of youth, employers and communities. For CDACC the research results will contribute ideas and perspective to aid in ongoing TVET reforms in Kenya, especially the implementation of the Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) framework approach, which now requires that soft skills be a mandatory component in all technical skills training programs.

The authors also hope that the many actors and stakeholders in the education and youth employability sectors will find in this report useful ideas that could help them in their own work. This is especially important in creating the close partnership between employers and skills providers that must exist if the implementation of responsive, demand led, skills training approaches in Africa is to succeed.

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Abbreviations

BEST	Basic Employability Skills Training
CAP YEI	CAP Youth Empowerment Institute Kenya
CBET	Competency Based Education and Training
CIES	Comparative and International Education Society
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
IYLDP	Individual Youth Learning Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SACCOS	Savings and Credit Co-Operative Society
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TVET CDACC	Technical and Vocational Education and Training Curriculum Development Assessment and Certification Council
UMN	University of Minnesota
VTC	Vocational Training Centres
YEFG	Youth Employment Funders Group

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Executive Summary

Due to increased competitive pressure, employers across different sectors have identified a strong need for non-technical skills at work. Some of these include problem solving skills, teamwork skills, communication skills, time management, and cultural adaptability (Bailey, 2014; Grieve, 2013; Gillard, 2009; Moss and Tilly, 1996). Interpersonal and communication skills, including listening skills, are particularly highlighted with respect to the hiring and promotion of employees in a variety of industries, suggesting that these skills are highly valued by employers (Gillard, 2009; Reinsch and Gardner, 2014; Grieve, 2013).

A common complaint amongst many employers in Kenya today is that graduates of skills training institutions lack a positive attitude towards work and cannot communicate well. Poor time management, lack of proper work ethics and inability to work in teams are commonly cited problems. A common sentiment of Kenyan employers is that many graduates fail to meet the demands of the workplace largely because they lack soft skills, even when they are technically qualified. This has become an issue of such grave concern that many businesses are forced to invest resources in training the already trained graduates in skills including teamwork, creativity, following instructions, interpersonal skills and communication skills.

The objectives of this research project were: i) to investigate employers understanding of the definition of 'soft skills' and their level of commitment to their acquisition by employees; ii) to identify the soft skills most valued by employers, and how they signal these preferences to the labor market; iii) to validate the Life skills curriculum and approach used by CAP YEI from an employers' point of view; iv) to build on the body of knowledge on soft skills that has recently emerged from the work of organizations such as the Mastercard Foundation, CAP YEI and others; and v) to derive lessons and give recommendations to employers, the Government, TVET institutions and development actors.

The study utilized two different approaches to collect data. The first one was a purposive sample of 1,364 employers drawn from across the country, who were asked to give their views on soft skills by either completing a physical questionnaire (89.7%) or an online version of the same (10.3%). This survey took place over a period of three months. Of the respondents sampled, 64% were male while 36% were female. This phase of the research employed a mixed method approach involving self-completed questionnaires as well as face to face interviews.

The second approach was a quantitative and qualitative desktop analysis of job advertisements that were placed in four print and online media platforms in Kenya over the same three-month period. 1,417 job advertisements were analyzed to indicate to what extent, if at all, soft skills were indicated as job requirements. While the purpose of the first approach was to directly elicit employers' views and preferences about soft skills, the second approach was meant to indicate to what extent employers were signaling these preferences to the labor market through job advertisements. The quantitative data was analyzed through simple regression using SPSS software. The qualitative data was analyzed manually using themes, quotes, context and triangulation.

Employer Questionnaire and Interview

Of the 1,364 respondents who completed the research questionnaires, 90.3% were from the private sector, while government, NGOs and parastatals accounted for 3.3%, 2% and 0.1% respectively. The remaining 4.3% comprised of SACCOS (Savings and Credit Co-Operative Societies), foreign government organizations, churches and mosques.

The respondents were spread across 20 industries/sectors with Retail Services providing the largest sample at 22.4%, followed by Financial Services at 8.7%, Hospitality at 6.7%, Construction at 5.4% and Education at 5.3%. The survey covered more than 90 major and minor towns across the country. Five of these account for 36% of the total responses, with Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, accounting for 17.2%.

The respondents mainly comprised managers (27.7%), followed by supervisors (16.8%), and proprietors/owners (10.2%). Human resource departments accounted for only 1.3%. This research was

targeting respondents who had a hiring and/or firing decision making authority, therefore including supervisors and managers. 59.2% of the respondents were involved in making hiring decisions, of which 56.6 % of them were, in addition, involved in making firing decisions. It was also observed that many micro and small enterprises interviewed did not have a human resource department.

The research found that 85% of the respondents had been trained in soft skills. Most of these respondents learnt soft skills in Colleges and Universities (55.6%), and others (44.1%) learnt soft skills at their place of work. This was further evidence that employers place great value on soft skills and seem to understand their importance to their organizations' productivity, and that they are already investing resources to equip their staff with them. When asked to rate soft skills on a scale from *not important* to *very important*, a large majority of employers (90.9%) perceive soft skills as *very important*.

When rating the importance of soft skills on a scale ranging from *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree* and *strongly disagree*, the top three highest rated statements, in which respondents *strongly agreed* with were: i) Soft skills contribute to my company/organization's productivity (70.2%); ii) Institutions of higher learning should incorporate soft skills in their programs (60.3%); and iii) Soft skills should be taught as early as possible in a person's life (59%).

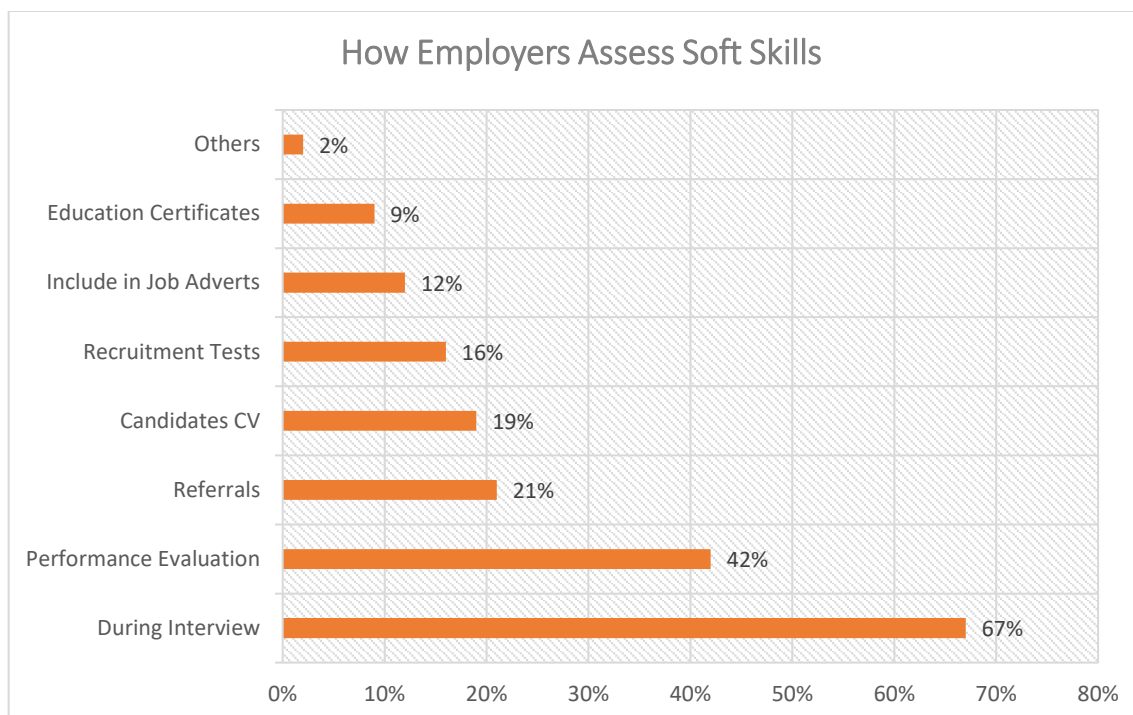
Although a small number of employers (35.9%) think that "employers have a responsibility to train their staff in soft skills," the majority (60.3%) feel this is the role of learning institutions. Further, employers prefer that soft skills should be taught early in life, a clear support for the integration of soft skills in the basic Education sector. The research found out that about 92.3% of employers support their employees to acquire soft skills by using the following methods: *one-on-one-coaching* (55.4%), *in-house training* (52.2%), *mentorship* (43.4%), *team building* 38.3%, and *motivation talks* 34.7%.

The respondents offered more than 2,000 terms to describe what 'soft skills' means to them. The most preferred terms were: *honesty*, *discipline*, *communication skills*, *team work* and *integrity*. The same terms were also reflected under several other question responses as well as from the analysis of job advertisements. This shows that the triangulation of top soft skill preferences that the researchers later came up with is fairly well supported through these unprompted responses. Of these terms the most popular one, with the highest mentions relate to *integrity* and *team work*, two soft skills that appear in the top five in most cases and were often mentioned during face to face interviews.

This research also showed that in using the term 'communication' the majority of respondents were referring to verbal communication. For instance, when asked to select from a list of the most important soft skills for their company/organization, 58.6% picked 'effective verbal communication' while only 37.4% picked 'effective written communication.'

Finally, the majority of terms used to describe soft skills by employers seem to refer to distinct and observable types of behavior. This would mean that employers understand soft skills to imply a set of behaviors that people should exhibit, rather than unseen qualities that they are supposed to have within them. Therefore, training programs that focus on theoretical delivery, failing to offer practical skills or simulate desired behavior change, are not likely to meet employers' approval. The priority outcomes of soft skills curricula in the TVET system must therefore be positive work behavior.

Most employers (67%) assess the presence of the right soft skills in potential employees during the interview process. Performance evaluations (42%) that are conducted while at work are also used to inform employers whether the employees possess the appropriate soft skills. Companies rarely rely on referrals (21%), recruitment tests (16%), educational certificates (9%), resumes (19%), or job adverts (12%) for this purpose, as shown in the figure below.



According to the research, Kenyan employers prefer to hire staff from TVET institutions (technical colleges, 33% and professional colleges, 30%)¹, local Kenyan universities (28%), and technical universities (22%), in that order. Only a few of them prefer candidates from overseas universities (3%)². However, it should be noted that they hire more high school leavers (21%) than they hire people trained in Vocational Training Centers (15%). This is not surprising as firstly, secondary schools provide the largest pool for entry level labor; secondly, VTCs have suffered from a pervasive negative perception by parents, youth and the public, who respond by staying away, resulting in very low enrollment rates and poor capacity utilization.

Most employers (63%) say they prefer to hire their employees from these institutions because they tend to possess desired attributes, most of which are oriented towards soft skills such as they: are more competent (52%), have a positive attitude (42%), are more productive 39%, learn faster (38%) and show initiative (33%) as shown in the table below.

Employers' reasons for hiring from preferred institutions

Reasons for preference	No. of times chosen	Percentage of total (N=1364)
More competent	715	52%
A positive attitude	567	42%
More productive	529	39%
Learn faster	514	38%
Show greater initiative	447	33%
Show leadership	216	16%
Make better managers	149	11%
Other reasons	49	4%

¹ When mapped on to the TVET hierarchy in Kenya (see chapter 2), these two categories match with Vocational Training Centers (VTC) and Technical Training Institution (TTI) levels

² This could be a reflection of the fact that foreign trained workers are considered 'high cost.' It could also be the respondents misunderstood the question as referring to foreigners, whose hiring is restricted by law.

Most employers (58.9%) experienced challenges when hiring entry level staff, as compared to when hiring management level staff (29%). A majority said that they emphasized soft skills when hiring entry level staff, but when hiring management level staff the majority emphasized experience. From these responses, we can conclude that making soft skills a key point of focus when training entry level staff is clearly a good strategy to ensure a high transition to employment rate and progression from entry level jobs to higher levels.

This research wanted to assess the employers' views on the skills mismatch, and to establish if soft skills play a role in this mismatch. To assess this, the following question was asked '*Employers often complain about the 'skills gap' in Kenya; namely, that the skills young people get from training institutions do not match what employers expect. Which of the following statements do you feel best explains the cause of this skills gap?*' According to the majority (42.8%) of respondents, lack of soft skills in potential employees is the key factor influencing the skills mismatch problem in Kenya, followed by negative attitudes (22.4%), and lack of technical skills (12.6%). Several important conclusions can be drawn from these responses. Firstly, they confirm the commonly cited finding that skills mismatch is an important factor contributing to poor employment outcomes as well as hindering business growth. Secondly this would imply that, to be successful, the ultimate goal of TVET reforms in Kenya and elsewhere must be to address this mismatch and providing soft skills training is an important first step.

Having established the great value employers place on soft skills, the researchers sought to find out which skills, among the many identified as soft skills, employers valued most. Three questions, each phrased from a different perspective, were used to draw out respondents' views. From the questionnaires, employers gave the following soft skills as the most valued in their organizations: professional behavior and work ethics (79.9%), ability to follow instructions (59.3%), effective verbal communication (58.6%), teamwork (58.2%), critical thinking and decision making (57.6%), in that order.

Employers also gave the following as key reasons for firing employees: rudeness to colleagues or customers (73.5%), unethical behavior (63.9%), failure to follow instructions (60.6%), poor time management (53.2%) and drug abuse (52.2%). Interestingly, lack of technical skills as a reason for dismissing or disciplining staff was rated relatively low at 32.5%. The popular saying that 'employers hire on the basis of technical skills but fire for lack of soft skills' would seem to have some truth behind it.

Employers described their ideal employee as ones with the following attributes: discipline (74.5%), communication (64.3%), taking initiative (61.8%), problem solving (60.9%), learns things quickly (58.9%), good listener (55.8%), good social skills (55.0%) and self-confidence (53.4%). Decisiveness and conflict solving were rated relatively low at 40.3% and 43.6% respectively.

Analysis of Job Advertisements

The parallel desk study conducted to analyze job advertisements focused on three print and two online media platforms: the Daily Nation newspaper, The Star newspaper, the Standard newspaper, Brighter Monday and LinkedIn. These are among the most popular job advertisement platforms in Kenya. The job advertisements were grouped into three broad clusters: Senior Management level, Middle Management level and Operations Staff level. From this analysis, the most desired soft skill was communication skills with 45% of the advertisements listing it as a requirement for different kinds of jobs. Others were; leadership skills (29.2%), decision-making (24.4%) and teamwork (16.3%), while negotiation came last with 5.6% of employers mentioning it as a requirement for job applicants. A significant number of advertisements (32.3%) did not indicate any soft skill requirements at all.

Not surprisingly, the rate at which each desired skill appeared in job advertisements tended to differ by job level. Thus, for instance, soft skills such as communications, leadership and decision making were rated highly as requirements for most top and middle management positions. On the other hand, soft skills such as teamwork and interpersonal relations were more likely to be required for lower level jobs.

A majority of lower level operations job advertisements did not indicate soft skills requirements. This could partly explain the challenge identified earlier, where 58.9% of employers admitted that, although they valued soft skills more when recruiting for entry level jobs, they faced greater challenges in recruiting

for this level of jobs than at management level. This identified an important issue that could be addressed through employer interventions, namely, while employers could overcome the challenge of entry level job hiring by signaling soft skills requirements more, they rarely do so. Changing this approach could be an important solution to this hiring and other problems. Also, integrating soft skills in the education system and making them examinable could offer an important verifiable record that employers could use to tell whether job candidates have these skills. This would be much more effective than the hit or miss methods they are forced to use now.

Analysis Across the Two Data Sources

Finally, the researchers sought to establish the top five soft skills that employers valued, based on what they said and what they signaled. From the analysis of questionnaire responses, employers said the five most valued soft skills are, *communication, integrity, discipline, teamwork* and *leadership*, in that order. However, the analysis of job advertisements showed there was a difference between what employers said they valued and what they signaled to the labour market. From this analysis, the five most signaled (and therefore most valued) soft skills are, *teamwork, communications, leadership, interpersonal skills* and *decision making*, in that order. There are several reasons for this difference, one being that, according to the research, employers are more likely to state soft skill requirements when advertising middle and top management jobs, which are fewer, than when hiring for the more numerous entry level jobs. In fact, many entry level jobs are not advertised in the print media at all. The research also raises the important conclusion that, while employers value soft skills, they are not doing a very good job at signaling them to the labor market and do not seem to appreciate how doing this could help them in overcoming hiring and staff retention problems.

Nevertheless, by using the two sources of data, the researchers were able to triangulate the top five most valued soft skills by Kenyan employers as follows: *discipline, integrity, communications, teamwork* and *leadership*, preferences that seem to be broadly reflected in similar studies carried out in different parts of the world. This is important as the soft skill preferences offers a map that can be used for designing core skill training interventions that are likely to fulfill employers' expectations of the staff they hire. While this does not imply that these are the only essential soft skills, it does provide a framework of employer desired skills around which others can be added to create a market responsive curriculum.

Summary of Recommendations

To implement this vision in Kenya the research therefore has given the following recommendations:

1. Employers face more challenges when hiring entry level staff, despite the larger labor pool, as opposed to management level staff.
 - (i) This situation can be mitigated by exposing students to the world of work as part of skills training (work readiness) so that they become much more prepared for entry level jobs.
 - (ii) Government and other stakeholders should aim to ensure every student in a tertiary institution is able to secure an opportunity for internship during or after training.
 - (iii) Programs targeting employers should be implemented, to demonstrate the importance of signaling soft skills requirements to improve recruitment outcomes.
 - (iv) Government should support the development of an environment of work-readiness by: offering incentives to employers who provide internships and revising restrictive labor laws that exclude children and youth from positive work experiences.

2. Making soft skills a key point of emphasis at basic, secondary and tertiary levels is a good strategy to ensure a high transition to employment rate and progression from entry level to higher level employment.
 - (i) The Ministry of Education should make soft skills an integral part of the curriculum of the basic Education sector.
 - (ii) Soft skills should be made mandatory and examinable in all TVET skills programs.
 - (iii) Government, funding agencies and other stakeholders should work together to ensure the Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) approach, which includes a focus on soft skills, is implemented across the entire TVET sector.

3. The five most valued soft skills by employers are: *communication, integrity, discipline, teamwork* and *leadership*
 - (i) It is recommended that these be considered as core skills around which *desired work behavior frameworks* to underpin soft skills curricula for TVET institutions are constructed.
 - (ii) Tools for experiential curriculum delivery as well as for measuring soft skills learning outcomes and impact should be developed and their use mandated for skills providers

4. The development of market-responsive, demand-led skills training programs in Kenya is critical. There must also be cooperation between the private sector and education institutions to ensure that students are being trained in skills that are in demand.
 - (i) Employers should be accorded a meaningful role in curriculum development, delivery, certification and the governance of TVET institutions.
 - (ii) Government should introduce a system for gathering and sharing current data on employability conditions and trainee outcomes through, for instance, market scans, longitudinal surveys of TVET programs, assessment of learning to livelihood outcomes, and closer integration of TVET outputs with government development plans.



Gaining 'hard' technical skills: CAP YEI Students practicing wiring at a construction site near Nairobi. Employers insist that, in training workers, soft skills are just as important as technical skills.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Over a period beginning in 2011, CAP YEI has implemented youth employability skills and support training programs in Kenya based on its Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST) with very good results. These have included demonstration of lasting transformation in vulnerable youth from a state of little hope to a positive vision for their future, and the confidence that they can achieve it. The transition of the programs, from learning to earning, has averaged 75% for jobs and 8% for self-employment. Several experts who have assessed these initiatives have indicated the integration of soft skills (called life skills in the CAP YEI model) as one reason behind this success. But little effort has been made until recently to examine how or why this works.

In 2017 a research titled 'Testing the Integration of a Life Skills Curriculum in the Government Run TVET System in Kenya' was commissioned by German GIZ as part of their regional YouMatch Program. It was meant to test if it was possible to integrate the Life skills curriculum of CAP YEI into the Government TVET system in Kenya and elicit the same or similar results. The results of the research were very interesting, leading to a broad conclusion that it is indeed possible to adapt the CAP YEI curriculum to the more constrained environment of government TVET institutions and obtain similar results, at least at learning outcome level, to those of CAP YEI. However, the study observed an important weakness that could affect livelihood outcome level results, namely that the curriculum had not been employer validated.

That research recommended a follow up study be carried out on the employers' perspective on soft skills so that the important question of exactly what comprises 'soft skills' and their perception by employers would be addressed. It was felt necessary to try to answer this question from an employer's point of view by assessing the desired behaviors, attitudes and perceptions in the world of work and the way these are signaled to prospective employee. Based on this, interventions that could lead learners to attain these behaviors and attitudes could be developed, starting with a framework of critical work behaviors and attitudes, which should ideally form the core of any soft skills curriculum offered in TVET and other skills training institutions. This was the genesis and intent of the current research project.

1.2 Problem Statement

A common complaint amongst many employers in Kenya these days is that graduates lack a positive attitude towards work and cannot communicate well. Poor time management, lack of proper work ethics and inability to work in teams are commonly cited problems. According to the 2013 'Professionalism in the Workplace' survey by York College, Pennsylvania, respondents claim that more than half (53%) of new employees demonstrate poor work ethics (Bloomberg, 2013). The survey goes on to identify poor work ethics as including laziness, a false sense of entitlement and a casual work attitude.

A common sentiment of Kenyan employers is that many graduates fail to meet the demands of the workplace largely because they lack soft skills, even when they are technically qualified. This has become an issue of such grave concern that many businesses are forced to invest resources in training or coaching these already 'trained' graduates in team work, creativity, the ability to follow instructions, interpersonal skills and communication skills, among others, before they can perform. These are resources that could be going to more productive uses, such as expanding the business in order to create more jobs opportunities.

Many challenges face the TVET sector in Kenya. One of the critical ones is the failure to provide transferable soft skills that youth need to become successful in the world of work, business and life. Many employers say that they would prefer to hire youth who, in addition to having technical skills, also possess soft skills, such as a positive attitude, ability to follow instructions, honesty, initiative, communication, and teamwork. Yet training in these skills is not part of the curriculum in most TVET institutions in Kenya. Where soft skills topics are integrated into the curriculum, these are usually heavily theoretical, with little attempt made to include employer views in their design and delivery.

The failure to seek employer input in the design of soft skills curricula results in exacerbating the mismatch between the skills that the TVET system offers and what employers actually want. The missing

employer voice in the debate about the importance of soft skills also means that much of the conversation is carried on between education practitioners, with little reference given to those who actually hire the products of the education system. The result is frustration, especially among youth, who feel shortchanged when their investment in skills training does not pay off, on one hand, and employers on the other who are often forced to curtail their plans for business growth because they cannot find the right people to hire.

The twenty-first century workforce has gone through tremendous changes and soft skills are needed in every business sector. However, the challenge is that these employers frequently report that new graduates are deficient in these soft skills (Mitchell & White, n.d.) pointing to a failure in the Education sector that is meant to adequately equip trainees for the world of work. The National Business Education Association in the US reported that the shortage of soft skills among employees is an acute problem that needs attention and resolve. Therefore, to ensure success, students entering the workforce today must possess non-technical soft skills along with technical competence (PCBEE, 2000).

As Kenya works towards becoming a middle income economy through implementing Vision 2030³, it is imperative that policy makers and planners in the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders develop curricula that will facilitate employability of graduates from tertiary institutions, hence preparing them for the employment and business opportunities and challenges of today. Soft skills that take cognizance of employer and other market needs must become an essential part of such curriculum and policy reforms.

1.3 Research Objectives

Main Objective

The main objective of this research was to assess employers' perspective on soft skills in Kenya.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the research were:

- (i) To investigate employers' understanding of the definition of soft skills and their level of commitment to their acquisition by employees.
- (ii) To identify the most valued soft skills by employers and how they signal these preferences to the labor market.
- (iii) To validate the Life skills curriculum and approach of CAP YEI from an employers' perspective.
- (iv) To build on the body of knowledge on soft skills that has recently emerged from the work of organizations such as the Mastercard Foundation, CAP YEI and others.
- (v) To derive lessons and give recommendations to employers, the Government, TVET institutions and development actors.

1.4 Project Rationale

The integration of a soft skills curriculum into TVET institutions will ensure TVET graduates are holistically trained, as well as prepared for the labor market, and that they can engage in productive employment and entrepreneurship activities, leading to an increase in private sector productivity. The research project thus aimed to contribute knowledge towards enhanced job preparation, and to some extent, to improved job orientation and matching for employees, employers and the TVET system.

³ Launched in 2008, Kenya's Vision 2030 "... aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens..." (www.vision2030.go.ke)

1.5 Research Hypothesis

Employers value soft skills as an integral part of the set of skills they look for when they want to hire staff at different levels of their organizations. They acknowledge that employees who have these skills are more productive, and thus contribute more to the growth of the organization than those either without, or with only technical skills. In the short term, employers are willing to invest resources to secure soft skills for themselves and their staff. In the long term though, they would prefer to engage with skills providers at different levels in efforts to ensure the wider, more sustainable, provision of soft skills to staff. Examining each of these hypotheses will lead to a better matching of skills training programs with employer needs, leading to improved livelihood outcomes through better staff hiring, job retention and productivity.



Consulting with Employers: If ongoing TVET reforms are to be effective, skills providers must create meaningful roles for engaging employers in the design of training programs and their delivery. Integrating soft skills in all such programs is a key demand of many employers in Kenya.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

An OECD study (Assan and Nalutaaya, 2018) argues that to ensure the effective contribution of economically active youth to the global economy, there should be careful approaches regarding the transition from school to work. This, in their opinion, will help curb the current global youth unemployment crisis. Kenya is experiencing a youth bulge with over 80% of its population under the age of 35 years (British Council, 2015). This youth bulge creates an employable population of 24 million, with an unemployment rate of 20% (Sunday Nation Newspaper, 2017). It is estimated that 62% of youth have education below the secondary level.

Inadequate employable skills within the tertiary educational curricula and teaching programs are considered as serious barriers which precipitate the observed patterns of unemployment and underemployment amongst graduates from tertiary institutions in Kenya. An international research conducted in 42 countries revealed that 19% of employers found it difficult to fill certain positions because of the lack of soft skills as an area of competency (Manpower group, 2014). Kubes et al (2004) contend that the progression of a competency based approach in human resources management and administration has led to an emphasis on skill levels of workers, in addition to formal education qualifications in the employment process. They argue that job seekers with “soft skills, life skills, interpersonal skills and employable skills,” are considered to be better positioned to navigate the job market, compared to those without. Graduates from tertiary institutions are required to have skills that are relevant to the modern-day workplace (Weil and Oded, 1999). Employers expect young people to think outside the box, work in teams, communicate effectively and build their entrepreneurship potential.

Due to increased competitive pressure, employers across different sectors have identified a strong need for non-technical skills, including problem solving skills, teamwork skills, communication skills, time management, and cultural adaptability (Bailey, 2014; Grieve, 2013; Gillard, 2009; Moss and Tilly, 1996). Interpersonal and communication skills, including listening skills, are particularly highlighted with respect to the hiring and promotion of employees in a variety of industries, suggesting that these skills are highly valued by employers (Gillard, 2009; Reinsch and Gardner, 2014; Grieve, 2013).

Soft skills visualize a social setting at the workplace that calls for an interconnected work environment that has a high interaction of teams. Alex (2008) provides a more comprehensive definition of soft skills—*“know yourself and know the world”*. He recognizes social, thinking and negotiating skills as being most critical for those entering the labor market. He highlights examples including self-discovery, positive attitude, forming values, improving perception, career planning, emailing, body language, team building, group discussion, social etiquette and manners, resume writing, interview skills, and stress management and critical thinking. According to Robles (2012), soft skills encompass character traits, attitudes, and behaviors, rather than technical aptitude or knowledge. Soft skills are described as being intangible, nontechnical, personality-specific skills that help ascertain one’s strengths in leadership, facilitating, mediating and negotiating.

James and James (2004) concur that soft skills are a contemporary way to describe a set of abilities or talents that an individual can bring to the workplace. Robotham and Jubb (1996) recognize that soft skills are related to personal qualities that lay behind people’s rational behavior. A research done by Andrews and Hugson (2008) explains that soft skills include professionalism, reliability, the ability to cope with uncertainty and the ability to work under pressure. Holtbrugge and Mohr (2010) added the skills of leadership, relationship, communication, team working and information management as encapsulating the meaning of soft skills. Wellington (2005) found out that employees who successfully enjoyed career advancement had both excellent technical and soft skills. In fact, soft skills are so crucial that they are ranked as the most important factor for potential job hires in many occupations and industries (Robles, 2012). Employing new graduates who possess interpersonal skills is pivotal for successful organizations to maintain a competitive advantage.

In a study done by Minnesota State College, the researchers indicated that there are three important classes of skills that business leaders seek from their employees—technological skills, soft skills, and skills that are required for emerging business practices such as green production (Sparks &

Waits, 2011). Therefore, they recommend that institutions of higher learning should also take the cue in providing the relevant occupational skills when disseminating knowledge.

In the new system of developing TVET curricula in Kenya using the Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) approach, the TVET Curriculum Development Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC) has mandated soft skills in all curricula at all levels and for all TVET programs. To ensure this is done consistently, CDACC has integrated seven basic competencies:

- (i) Numeracy, literacy and communication
- (ii) Employability skills (critical thinking, decision making, problem-solving, teamwork, etc.)
- (iii) Environmental literacy⁴
- (iv) Health and safety
- (v) Information Communications and Technology (ICT)
- (vi) Entrepreneurial skills and
- (vii) Leadership skills

There is a severe lack of research on soft skills in Kenya, especially the assessment of employer views and perceptions of the same. While some research exists on the role of soft skills in basic education, their role in the tertiary Education sector has gone largely unexamined. Nevertheless, several organizations such as the Mastercard Foundation, CAP YEI and German GIZ have carried out useful studies in this area. The current research broadly takes off from some of them.

In 2016, the Mastercard Foundation commissioned a study of three project case studies in Kenya, Rwanda and Nigeria (Mastercard Foundation, 2017). The purpose of the report was to examine three cases in which governments have incorporated and scaled up training on soft skills within formal secondary education and TVET systems, and to offer insights and lessons from this process. The Kenya case study examined the life skills component of the CAP YEI program in Kenya. In recommending that these cases be considered for scale up, the researchers came up with six strategies—‘drivers of scale’—to be considered for such a process, namely: an enabling policy environment; strong political champions; evidence of impact on youth employment and entrepreneurship; wide stakeholder engagement; decentralization of authority; and flexible funding. CAP YEI responded to the examination of its model in this study and the overall recommendations by, for instance, revamping its Capacity Building program to serve as a vehicle for scaling up soft skills in the TVET sector (among other objectives). However, the fact that no attempt was made to relate these findings and recommendations to the views of employers tended to hamper these efforts.

Research commissioned by the Mastercard Foundation on behalf of the Youth Employment Funders Group (YFEG) examined case examples from a wide range of countries and organizations in an attempt to answer the question “What works in soft skills development for youth employment?” The overwhelming conclusion was that soft skills are important to both employers and youth seeking employment, and are therefore worth investing in. The report went on to recommend specific actions that different actors—governments, other donors, development organization and communities—could take to ensure youth gain the greatest value from soft skills integration initiatives designed to benefit them. Some of these recommendations, most of which the current study was able to verify for Kenya, include: focusing on core skills, deepening reform efforts, establishing essential partnerships with a central role for business employers, and enhancing assessment and evaluation tools and processes for soft skills.

Between the years 2011 and 2016, a team from the education department of the University of Minnesota (UMN) carried out several studies on three projects that were part of the *Learn, Earn and Save Initiative* supported by the Mastercard Foundation in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The projects, which applied

⁴ This refers to competencies required to control environmental hazard, environmental pollution, comply with workplace sustainable resource use, evaluate current practises in relation to resource usage, identify environmental legislations/conventions for environmental concerns, implement specific environmental programs and monitor activities on environmental protection /programs.

different models to address the common challenge of youth unemployment, were run by CAP YEI (Kenya), Swisscontact (Uganda and Tanzania) and Fundación Paraguaya (Tanzania). Of these studies, the most significant one was a longitudinal survey that followed a cluster of youth beneficiaries to establish the impact of the programs on them. The findings suggested that the integration of soft skills in each of the models used was an important reason behind the positive impact they had on the youth. This conclusion was taken seriously enough that in 2017, the Mastercard Foundation requested the UMN team to perform a desktop evaluation of the soft skills curricula of each of these organizations and recommend how they could be strengthened. The CAP YEI review made important observations and recommendation for improvement. Some of these, for instance, the suggestion to increase the number of training support resources and do further work towards '*Kenyanizing*' the tools and case examples, were adopted in the years that followed. Other recommendations, such as the suggestion to reduce the focus placed on sexual and reproductive health, were left pending as it was deemed important to reconsider them after further study and consultation. The current research has largely been able to validate some of these UMN conclusions and the resulting suggestions (see chapter 3).

In 2018, CAP YEI received a grant from the German GIZ Regional program, YouMatch, to test the possibility of integrating its own Life skills curriculum into the Government TVET system. The aim of the study was to recommend to policy makers a potential scaling up pathway for soft skills through Government institutions in Sub Saharan Africa. Many CAP YEI TVET capacity building partners had undertaken, often on their own volition, to implement soft skills within their training programs. However no formal effort to assess the effect of such initiatives had been carried out. The results of the research showed that it was possible to obtain almost immediate and observable behavior changes in youth trained in soft skills, a 'transformation' process that CAP YEI staff have observed many times during the delivery of the short course BEST model program. The broad conclusion of the GIZ research was that it is indeed possible to scale up soft skills by adapting curricula like CAP YEI's to the more constrained environment of Government TVET institutions and obtain fairly similar results, at least at learning outcome level. However the study had a major weakness in that it did not last long enough to assess impact at livelihood outcome level. In any case, as the researchers observed, the Life skills curriculum of CAP YEI, unlike the technical skills curricula, had not been employer validated. Therefore livelihood outcomes similar, or even close to those achieved by CAP YEI, could only be assumed, not guaranteed.

The Conceptualization of Soft Skills

The *flexibilization* of the labor market and the inflation of educational credentials poses various challenges to young graduates seeking employment. For instance, college graduates are increasingly expected to possess the requisite soft skills to fit into multiple key positions that require flexible skills. Consequently, every individual worker is expected to have the skills and capacity to multitask. An important question in the ongoing debate on the relevance of technical and soft skills is whether they complement or rival each other, and whether soft skills can be learned at any age and taught through a curriculum in a higher educational institution. The Kenyan labor market is characterized by services which require strong soft skills. According to Noon et al. (2013), there is an increase in the demand for soft skills because of the growth in the service sector. There is continued reference to the role of soft skills in increasing productivity at work, although there is no agreement to which specific set of skills are key.

Often soft skills can be difficult to assess. Generally speaking, standard achievement or IQ tests cannot capture proficiency in soft skills (Heckman and Kautz, 2012). Instruments such as the employment readiness scale in Canada measure soft skills to a certain extent, using psychometric questioning to do so, though these kinds of instruments tend to focus on self-efficacy, goal setting, social skills, and past performance over other soft skills such as communication skills or time management (Ward and Riddle, 2014).

Some literature suggests, however, that many soft skills can only be effectively evaluated through on-the-job observation, meaning that a traditional classroom may not be a suitable location to benchmark key soft skills (Lane and Christensen, 2015). It is argued that at the interview stage, employers will always look out for candidates who show critical thinking, ability to solve problems at the workplace, among other soft skills (Green, Graybeal, & Madison, 2011). Green et al. (2011) established that employers appreciated candidates who are strong in skills that include social, communication, higher order thinking

skills, intrapersonal skills and positive self-concept. Employees are expected to understand key soft skills as these skills are considered to increase the outcomes at the different employment places regardless of the industry or vocation (Lipmann, Ryberg, Carney & Moore, 2015).

It is strongly suggested that the employability of graduates today is highly dependent on the soft skills that they possess. A survey conducted by the Association of Graduate Recruiters in Britain forecasted that 40% of large companies will face problems in filling job vacancies due to applicants who do not possess the 'right skills' such as team work, determination and communication, even though they are otherwise academically qualified (Agr.org.uk, 2012).



Practicing entrepreneurship. Soft skills are especially important for youth who seek to become future employers.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilized two different approaches to collect data. The first one was a purposive sample of 1,364 employers drawn from across the country who were asked to give their views on soft skills by either completing a physical questionnaire (89.7%), or an online version of the same (10.3%). See annex 1. This survey took place over a period of three months. Of the respondents sampled, 64% were male while 36% were female. This phase of the research employed a mixed method approach involving self-completed questionnaires as well as face to face interviews.

The second approach was a qualitative desktop analysis of job advertisements that were placed in four print and online media platforms in Kenya over the same three month period. 1,417 job advertisements were analyzed over the period. While the purpose of the first approach was to directly elicit employers' views and preferences about soft skills, the second approach was meant to indicate to what extent employers were signaling these preferences to the labor market through job advertisements. Each advertisement was therefore analyzed for words or phrases that showed what soft skills, if any, the job was calling for. The quantitative data was analyzed through simple regression using SPSS software while the qualitative data was analyzed manually using themes, quotes, context and triangulation.

3.1 Data Collection

This section summarizes the data that was collected from the study. It is divided into two sections—the data from the questionnaires, and the desktop survey data from the job advertisements.

3.1.1 Employers Responses to Questionnaire

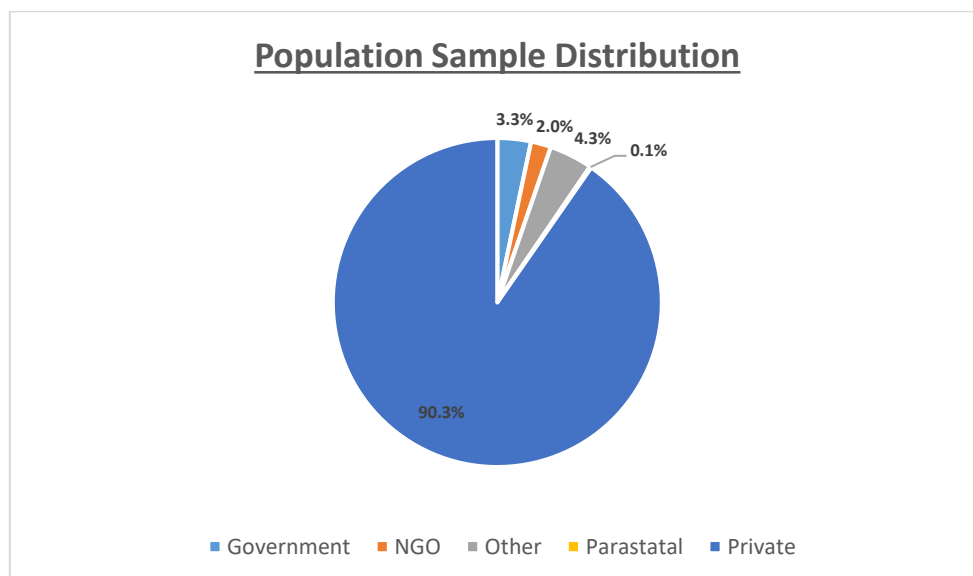
a) Description of sample population

Of the 1,364 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 89.8% (N=1224) completed the physical version while 10.3% (N=140) filled out the online survey version through the online tool, Survey Monkey.

b) For profit and non-profit distribution

The private sector provided 90.3% (N=1,232) of the total respondents, with government, NGOs and parastatals accounting for 3.3% (N=45), 2% (N=27) and 0.1% (N=2) respectively. The remaining 4.3% (N=58) was others, which comprised of SACCOS (Savings and Credit Co-Operative Societies), foreign government organizations, churches and mosques (See pie chart below, figure 1).

Figure 1: Population distribution



c) Distribution by industry/sector

The respondents were spread across 20 industries/sectors, with retail services providing the largest number at 22.4% (N=306). The table below shows the distribution of 74.7% (N=1,019) of the population across these 20 sectors. Other sectors were represented by 263 respondents (19.3%). Only 6% (N=82) failed to indicate their industry or sector.

Table 1: Sample population by industry sector

Industry/Sector	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Retail Services	306	22.4%
Financial Services	119	8.7%
Hospitality	92	6.7%
Construction	74	5.4%
Education	72	5.3%
Beauty Care	62	4.5%
Health	57	4.2%
Transport	45	3.3%
Agriculture	32	2.3%
Information Technology	28	2.1%
Oil/Petroleum	26	1.9%
Security	23	1.7%
Manufacturing	22	1.6%
Communications	20	1.5%
Non Profit (NGO)	17	1.2%
Civil Service	11	0.8%
Education	10	0.7%
Hospitality	1	0.1%
Sales	1	0.1%
Tourism	1	0.1%

d) Geographical distribution

Even though the survey covered more than 90 major and minor towns across the country, five of these (Nairobi, Naivasha, Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisii) accounted for 36% of the total responses, as shown in the table below. These represent some of the major urban and population centers in the country and host the majority of industries. Not surprisingly, the largest number, 17.2% (N=234) came from Nairobi, the political and commercial capital of Kenya.

Table 2: Sample population by region

Region	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Nairobi	234	17.2%
Naivasha	100	7.3%
Nakuru	57	4.2%
Eldoret	37	2.7%
Kisii	35	2.6%
Thika	34	2.5%
TOTAL	497	36.4%

e) Distribution by job designation and responsibility

Similarly the respondents were concentrated in a few among the many possible job positions and roles. Managers comprised the largest number, 27.7% (N=378) followed by Supervisors at 16.7% (N=228), and Proprietors/Owners at 10.2% (N=139). These three job designations accounted for 54.6% of the total sample population (see below). Human resource departments accounted for only 1.3%. We suspect this is because a large number of the organizations represented are small or medium sized (see below), and therefore do not have the resources to invest in HR departments.

Table 3: Sample population by designation

Job Position	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Manager	378	27.7%
Supervisor	228	16.7%
Owner	139	10.2%
Administrator	70	5.13%
Director	55	4.0%
Branch Head/Leader	50	3.7%
Customer Care/Service/Relations	22	1.6%
Human Resource	18	1.3%
Lecturer/Teacher/Trainer/Instructor	16	1.2%
Sales & Marketing	16	1.2%
Accountant	13	1.0%
Other	359	26%
TOTAL	1364	100%

The sampled organizations had an average of 67 employees each (placing them in the category of SME's), and the respondents managed 13 staff on average. The research also targeted respondents who

had a hiring and/or firing decision within the organization, therefore including Managers (27.7%), Supervisors (16.7%) and Owners (10.2%). Of those who participated in the survey, 59.2% (N=807) said they were involved in making hiring decisions, while 56.6% (N=772) of them were involved in making firing decisions.

3.2 Desktop Survey of Online and Print Job Advertisements

As part of the research, a parallel desk study was conducted to analyze job advertisements placed in three print and two online media platforms available in Kenya (see below). These are among the most popular job advertisement platforms in Kenya.

The purpose of this survey was to triangulate findings from the field questionnaire responses. The assumption was, if employers were seen to place a significant value on soft skills, as was indeed the research hypothesis, then it logically followed that they should be signaling these preferences to potential employees through job advertisements. Although many jobs, especially entry level, are not advertised or are filled through recruitment agencies, the researchers felt that analyzing advertisements would still be a useful way to assess how employers operationalize their desire for particular soft skills in job applicants.

The desk study analyzed 1,417 job advertisements posted over a period of three months, the same period as when the field survey was taking place. Each advertisement was analyzed to select words, phrases or sentences that indicated which soft skills an applicant was explicitly required to have. These words or phrases, indicative of soft skills, were selected from the same list of different soft skills options used in the questionnaire survey, which in return were largely drawn from the CAP YEI curriculum. The advertisements from the following print and digital platforms were reviewed over the three-month period:

Table 4: No. of job advertisements per advertising platforms

Job advertising platform	URL	Type	Number of ads
Nation newspaper	www.nation.co.ke	Print media	199
Standard newspaper	www.standardmedia.co.ke	Print media	168
The Star newspaper	www.the-star.co.ke	Print media	9
LinkedIn online platform	www.linkedin.com (/jobs/all sectors/Kenya)	Digital	260
Brighter Monday online platform	www.brightermonday.co.ke	Digital	781

4.0 STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

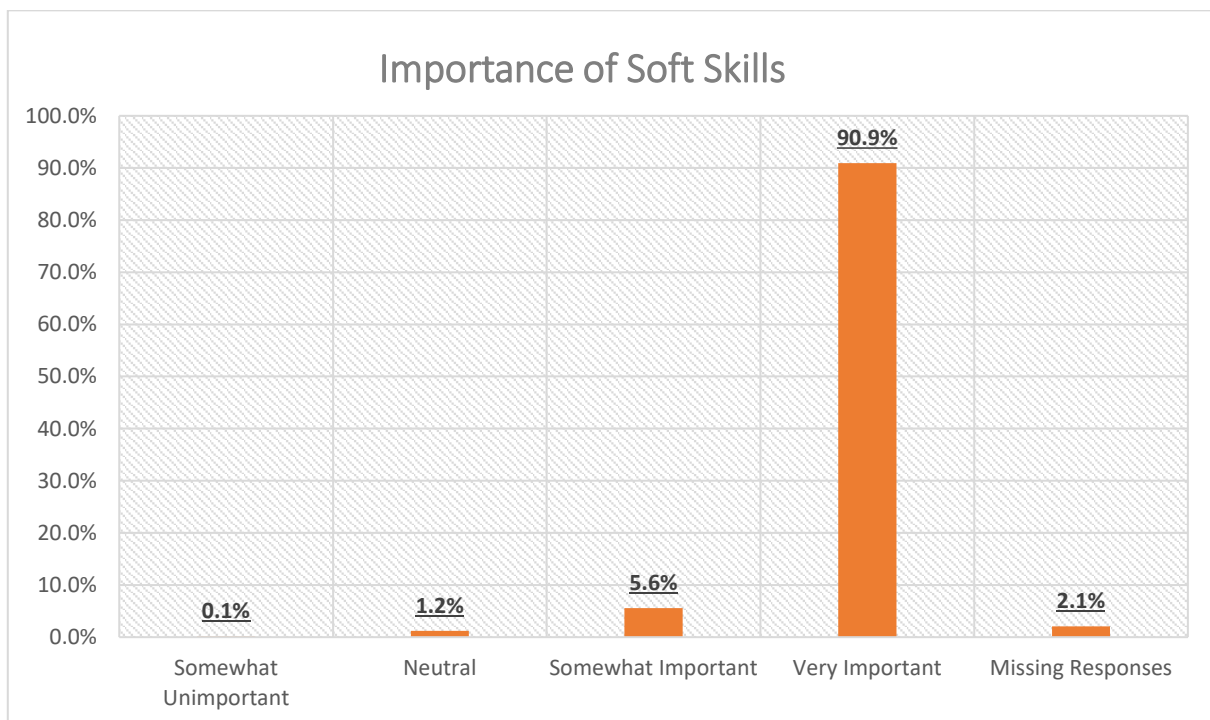
4.1 Employers' Responses to Questions on the Questionnaire

4.1.1 Employers' Knowledge and Commitment to Soft Skills

The researchers sought to know if employer respondents had received any training in soft skills. 85% of the respondents, irrespective of their positions in the organization, said they were trained in soft skills. This is an important point in as far as TVET reforms are concerned. For instance, it would indicate that the employer community is far ahead of government and other stakeholders in the value they place on soft skills, to the extent that they are investing in their own training. The planned introduction of soft skills, hopefully as a mandatory component of TVET, therefore, is likely to find favor with employers, as many of them are already committed to it. Secondly the key TVET reform policy that mandates a definite role for employers in the design and delivery of TVET curriculum will be likely to work better when employers are already convinced of the importance of soft skills in employability training.

Broadly the responses show that employers place great value in soft skills and seem to understand the importance of these skills to their organizations' productivity. When asked to rate soft skills on a scale from 'not important' to 'very important', a large majority of employers 90.9% (N=1,240) perceived soft skills as *very important*. See graph below.

Figure 2: Importance of soft skills



The value employers place on soft skills is further corroborated by the response to another question which asked employers to rate the importance they place on different qualities and skills when hiring entry level staff. The majority of valid responses by employers rated soft skills as the most important, with the highest mean value of 4.67.

In another question, respondents were asked to rate different statements about soft skills on a scale ranging from *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree* and *strongly disagree*. The top three highest rated statements, in which respondents *strongly agreed* with were:

- (i) *Soft skills contribute to my company/organization's productivity* (70.2%)

- (ii) *All Institutions of higher learning should incorporate soft skills in their programs (60.3%) and*
- (iii) *Soft skills should be taught as early as possible in a person's life (59%)*

The lowest rated statement at 6% was “*Soft skills cannot be taught; you either have them or you don't.*” Neither do many employers think that soft skills are best taught by parents, rating this statement second from the bottom at 25.7%. For a detailed breakdown, see annex 2.

The story that these responses tell is one that was repeated many times throughout the field data gathering phase of the survey. Employers value soft skills, even preferring them over hard skills and feel they contribute to the company's productivity. Although a small number (35.9%) think that “employers have a responsibility to train their staff in soft skills,” the large majority (60.3%) feel that this is the role of learning institutions. Further, employers prefer that soft skills should be taught early in life, a clear vote for the integration of soft skills in the basic Education sector.

4.1.2 Where Employers Learn Soft Skills

As mentioned in the section above, a majority of the respondents, said they were trained in soft skills. The study then sought to find out where respondents received their soft skills training. The data is summarized in table 5 below. Most employers (55.6%, N=758) learnt soft skills in colleges and universities. A similarly large number said they gained the skills at their place of work (44.1%, N=602). This is an indication that Kenyan employers not only value soft skills, but are already investing resources to equip themselves and their staff with them. On the other hand, this does point to a failure of the education system. Employers should not have to devote their own resources to provide skills that the Education sector is supposed to offer. As one employer said:

“The curriculum in [education] institutions needs to include soft skills as part of their curriculum to help employers reduce on cost and time it takes to retrain workers” (Manager in a Security Staffing company).

The fact that universities and colleges are the sources from which most respondents learned soft skills is a key pointer to the critical role that this tertiary Education sector must play in TVET reforms. So far most Government efforts have focused on TVET institutions directly as the key subjects of ongoing TVET sector reform. This is clearly not enough. Other sectors will play an equally critical role in the long term success of these reforms.

Secondary schools at 4.1% (N=192) and online platforms at 6.2% (N=84) were rated very low as providers of soft skills training. The small role that this basic Education sector plays in the provision of soft skills is especially worrying. The primary and secondary Education sectors hold the greatest potential for addressing the challenge of soft skills provision in Kenya. Firstly they comprise the largest portion of the education pyramid by far. In fact through them it is possible to reach virtually every child that goes to school, and that at the young age when soft skills are likely to have the most lasting impact. Universal primary education is the goal for Kenya, with net enrollment standing at 84% (UNICEF, 2013). In 2018, the Government started a policy of 100% transition from primary to secondary education. Both policies are enforced by law and massive local and international community goodwill⁵. This means that within a few years these two levels will enroll almost all Kenyan children and, if used well, can guarantee a majority of future generations receive soft skills training at an early age.

The relatively small role played by online platforms in the provision of soft skills is not very surprising as the role of the digital sector in education provision is still quite small in Kenya. However, it would seem that there is a potential market in the online/digital provision, or reinforcement, of soft skills. The increasing adoption of digital tools in other sectors and products by Kenyans make this a useful potential platform for soft skills training and reinforcement that should be explored.

⁵ SDG Goal number 4 aims to: “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.” (www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org)

Table 5: Institutions that trained employers in life skills

		Secondary School	College/University	Place of Work	Religious Organization	Online	Other
N	Valid	1235	1234	1234	1234	1234	1233
	Missing	129	130	130	130	130	131
Yes (N)		192	758	602	219	84	41
Yes (%)		14.1	55.6	44.1	16.1	6.2	3
No (N)		1043	476	632	1015	1150	1192
No (%)		76.5	34.9	46.3	74.4	84.3	87.4

4.1.3 How Employers help Employees to Acquire Soft Skills

The commitment by employers to soft skills goes even further than the recognition of their value to themselves. For instance, when asked if they support their employees to acquire soft skills, 92.3% (N=1259) indicated that they do. When asked to say how they do this, *one-on-one-coaching* (55.4%), *in house training* (52.2%) and *mentorship* (43.4%) are the preferred methods when it comes to helping their workforce to develop appropriate soft skills (see table 6 below).

Table 6: How employers help employees acquire soft skills

Response	Frequency		Total	Yes (%)
	Yes	No		
On-on-one coaching	756	597	1353	55.4%
In-house training	712	640	1352	52.2%
Mentorship	592	761	1353	43.4%
Team building	523	830	1353	38.3%
Motivation talks	473	880	1353	34.7%
Support external training	407	945	1352	29.8%
Online courses	166	1187	1353	12.2%
Preaching	106	1247	1353	7.8%
Don't do anything	93	1258	1351	6.8%
Others	12	1340	1352	0.9%

The preference for direct in-house training and support follows the trend seen earlier. Again this indicates a failure of the education system to provide skills that employers clearly value; highly enough to spend their own resources on them. Only 6.8% of respondents admitted that they ‘don’t do anything’. The low number of employees who support their staff to undertake soft skills training externally lends further credence to this conclusion. It also implies there is big potential demand for credible training in soft skills that meet employer needs. 7.8% of respondents mentioned ‘preaching’ as the method they use to help their employees acquire soft skills. In a highly religious society like Kenya this is not surprising and it is a practice reflected in many parts of society. For instance almost all public meetings, including the opening

of Parliament, start with a prayer. One employer, who runs a successful commercial farm growing strawberries, informed us that one reason for his firm’s success is the fact that they start every working day with a mandatory one hour ‘praise and worship’ (prayer) session. “It helps create good relations and cohesion among workers, which is important for productivity,” he said.

4.1.4 What Employers Understand Soft Skills to Mean

The research sought to find out if employers had a common and clear understanding of the meaning of soft skills. It turned out that, to a large extent, they have. To the question: “*What 3 words (or less) best describe what **soft skills** means to you?*” respondents provided more than 2,000 terms that they felt suitably described soft skills. However, the most preferred terms (see below) closely matched the ones that they selected to describe different kinds of soft skills in the rest of the questionnaire.

Table 7: Employers' understanding of soft skills

Descriptive Term	No. of Mentions
Honesty	263
Discipline	196
Communications Skills	182
Hardworking	118
Integrity	102
Creativity	98
Problem Solving Skills	68
Decision Making	61
Knowledgeable	59
Customer Care	57
Experience	56
Trustworthy	56
Sociable	50
Teamwork	50
Politeness	48
Critical Thinking	45
Accountability	43

There are several important points to note about these responses. First the eminence of *honesty*, *discipline*, *communication skills*, *teamwork* and *integrity* as desired soft skills is reflected under several other question responses, as well as in the analysis of job advertisements. This shows that the triangulation of top soft skill preferences (annex 3) is fairly well supported through these unprompted responses. Thirdly the most obvious word clusters derived from this question, the ones with the highest mentions (see diagram below) relate to *integrity* and *teamwork*, two soft skills that appear in the top five.

Table 8: Two highly ranked word clusters, soft skills

Descriptive Term	No. of Mentions	Soft Skill	Total Mentions
Honesty	263	Integrity	421
Integrity	102		
Trustworthy	56		
Politeness	48	Team work	148
Teamwork	50		
Sociable	50		

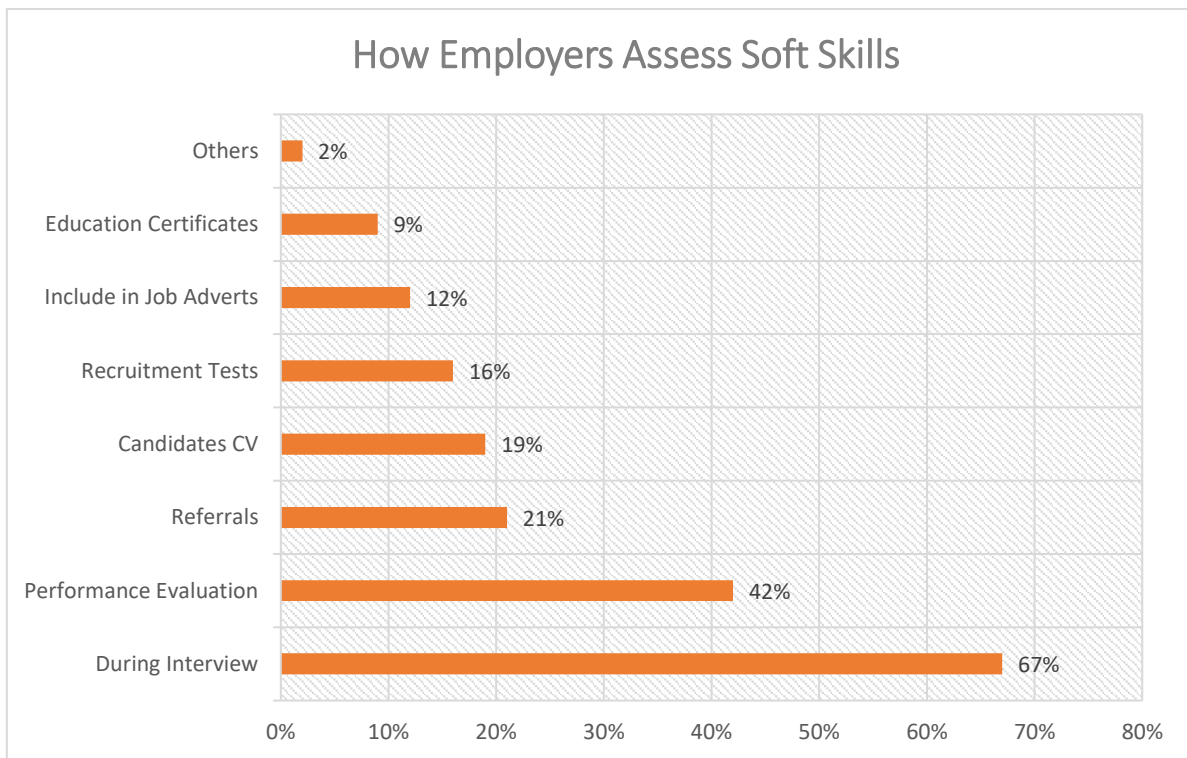
This research also showed that in using the term ‘communication’ the majority of respondents were referring to verbal communication. For instance, when asked to select from a list the most important soft skills for their company/organization, 58.6% picked ‘effective verbal communication’ while only 37.4% picked ‘effective written communication.’ In carrying out curriculum design for TVET, this should be an important point to note, especially when transition from training to entry level employment and self-employment are the primary desired outcomes. Good verbal communication is highly valued by employers.

Finally, the majority of terms used to describe soft skills by employers seem to refer to distinct and observable types of behavior. *Honest, disciplined, social, customer care* and others; things that people do. This would mean that employers understand soft skills to imply a set of behaviors that people exhibit, rather than unseen qualities that they are supposed to have within them. Therefore, training programs that focus on theoretical delivery, failing to offer practical skills or simulate desired behavior change are not likely to meet employers’ approval. The priority outcomes of soft skills curricula in the TVET system must be oriented toward positive work behavior.

4.1.5 How Employers Assess Soft Skills in Employees

When asked at what point and how employers assess the presence of soft skills in potential employees or staff, 67% of the respondents said they assess whether an employee has the right soft skills during the interview process. Performance evaluations (42%) that are conducted while at work are also used to inform employers whether the employee possesses the appropriate soft skills. However, companies rarely rely on referrals (21%), recruitment tests (16%), education certificates (9%), resume (19%), or job adverts (12%) for this purpose (see figure below).

Figure 3: Assessment of soft skills by employers



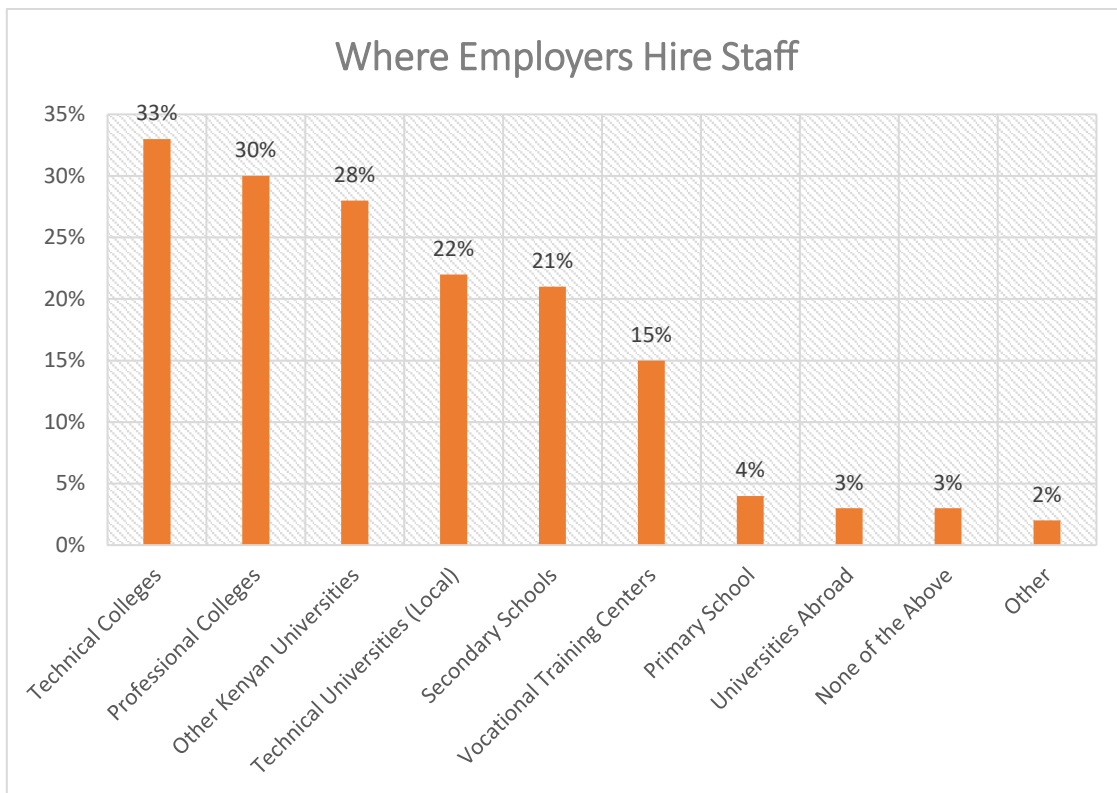
These findings reflect the general situation of soft skills training in Kenya and is reflected in many other parts of the world. Few institutions in Sub Sahara Africa offer soft skills and in many cases “when offered, they are not examinable” (GIZ, 2018). This means that the certificates that a potential employee offers during the interview process will often not include any information of past soft skills training. This places the employer at a distinct disadvantage when assessing whether the candidate possess the desired soft skills. According to Lane and Christensen (2015) “many soft skills can only be effectively evaluated through on-the-job observation.” Nevertheless, the fact that such a large majority of employers assess the existence of these skills during and after the interview (67% and 42% respectively) points to a level of uncertainty that makes this largely a hit or miss affair. This justifies the need to offer employers an additional tool, an empirical way to ascertain soft skills in job candidates, similar to the grading system used to signal technical skills. Making soft skills training mandatory and examinable in TVET and other tertiary institutions would be an important step in this direction by providing a reliable, verifiable record.

4.1.6 Where Employers Hire Most of Their Staff

According to the findings, most Kenyan employers prefer to hire staff from technical colleges (33%), professional colleges (30%), local Kenyan universities (28%), and technical universities (22%), in that order. Only a few of them prefer candidates from overseas Universities (3%)⁶. However, it should be noted that they hire more high school leavers (21%) than they hire people trained in Vocational Training Centers (15%). This is not surprising as, firstly, secondary schools provide the largest pool for entry level labor; secondly, VTC’s have suffered from a pervasive negative perception by parents, youth and the public, who respond by staying away, resulting in very low enrollment rates and poor capacity utilization.

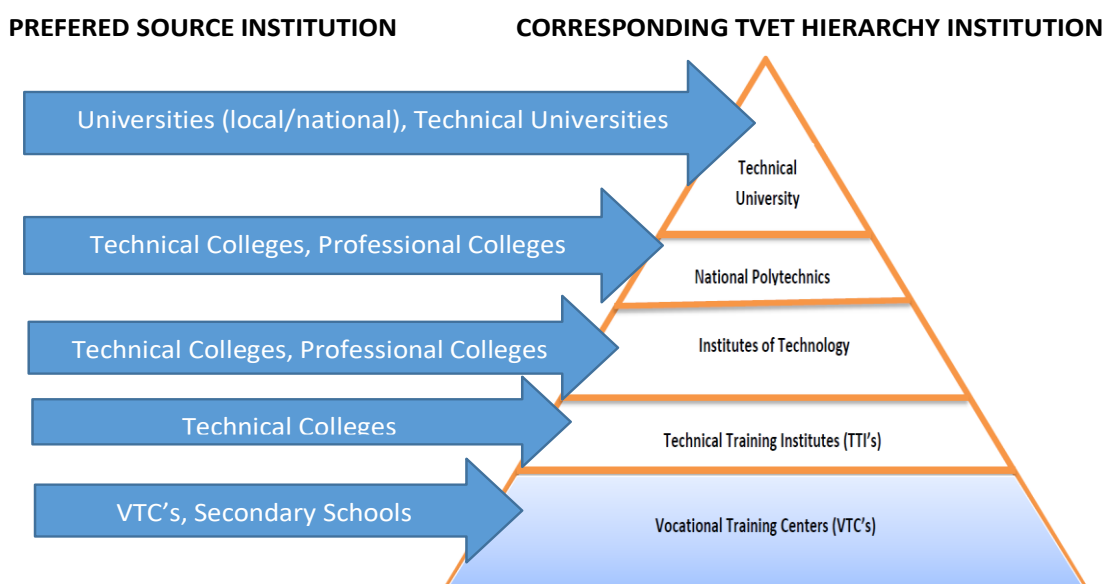
This could be a reflection of the fact that foreign trained workers are considered ‘high cost.’ It could also be that the respondents misunderstood the question as referring to foreigners (as opposed to foreign trained) whose hiring is difficult and restricted by law.

Figure 4: From where do employers hire their staff?



The preference for hiring from TVET and professional colleges (which in Kenya are part of the same cluster in the TVET hierarchy (see figure 5 below), could be an indicator of the value employers place on the graduates of these tertiary institutions, as opposed to university graduates. This conclusion is supported by anecdotal evidence from CAP YEI, where employers often rate CAP YEI graduates higher than university graduates in terms of attitudes, work behavior and, sometimes, productivity. Therefore, the current large investments that the Kenya Government is making in reforming the TVET sector is clearly justified and should potentially result in much higher returns as far as addressing youth unemployment is concerned. However, priority should now be given to the VTC's, which comprise the largest part of the TVET sector (see figure 5 below) in order to raise their value as a source of productive labor for employees.

Figure 5: Mapping of preferred hiring source institutions against the Kenyan TVET hierarchy



For TVET institutions, this indication that they are indeed a preferred source of labor should serve as encouragement for them to improve and become more responsive to employer and market needs. The adoption of a market based approach to training, one that mandates a meaningful involvement of employers and a clear focus on both soft and hard skills, is a good start. Employer engagement in these initiatives would serve as an important guarantor that skills offered are optimized to meet industry needs, and this includes laying as much emphasis on soft skills as on technical skills. The reasons that respondents give for preferring to hire from different training institutions give a fairly good indication of some of the qualities they should aim to inculcate in their graduates. When asked to choose from a mix of reasons for their preferences, which comprised both technical and soft skills, the responses were quite illustrative, as shown in table 9 below. Three of the top five reasons employers gave for hiring staff from the preferred institutions are oriented towards soft skills. These are, the employees: *have a positive attitude* (42%), *learn faster* (38%) and *show initiative* (33%).

Table 9: Reasons for hiring from preferred institutions

Reasons for preference	No. of Times Chosen	Percentage of Total (N=1364)
More competent	715	52%
A positive attitude	567	42%
More productive	529	39%
Learn faster	514	38%
Show greater initiative	447	33%
Show leadership	216	16%
Make better managers	149	11%
Other reasons	49	4%

These reasons reflect the experience that CAP YEI has had while implementing its demand-driven employability skills program in Kenya since 2011. In fact, in a summary of the five-year longitudinal survey of the CAP YEI program, a positive attitude, specifically one where “youth reported themselves to be very likely to take action to achieve their goals” was assessed as one of the two key predictors of future success once the youth had left the program (Mastercard Foundation, 2018)⁷. Further the many case studies and stories that CAP YEI has collected from beneficiary youth clearly show that the emphasis on soft skills has a positive impact on them in life and work and that, further, these positive changes tend to last for a long time.

One conclusion from this is that youth-focused approaches to TVET reforms are likely to yield better results as long as they are responsive to labor market needs as expressed by potential employers. This of course implies a need to learn from initiatives that have succeeded, especially those where evidence is available, as well as responsiveness to constant changes in the economy and in employer’s preferences.

“Youth continued to value their participation in the CAP-YEI program. As in previous years, youth and stakeholders highly valued the life skills and financial literacy components. Now that youth have been out of the program for four years there was less discussion about the specific skills that youth learned and more discussion about how youth felt the program helped them. Youth gave the distinct impression that they viewed CAP-YEI as a catalyst in their lives and that they were on one track but after participating in the program, their life took a different turn.” (report excerpt quoted in Johnstone, Nikoi and Kahihu, 2016)

⁷ The other key predictor of future success is gender

4.1.7 Hiring Challenges That Employers Face

When asked if they were experiencing hiring challenges, 55.9% (N=763) of employers said they were, and 28.7% (N=391) were not. 15.4% (N=210) of them did not respond to this question. Most challenges were experienced in hiring entry level staff (58.9%, N=571) as compared to hiring management level staff (29%, N=394). This finding would seem to run counter to commonly perceived logic. For instance, while employers clearly value the entry level staff that CAP YEI trains for them, when asked if they would be willing to pay for such training, many of them have answered in the negative, some arguing that the large number of people looking for work means they only have to advertise and they get a large choice of applicants. By this logic, it should be much easier to hire entry level staff as there is a much bigger labor pool to choose from. But the responses in this research show that this is clearly not the case⁸.

The experience of CAP YEI could shed some light on this paradox. The model and approach CAP YEI uses exploits the well documented 'mismatch' between skills employers want and what skills training institutions offer. An often quoted study by McKinsey, Inc., shows that 46% of businesses say they face challenges in recruiting suitable staff (McKinsey, 2012). Further, identifying suitable entry level staff, despite the large pool available to choose from, is also much harder because most of them are beginners, meaning they are unknown quantities, whereas management level staff usually come with a record of experience that can often be verified.

A problem exists that will ultimately be solved when reforms in the skills sector take root—that of ensuring a closer match between what the skill organizations train and what employers wish to hire. In the meantime, there is a potential market for organizations like CAP YEI that have demonstrated a proven solution, even as they are having problems convincing employers that the solution is worth paying for. Of course another reason for this employer reticence could be the moral hazard problem. For years CAP YEI has offered trained entry level staff to employers for free. Asking them to pay now is a hard sell.

Employers were further asked to say what they look for when hiring entry and management level staff. Based on a Likert scale, the majority (4.8 mean, N=1,258) say they emphasize soft skills when hiring entry level staff. For management level staff, employers emphasize experience (mean of 4.9, N=188). However, this is closely followed by soft skills (4.8, N=1,163). From these responses, we can conclude that making soft skills a key point of emphasis when training entry level staff (as CAP YEI has done over the years) is clearly a good strategy to ensure a high transition to employment and an equally high retention and progression from entry level to higher levels.

4.1.8 What Employers Think About the Skills Gap

The skills gap (or skills mismatch) question has become a common discussion issue in Kenya and elsewhere. The researchers wanted to assess the employers' views and to establish if soft skills play a role in this mismatch. To assess this, the following question was asked: *'Employers often complain about the 'skills gap' in Kenya; namely, that the skills young people get from training institutions do not match what employers expect. Which of the following statements do you feel best explains the cause of this skills gap?'*

A large majority of respondents agreed that indeed there is a skills mismatch, with only 2.6% (N=36) saying there is none. According to the respondents, lack of soft skills in potential employees (42.8%, N=584) is the key factor influencing this skills mismatch problem. It is followed by negative attitudes (22.4%, N=306), and lack of technical skills (12.6%, N=172).

Several important conclusions can be drawn from these responses. Firstly, they confirm the commonly cited finding that skills mismatch is an important factor contributing to poor employment outcomes as well as hindering business growth. Certainly the success of organizations like CAP YEI and others, which have made progress by exploiting this niche almost exclusively, corroborates this point. Secondly this would imply that, to be successful, one of the ultimate goals of TVET reforms in Kenya and elsewhere

⁸ A further enquiry into this issue to establish why employers are reluctant to pay for a solution to this important challenge that they face is indicated here.

must be to address this mismatch. According to employers, the provision of soft skills is an important step toward achieving this goal.

4.1.9 Which Soft Skills do Employers Value Most?

Having established the great value employers place on soft skills, the researchers sought to find out which skills among the many identified as soft skills, employers valued most. The list of skills provided as options to select from were largely drawn from the CAP YEI Life skills curriculum. Three questions, each phrased from a different perspective, were used to draw out respondents' views.

The first question asked respondents to select from a list of 21 skills, behaviors and attitudes, the most important reasons for firing or disciplining an employee in their organization. The three highest rated reasons were: *rudeness to colleagues or customers* (73.5%), *unethical behavior* (63.9%), *failure to follow instructions* (60.6%), *poor time management* (53.2%) and *drug abuse* (52.2%). Interestingly, lack of technical skills as a reason for dismissing or disciplining staff was rated quite low at 32.5% (see annex 4). The popular saying that *employers hire on the basis of technical skills but fire for lack of soft skills* would seem to have some truth to it, at least according to these responses.

Table 10: Reasons for firing/disciplining an employee

Order	Top Rated Reasons for Firing/Disciplining Employee	Frequency			
		Yes	No	Total	Yes (%)
1	Rudeness to colleagues/customers/others	1002	340	1342	73.5%
2	Failure to follow instructions	826	516	1342	60.6%
3	Unethical behavior	872	470	1342	63.9%
4	Poor time management	725	617	1342	53.2%
5	Drug abuse	712	630	1342	52.2%
Lowest Rated Reasons for Firing/Disciplining Employee		Frequency			
Order		Yes	No	Total	Yes (%)
1	Lack of creativity	180	1162	1342	13.2%
2	Lack of multi-tasking skills	114	1228	1342	8.4%
3	Proneness to accidents	100	1241	1341	7.3%
4	Poorly informed on current issues	68	1274	1342	5.0%
5	Poor physical abilities	50	1291	1341	3.7%

Another question asked respondents to select from a list “the soft skills that are most valued in your organization.” A list of 22 skills were offered for respondents to choose from. From this list, the top most valued soft skills are; professional behavior and work ethics (79.9%), ability to follow instructions (59.3%), effective verbal communications (58.6%), teamwork (58.2%), critical thinking and decision making (57.6%) in that order (see table below).

The lowest rated soft skills are: knowledge on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS (9.1%), physical abilities (11.4%), ability to be factually informed on current issues (20.7%), gender equity/lack of gender bias (20.8%) and assertiveness (27.5%).

Table 11: Skills most valued by employers

Order	Top Rated Soft Skills	Frequency			Yes (%)
		Yes	No	Total	
1	Professional Behavior/Work Ethics	1090	263	1353	79.9%
2	Ability to Follow Instructions	809	544	1353	59.3%
3	Effective Verbal Communication	799	554	1353	58.6%
4	Teamwork Skills	794	559	1353	58.2%
5	Critical thinking/decision making	679	674	1353	57.6%
Lowest Rated Soft Skills		Frequency			
Order		Yes	No	Total	Yes (%)
1	Assertiveness	375	978	1353	27.5%
2	Gender Equity/Lack of Gender Bias	284	1063	1347	20.8%
3	Ability to be Factually Informed on Current Issues	282	1070	1352	20.7%
4	Physical Abilities	155	1191	1346	11.4%
5	Knowledge on Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS	124	1223	1347	9.1%

The very low rating given to sexual and reproductive health and HIV knowledge as a soft skill (9.1%) is a strong indicator that CAP YEI should reconsider this topic when reviewing its Life skills curriculum. This finding corresponds with the recommendations of the desk review of life skills curricula carried out by the University of Minnesota in 2015, which indicated that reproductive health training was not providing as much value to the overall outcomes of the CAP YEI program and should therefore be reconsidered (Mastercard Foundation, 2015, unpublished report). On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the key justification for CAP YEI including reproductive health training in its program is the fact that the organization largely targets vulnerable youth. To many of these youth sexual exploitation and attendant risks such as HIV infection, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortions among others, are common challenges that they face in their lives.

In the final question, respondents were asked to think of their best employee and, from a list of choices, make a selection of the factors that made this person an ideal employee. From this list of choices, discipline (74.5%), communication (64.3%), taking initiative (61.8%), problem solving (60.9%), learning things quickly (58.9%) were rated the highest. Others were: good listener (55.8%), good social skills (55.0%) and self-confidence (53.4%). Decisiveness and conflict solving were rated lowest at 40.3% and 43.6% respectively (see table 12 below).

Table 12: Qualities of best employee

Order	Item	Frequency		Total	Yes (%)
		Yes	No		
1	Is disciplined	1016	332	1348	74.5%
2	Communicates well	877	471	1348	64.3%
3	Takes initiative	843	505	1348	61.8%
4	Good problem solver	830	518	1348	60.9%
5	Learns new things quickly	803	545	1348	58.9%
6	Good listener	761	586	1347	55.8%
7	Has good social skills	750	597	1347	55.0%
8	Self-confident	728	619	1347	53.4%
9	Follows orders	689	657	1346	50.5%
10	Critical thinking	680	666	1346	49.9%
11	Good negotiator	644	702	1346	47.2%
12	Is decisive	595	752	1347	43.6%
13	Compassionate	578	770	1348	42.4%
14	Solves conflicts	550	796	1346	40.3%
15	Other	28	1317	1345	2.1%

Interestingly, ethical behavior, teamwork and ability to follow instructions appear in the responses to the earlier question as important reasons for firing an employee. This confirms the high value that employers place on these soft skills. Using this as a starting point, the researchers were able to construct a provisional hierarchy of the five most valued soft skills by employers, based on the responses to key questions in the research questionnaire. These skills, based on responses to each question and their scoring and ranking are summarized in the table below.

Table 13: Triangulation of 5 most valued soft skills from questionnaire

Question/Cluster/Preference	Implied Soft Skill	Rank & Score	Total Score
<i>What 3 words best describe what soft skills means to you?</i>			
Honesty	Integrity	5	14
Discipline	Discipline	4	16
Communication	Communication	3	14
Hard working	Discipline	2	
Integrity	Integrity	1	
<i>Most common reasons for firing or disciplining an employee</i>			
Rudeness	Team work	5	7
Failure to follow instructions	Communication	4	
Unethical behavior	Integrity	3	
Poor time management	Discipline	2	
Drug abuse	Discipline	1	
<i>Soft skills that are most valued in your organization</i>			
Professional behavior/work ethics	Integrity	5	
Ability to follow instructions	Discipline	4	
Verbal communication	Communications	3	
Team work	Team work	2	
Self confidence	Self confidence	1	1
<i>What are the qualities of your best employee?</i>			
Is disciplined	Discipline	5	
Communicates well	Communications	4	
Takes initiative	Leadership	3	3
Good problem solver	Decision making	2	2
Learns new things quickly	Motivation	1	1

Table 13 above provides an estimation of the five most valued soft skills. This is based on four of the questions that asked respondent to indicate their preferred soft skills. Each response was mapped against a list of terms commonly used to imply different soft skills. Each response was then scored by the number of times it appeared in the list, as well as the order of appearance, with the highest scoring five points and the lowest given one point. A total rank score was calculated by simply adding up these assigned scores. From this analysis, the top rated soft skills by Kenyan employers, based on what they say, are: *discipline, integrity, communication, team work and leadership.*

However, as far as employers are concerned, there is still one outstanding question. To what extent do employers signal these preferred soft skills to potential employees? The analysis of job advertisements was meant to answer this question.

4.2 Results from the Desktop Survey

The job advertisements analyzed were clustered into jobs sectors (table 14 below), which broadly follow the same clusters used to organize responses from the questionnaire survey. The table below shows the number and percentages of the sectors captured through adverts. There were important differences between the two surveys, however. For instance, although it was observed that the retail sector comprised 22.4% of the respondents of the questionnaire survey, it comprised only 4.2% of the job advertisements. The reason could be because retail jobs in Kenya are characterized as non-technical, do not require one to have a high level of education, and therefore many are entry level jobs that are rarely advertised. The data in fact shows that although many organizations interviewed were retail, they put up much fewer job advertisements. ICT, NGO and finance jobs were the most advertised, representing 16.6%, 11.4% and 11.1% of the total respectively.

Table 14: Comparison, job advertisements/research respondents per sector

Industry/Sector	No. of Ads	Percentage	Industry Sector	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Retail Services	60	4.2%	Retail Services	306	22.4%
Finance	157	11.1%	Financial Services	119	8.7%
Tourism and Hospitality	62	4.4%	Tourism & Hospitality	94	6.9%
Construction	58	4.1%	Construction	74	5.4%
Education	102	7.2%	Education	82	6.0%
Beauty Care	2	0.1%	Beauty Care	62	4.5%
Health	68	4.8%	Health	57	4.2%
Transport/Logistics/Equipment	44	3.1%	Transport	45	3.3%
Agriculture/Food	54	3.8%	Agriculture	32	2.3%
Information Communications and Technology	235	16.6%	Information Communications and Technology	48	3.5%
Oil and Gas/ Energy	79	5.6%	Oil and Gas/ Energy	26	1.9%
Security	27	1.9%	Security	23	1.7%
Manufacturing	97	6.8%	Manufacturing	22	1.6%
Nonprofit (NGO/Religious)	162	11.4%	Non Profit (NGO)	17	1.2%
Civil Service (Government)	106	7.5%	Civil Service	11	0.8%
Consulting/Research	51	3.6%	Sales	1	0.1%
Not indicated	53	3.7%	Not indicated & other	345	25.3%
Totals	1417	100.0%	Total	1364	100%

4.2.1 Formats of Job Advertisements in Kenya

As a tradition and common practice, job advertisements in Kenya tend to follow a standard format:

- (i) **The job title:** usually specific to the role or level that the successful candidate will hold.
- (ii) **Introduction:** a brief description of the company advertising, and what it does. However when an advertisement is placed by a recruiting firm, this part tends to be omitted.
- (iii) **Job description:** this part describes the duties, responsibilities, expectations and level of authority the successful applicant will hold.
- (iv) **Job requirements:** usually job qualifications, skills, experience, knowledge, licenses, personal qualities and attributes, physical abilities and languages required for the position. This is the part where desired soft skills are often described. There is no common format for this, except that most advertisers list soft skills after stating the required technical skills and experience.

Despite having a standard format the amount of information provided tended to differ widely creating a number of challenges when analyzing the job advertisements. These challenges included:

- (i) The introduction section was often missing in the adverts. This made it difficult to know with accuracy the type of organization and sector advertising the job.
- (ii) The job descriptions were sometimes too general and often did not indicate the position of the job being described.
- (iii) Some job advertisements, 32.3%, see figure 7, omitted to indicate required soft skills at all.
- (iv) Finally as mentioned earlier, a lot of entry level jobs are not advertised in Kenya, and as these are likely to be the majority, the picture that emerges from this analysis cannot be considered complete.

Despite these challenges, the researchers consider this analysis as useful in as far as it shows to what extent employers signal desired soft skills to potential job applicants. The results also offer an opportunity to propose remedies to the challenges encountered, either through Education sector interventions or by interventions targeting employers themselves.

To simplify the analysis, the job advertisements were grouped into three broad clusters; Senior Management, Middle Management Level and Operations Staff.

4.2.2 Senior Management Level Jobs

These were advertisements seeking Managers at the highest level in the hierarchy of the organization. The jobs, as described in the advertisements, are often complex and the selected holders become responsible for the future growth of the organization. The most common roles sought under this category include: Board Chairpersons, Managing Directors, Board Members, Chief Executive Officers, Chief Operating Officers and General Managers. These jobs require the most experience and lay the greatest focus on the successful candidate possessing required soft skills (often described as desired aptitudes) in addition to technical skills. This category made up 7% of the jobs advertised and analyzed over the three months' period.

4.2.3 Middle Management Level Jobs

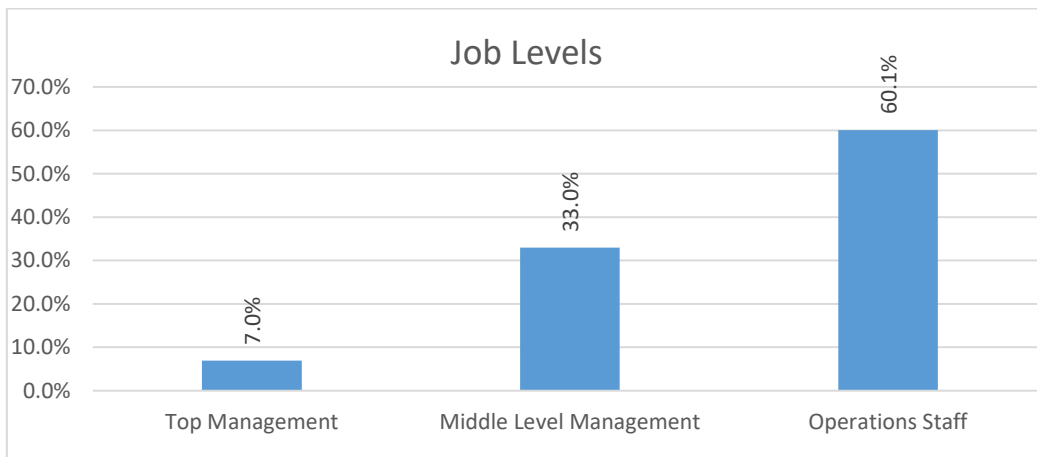
These jobs call for candidates who serve as a link between the senior management and Operational staff. They chiefly head departments, divisions and business units. The most common roles include: Finance Managers, Production Managers, Operations Managers, Marketing Managers, Sales Managers among others. For the purpose of this research, Supervisors and Team leaders were also included in this group. This category made up 33% of all jobs analyzed.

4.2.4 Operations Staff Jobs

These jobs comprise of employees responsible for the day to day routine work carried out in an organization. They often work under instruction. They are thus responsible for putting into action projects and plans. They receive directions from middle and sometimes senior management. This category included, but was not limited to, entry level jobs which generally require limited experience or none at all. These jobs cover a whole range from management trainees, seasonal and casual workers, service staff, artisans, technicians, craft workers, among others. This category contributed 60.1% of the jobs analyzed.

The proportion of advertisements analyzed under each job level is shown in the graph below.

Figure 6: Advertisements by job level



4.2.5 The Most Preferred Soft Skills

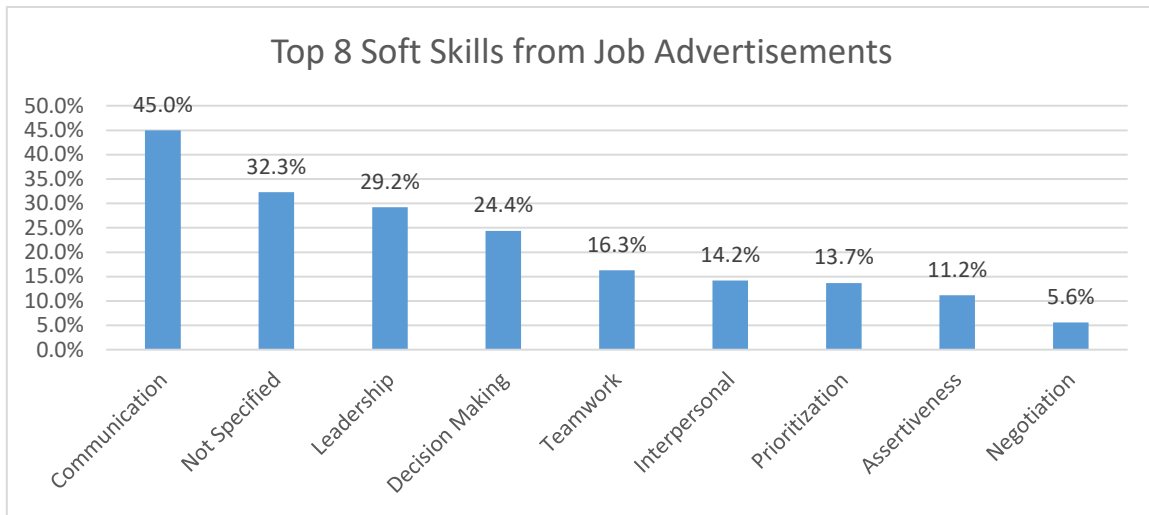
The analysis identified 57 soft skills indicated in the 1,417 job advertisements. For the purpose of this research, the 57 soft skills were grouped into eight broad clusters. These clusters were largely based on the same categories and format used in the questionnaire survey. The table below shows the eight soft skills categories used. Linked to each are sub-categories, largely drawn from the descriptive terms and phrases used in the job advertisements themselves.

Table 15: Soft skills clusters as per advertisements

Broad Soft Skills Clusters	Sub Categories
Communication	Verbal communication; written communication; presentation skills
Leadership	Management skills; influencing; initiative
Teamwork	Team player
Interpersonal	Collaborative skills; networking
Decision making	Analytical skills; reasoning; critical thinking; problem Solving
Prioritization	Planning; organizing
Assertiveness	Self-driven; pro-active; ambitious; resilient
Negotiation	Persuasiveness; conflict resolution

The bar chart below shows the percentages and ranks of these seven soft skill categories, and the instances of none specified, as represented in the analyzed job advertisements.

Figure 7: Top 8 ranked soft skills



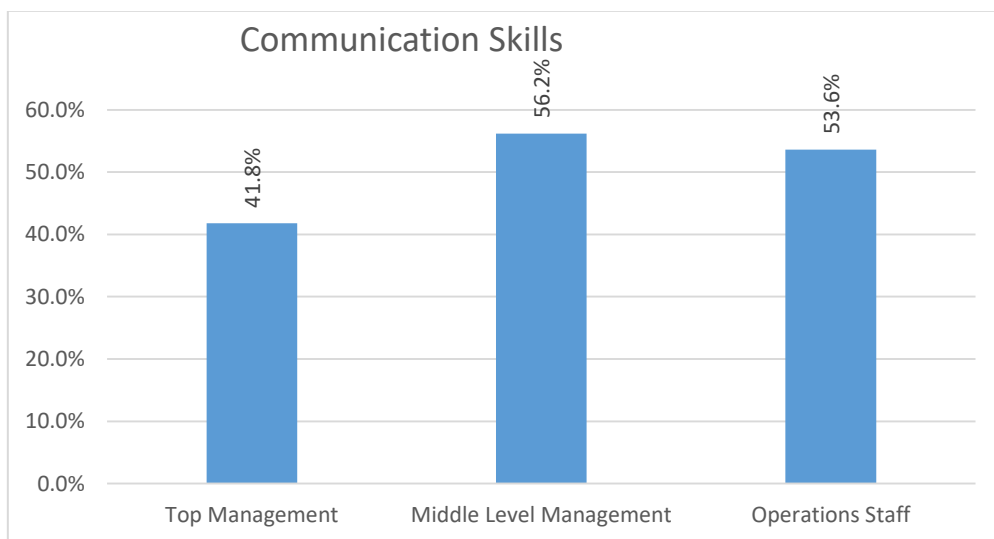
The most desired soft skill according to the job advertisements is communication skills with 45% (N=1417) of the advertisements listing it as a requirement for different kinds of jobs. A large number of advertisements (32.3%) did not indicate soft skill requirements at all. Leadership skills come third (29.2%), while negotiation skills were the least requested, with 5.6% of employers mentioning this as a requirement from applicants.

Not surprisingly, the rate at which each desired skill appeared in job advertisements tended to differ by job level. Thus, for instance, soft skills such as communication, leadership and decision-making were indicated as requirements for most top and middle management positions. On the other hand, soft skills such as teamwork and interpersonal relations were more likely to be required for lower level jobs. Below is further elaboration on the top five soft skill requirements against different job levels.

a) Communication Skills

Communication skills were signaled most often in all job advertisements as a desired prerequisite for potential job applicants. The distribution of this soft skill within the three job categories was fairly even at 41% for senior management, 56.2% for mid-level management and 53.6% for operations staff (see figure 8 below).

Figure 8: Communication skills requirements for different job levels



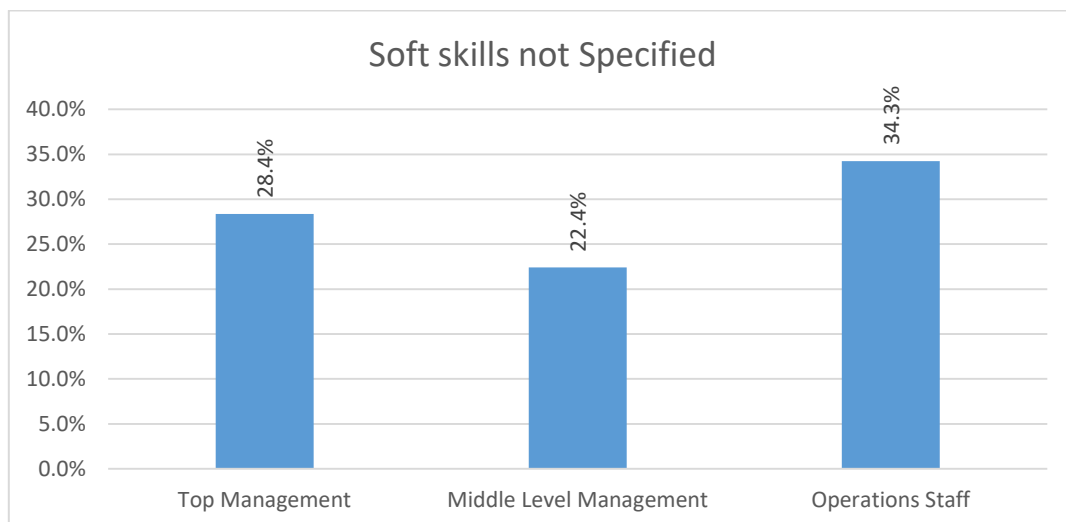
It is evident from the advertisements that communication as a soft skill is desired across the entire employment spectrum. This is not surprising as, from the analysis of questionnaire responses, communication also appears as the most preferred soft skill. The correspondence between the two samples indicates that, where communication is concerned, employers are not only stating their preference, but are also signaling the same message to potential employees through job advertisements. This point was emphasized many times and in different words by questionnaire respondents. For instance, one respondent, the Manager of a Law firm, who supervises 20 staff, was quoted as saying:

“Soft skills trained include; customer care, basic ICT, communication and change management...We have to train them how to communicate in emails and phone calls and how to conduct themselves in an office set up.”

b) Where no Soft Skills Were Specified

Figure 9, below illustrates the percentage of job advertisements which did not indicate any soft skills requirement. This was quite significant. Of the 1,417 advertisements analyzed, 32.3% did not indicate any soft skills required. The graph below shows how this proportion was distributed across different job levels.

Figure 9: Job advertisements without specified soft skills requirements



The data reveals that 34.3% of employers who advertised for operations staff positions did not indicate any desired soft skills, followed by 28.4% for top management positions and 22.4% for middle management positions. In each of these cases, the employers only described the desired technical skills or experience desired for the advertised job. Several conclusions can be drawn from this.

A majority of lower level operations job advertisement did not indicate soft skills requirements. This could partly explain the challenge identified earlier in this chapter, where 58.9% of employers admitted that, although they valued soft skills more when recruiting for entry level jobs, they faced greater challenges in recruiting for this level than in recruiting for management level. A much smaller number (29%) said they were facing challenges recruiting management level positions. This is not surprising as the job advertisements analysis reveals that they were omitting to signal these requirements much less often when recruiting for management positions than for any other positions. In any case, with a third of employment advertisements failing to signal any soft skill requirements for all kinds of jobs, this could mean employers do not see this as a valuable tool for overcoming the recruitment challenges they already face, or that they do not have a reasonably effective way to signal soft skills across all job levels.

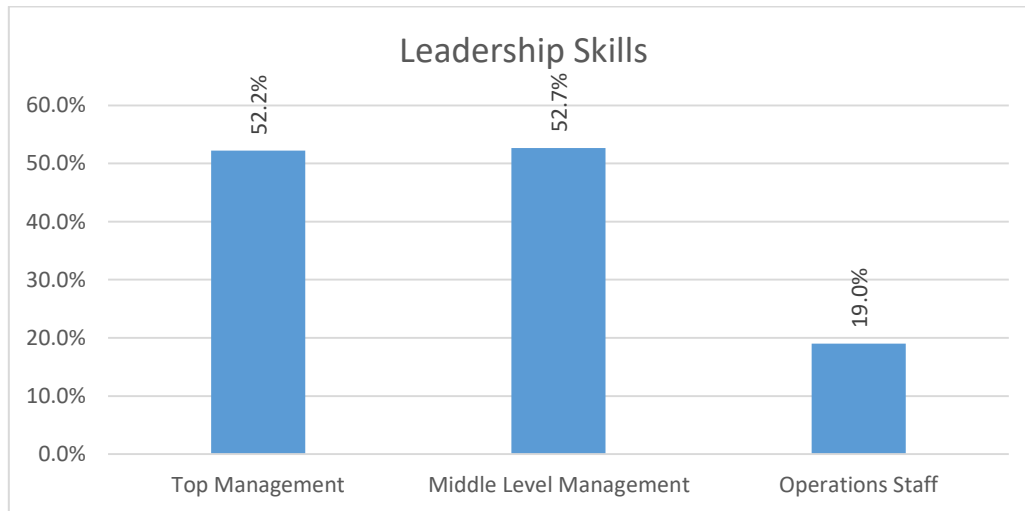
This would seem to point at the need for interventions targeting employers themselves; first to point out to them the need to clearly signal soft skills requirements when looking to hire at all levels. Further that they should also prioritize such signaling during entry level jobs hiring, as the recruitment challenge is

admittedly much greater at this level, and the risk of job mismatch is much higher. After all, management level job candidates tend to come with detailed experience and past performance trails that can be verified. Many entry level candidates don't, and as such, employers are quite often forced to hire them blindly. Finally this offers further support for the need to institute a credible system in which the Education sector can provide verifiable records of a candidate's soft skills which employers can check.

c) Leadership skills

Leadership was the second most desired soft skill, with 29.2% of the employers indicating this as a soft skills requirement in job advertisements. The graph below shows the distribution of leadership skills as a requirement across different job levels.

Figure 10: Leadership skills requirement across different job levels

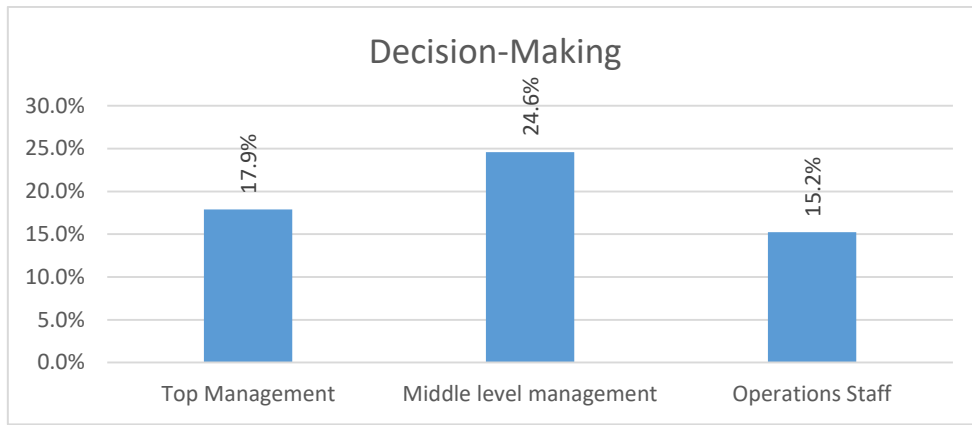


Leadership was a preferred soft skill for top management and middle management job levels (52.2% and 52.7% respectively) while it was required only 19% of the time for operations jobs. The comparatively higher need for leadership skills at middle and top management level is reasonable, as indeed these are roles on which an organizations growth, and even survival, depends. This reflects a common trend in many organizations where 'leadership' is most valued at the top while 'followership' is most valued at the bottom. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to examine in further detail how the signaling of leadership skills changes with changing structures of employment organizations and the wider economy—changes often characterized by such phenomena as increasingly flat organizations, job automation, semi-autonomous work arrangements, or even the fully autonomous 'gig work.' Such an examination might prove useful as Kenya, along with other world economies, increasingly grapples with these changes as well as the many uncertainties heralded by the advance of technology, broadly termed as 'the future of work.' Will soft skills be more important or less so in the future world of work?

d) Decision-making skills

Decision-making was ranked third in the list of most preferred soft skills, with 24.4% of job advertisements signaling this as a requirement. Problem solving and critical thinking skills were included in this category. The graph below shows how this skill preference is distributed across different job level categories.

Figure 11: Decision-making skills preference across job levels



The middle level management advertisements ranked decision making highest in their requests for soft skills, with 24.6% of adverts including it as a required skill. Advertisements for senior management level jobs came second with 17.9% followed by those for operations level staff with 15.2%. This mirrors the pattern observed for leadership skills above, which is not surprising as decisiveness is often seen as an important indicator of the presence of management potential or ability in an employee. It is also a fact that in many organizations, management staff are expected to offer leadership to other staff as a primary deliverable, with the direct execution of job tasks coming second or even lower.

e) Teamwork Skills

In all the advertisements analyzed, 16.3% listed teamwork as a desired soft skill for potential employees. Below is further analysis showing how this soft skill was distributed across the three job levels.

Figure 12: Teamwork skills preference across job levels

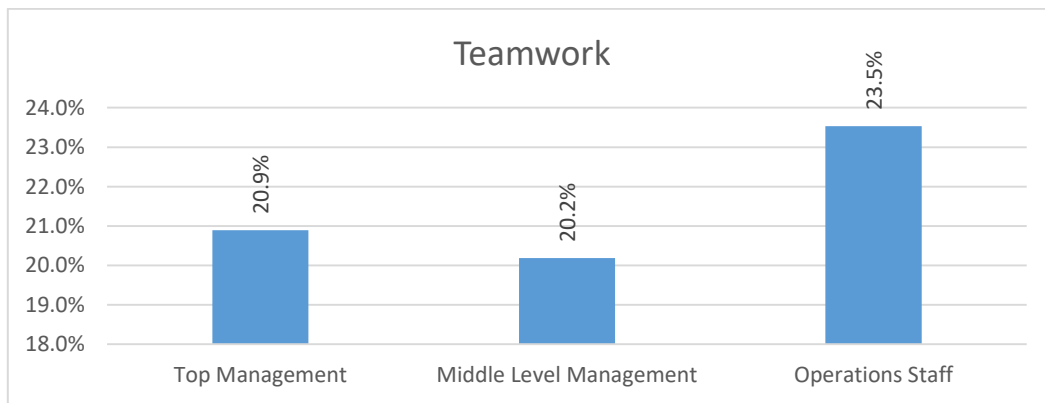


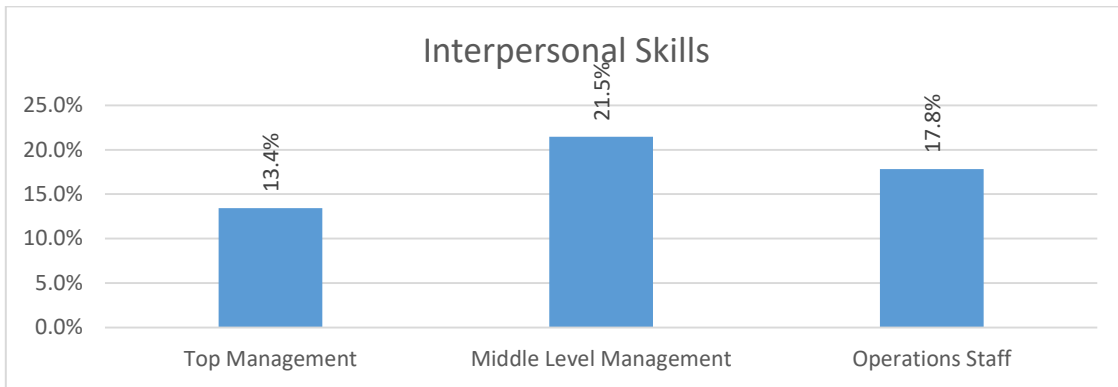
Figure 12 above indicates that teamwork ranked highest as a requirement in operations level job advertisements, with 23.5%. This is reflective of the expectations placed on staff at the bottom of the organizational pyramid to follow instructions, work in teams and deliver. Team work is an important skill set here and it is not surprising that many of the advertisements are signaling this requirement. The leadership of these teams is often given to mid-level management staff whose required skills sets and orientation are often quite different, having more to do with leadership and decision making as already observed.

f) Interpersonal Skills

14.2% of the job advertisements listed interpersonal skills as a job requirement. For the purposes of grouping, interpersonal skills were combined with networking skills and collaboration skills. Networking skills involve building relationships, keeping in contact and leveraging on influential connections, while

collaboration skills involve building trust between people to enable them to work together. Figure 13 below further analyses employers' requirement of interpersonal skills according to job levels.

Figure 13: Interpersonal skills preference across job levels

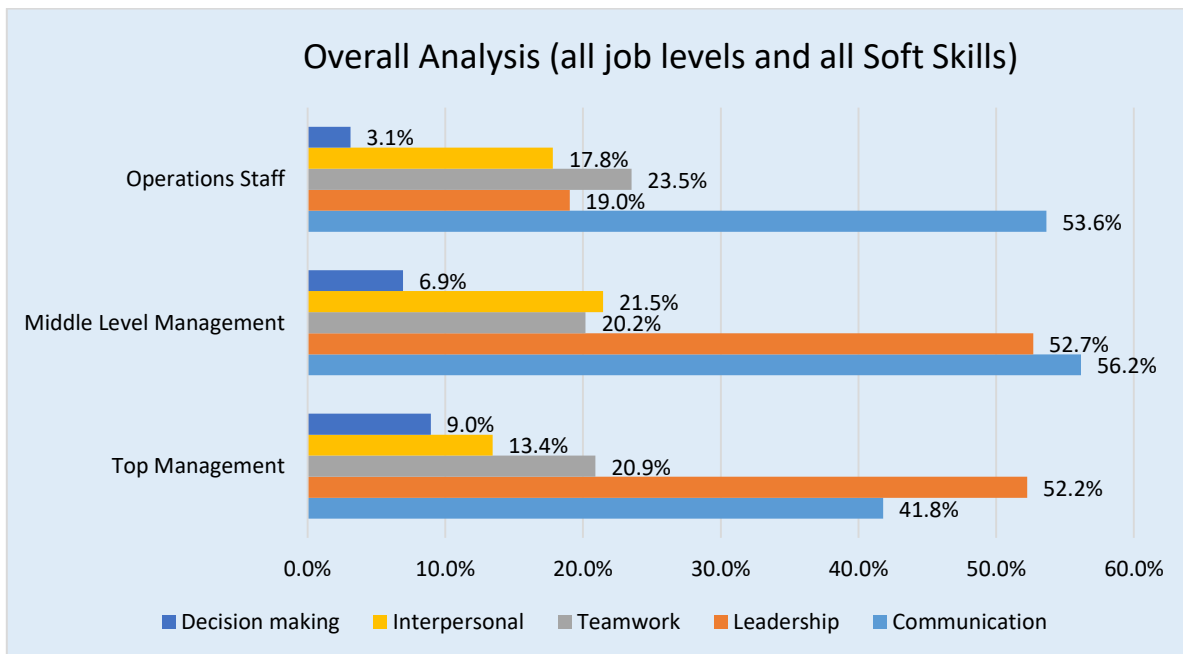


As indicated in the above figure, the middle level management job advertisements requested this skill most often with 21.5%, followed by operations staff level at, 17.8%. Senior management job advertisements signaled this skill only 13.4% of the time. The rating given for the operations staff category is in keeping with the pattern observed so far. In any case, interpersonal skills are an important adjunct of teamwork, and this could be the reason both are signaled as important for low level operations staff. The high preference for this soft skills at middle-level management could perhaps reflect the important organizational role that officers at this level play; that of chief communicators of information from the top as well as intermediaries between senior management and lower level staff.

4.2.6 Overall Analysis

From this analysis, an overall pattern of preferred soft skills distribution emerges, with communication skills taking a clear lead, as illustrated in the graph below.

Figure 14: Overall summary of preferred soft skills for all job levels



From the above summary, a hierarchy of soft skills requirements, as signaled in job advertisements, can be assessed and ranked. These are: *communication, leadership, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and decision making*, in that order (see table 16 below).

Table 16: Ranking of soft skills as signalled in job advertisement and based on job level

Order	Top Management	Score	Middle level management	Score	Operations staff	Score	Rank score
1	Leadership	5	Communication	5	Communication	5	12
2	Communication	4	Leadership	4	Teamwork	4	14
3	Teamwork	3	Interpersonal skills	3	Leadership	3	9
4	Interpersonal skills	2	Teamwork	2	Interpersonal skills	2	7
5	Decision-making	1	Decision-making	1	Decision-making	1	3

This ranking has been arrived at by scoring each of the soft skills according to the preference given under different job levels as analyzed above. The highest rated soft skill given a score of five and the lowest a score of one. The category where no soft skills were signaled has been omitted. The total score for each soft skill indicates the overall rank it has attained from the analysis of job advertisements and therefore the preference that employers have assigned it through signaling desired job qualifications.



Students practicing trust building as a part of a teamwork demonstration exercise. Skills such as team work, communication and leadership, which build on trust, are especially valued by employers.

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter examines the results from the study and offers key discussion of the findings. It relates them to similar findings elsewhere as well as to the wider experience of CAP YEI, TVET CDACC and Mastercard Foundation, the three organizations that collaborated in this research in as far as the integration of soft skills in youth development and education initiatives is concerned.

The analysis of questionnaire responses shows that a majority of employers are aware of soft skills and many are trained in them. They consider soft skills to be very important contributors to their companies' or organizations' productivity. When asked to say what criteria they use in selecting potential employees, on the one hand, or disciplining employees on the other, the presence or lack soft skills rate far higher than of technical skills. Most employers are already investing in soft skills by training their staff either in-house or externally.

This corresponds with research carried out in other parts of the world. For instance, the Washington State Human Resources Council (2014) survey report that launched a Workforce Readiness initiative to gauge employers' perceptions on soft skills indicated that company respondents placed overall great importance on soft skills, with 90% reporting that soft skills were "*more important than technical skills*" or "*as important as technical skills*". The remaining 10% responding to this question said that soft skills were "*important, but less than technical skills*". No one responded that soft skills were "*not essential*" to their organizations.

The Mastercard Foundation commissioned multi-donor report (YEFG, 2017) concurs. In recommending the creation of education and training partnerships with business, the report notes that "the development of soft skills is critical for business productivity." The study cites many examples in which this value to organizational productivity is realized. One of them is the Generation program, by McKinsey Inc., which develops soft skills programs by first observing highly productive people in the work place and then designing curriculum responses that are best able to generate the kind of behavior that will help a worker attain this level. This is different from the CAP YEI approach, which aims to create a ladder by which a vulnerable young person can find their way into securing a dignified livelihood or further learning opportunity. This approach tries to help these youth mitigate risk by providing multiple pathways leading to many possible future earning and further learning outcomes. Both approaches are essential for developing countries and should be considered.

In every case it is essential to create the kind of positive partnerships between skills providers and skills consumers (employers) that see both as integral to addressing this important social challenge; the kind of collaboration that the YEFG research considers an absolute essential. The possibility of generating such partnerships is indicated by the employer responses in the current research. For instance, even as they are willing to invest in soft skills for themselves and their employees, most employers believe soft skills training is the responsibility of the Education sector and recommend that such should start as early as possible. A majority of them (60.3%) believe that "all Institutions of learning should incorporate soft skills in their programs," while a further 51.7% say that "skills training institutions should place equal emphasis on providing 'soft' skills as they do on 'hard' technical skills." By the terms they use to describe soft skills, many employers imply that such soft skills training must be practical; oriented more towards engendering observable and positive work behavior change rather than merely inculcating theoretical values.

From the analysis of questionnaire responses, the five most valued (stated) soft skills by employers are: *Discipline, Integrity, Communication, Teamwork* and *Leadership* in that order. From the analysis of job advertisements, the five most valued (signaled) soft skills are: *Teamwork, Communications, Leadership, Interpersonal skills* and *Decision-making*.

Table 17: Top five soft skills comparison questionnaire vs advertisements

Order	From Questionnaire Analysis	From Job Advertisements Analysis
1	Discipline	Teamwork
2	Integrity	Communication
3	Communication	Leadership
4	Teamwork	Interpersonal skills
5	Leadership	Decision-making

These preferences are fairly well aligned (see above) with three soft skills, *communication*, *teamwork*, and *leadership* appearing as common in the two lists. This demonstrates a close correspondence between the expressed preferences by employers and how they signal these preferences to the outside world. *What are the implications of these findings?*

5.1 Implications of the Findings

5.1.1 Towards a Plan for Scale

The greatest need expressed by employers is for the education system to step forward and fill the obvious gap that has been identified in soft skills provision for potential employees. While the data gathered did not directly prescribe how this can be done, the validation of much of the Life skills curriculum of CAP YEI does indicate a useful starting point. We turn to discussing this potential platform now, starting from the premise that any efforts to provide soft skills in the required quality and scale must address both content and context issues.

5.1.2 Content - the Top 5 Soft Skills Preferred by Employers

The first step is to identify the most important soft skills. Fortunately, the employers have given a clear indication of the skills they value most, based both on the field survey and the desktop analysis. From these findings it is possible to triangulate a list of the top five soft skills preferred by employers, based on what they say and what they signal. This triangulated list is summarized in order of rank below.

Table 18: Top 5 preferred soft skills and corresponding work behaviours

Rank	Soft Skill	Corresponding Work Behavior	Rank Score
1	Communication	Verbally communicates well; good listener; asks for clarification	18
2	Integrity	Tells the truth; is seen as honest; behaves ethically; trustworthy	18
3	Discipline	Time management; follows instructions; avoids substance abuse	16
4	Team work	Collaborates with others; has good interpersonal skills; shares responsibility; solves conflicts	11
5	Leadership	Takes initiative; communicates instructions; gives feedback; takes responsibility for decisions and outcomes	10

The above triangulation was done by rating how highly each skill is indicated against different questions posed in the field survey, and as it appears across different job levels in the analysis of advertisements. For the sake of simplicity the preferences made in the two analysis were assumed to have the same weight. A detailed explanation is provided in annex 3. From this analysis the top rated soft skills as ascertained from the analysis of questionnaires and job advertisements are: **communication**, **integrity**, **discipline**, **team work** and **Leadership** in that order.

This rating seems to agree with some of the studies carried out in other parts of the world. For instance the researchers analyzed the top soft skills as indicated in four studies referenced in this research. *Communication, integrity* and *team work* feature prominently across most of the studies. The results of this comparison are summarized in the table below.

Table 19: Top soft skills across different studies

Current Study	Top 10 soft skills needed in today's work place; Eastern Kentucky University, US (Robles, 2012)	Soft skills are hard (a meta-analysis); Ryerson University, Canada (Cukier et. al, 2015)	What works in soft skills development for youth employment? (Youth Employment Funders Group, 2017). ⁹	The importance of soft skills in entry level employment and post-secondary success. Seattle Jobs Initiative (Pritchard, 2013)
Communication	Integrity	Communication	Positive self-concept	Communication
Integrity	Communication	Critical thinking	Self-control (discipline)	Critical thinking/ problem solving
Discipline	Courtesy	Problem solving	Communication	Teamwork
Teamwork	Responsibility	Interpersonal skills	Social skills	Integrity/professionalism
Leadership	Interpersonal skills	Teamwork	Higher order thinking	Adaptability
	...Team work			...Leadership

Of course it should be pointed out that a critical, overarching skill or behavior is the *ability to learn*. As one employer, the manager of a micro finance company based in Kitale, Kenya, pointed out:

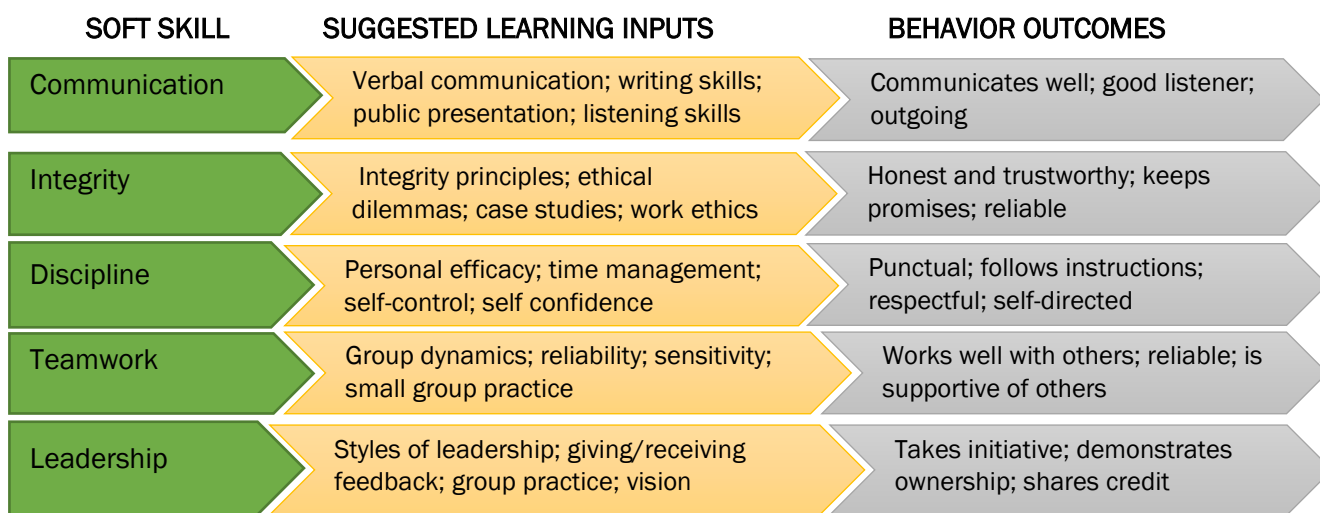
“The most important skill... is the ability and openness to learn. Nobody expects new employees to know everything, but we expect them to be open-minded enough to acquire new skills.”

The summary of preferred soft skills is important for several reasons. First it provides a core around which curricula for skills providers can be built. For skills providers, the primary outcome of their programs, as expressed by youth participants, is transition from learning to earning. They should consider these soft skills as indicating the minimum work behavior qualifications that employers require as a condition for hiring.

However as the Youth Employment Funders Group (2017) research points out: “A focus on these skills for youth employment programming does not mean that they are the only soft skills that matter for all young people everywhere, nor that programs should cease conducting assessments to determine the needs of particular target groups.” Other important skills and activities, including those that engender desired values, beliefs and culture can and should be built around them. However, where time and resources are limited, as is often the case for overstretched TVET systems, this list offers a guideline for trainers as to what the minimum inputs for soft skills training should be, whether integrated in other courses or offered as a stand-alone subject. From the core list of soft skills an occupational framework of desired behaviors can be developed. A provisional draft summary is provided below.

⁹ These were the skills identified in Lippman, L., Ryberg, R., Carney, R., and Moore. K., Key “Soft Skills” that Foster Youth Workforce Success: Toward a Consensus across Fields (Washington, DC, USAID/Child Trends/FHI360, 2015). This study included youth’s success in obtaining a job, promotion on the job, wages/income, and entrepreneurship success.

Figure 15: Draft learning framework to achieve desired soft skills and related work behaviour



This framework summarizes the key learning inputs against each of the soft skills and some of the behavior change outcomes to be expected. From here it is possible to design interventions and tools to be used for delivery of content to achieve desired work behavior change in employees.

5.2 Measuring Soft Skills

This raises the important question of how to measure soft skills. While, admittedly there is a shortage of proven, scalable tools for soft skills measurement, some useful examples do exist around the world. For instance, a report by USAID (2017), while acknowledging that “soft skills measurement is still an emerging area of research,” provides an inventory of 10 tools for measuring soft skills in international youth programs from around the world. Some of these could be adapted to serve as resources for measuring the impact of soft skills content in TVET programs in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa.

CAP YEI uses a simplified Individual Youth Learning and Development Plan (IYLDP) that is fairly easy to replicate and scale. The IYLDP is a framework that summarizes the main topics covered in the Life skills curriculum of CAP YEI and the corresponding desired behavior outcomes the trainees are supposed to exhibit (see, IYLDP, annex 5). A scoring frame is provided, which rates how each trainee exhibits these desired behaviors on a scale from 1 to 4. The facilitator observes trainees behavior and rates how each performs over the training period, which is normally three months. A summary of the scores is regularly shared with trainees and verbal feedback is also given to each of them. Where serious lapses are observed, specific remedial interventions are organized. A version of the IYLDP was used in the study to test integration of the CAP Life skills curriculum in the government TVET system referred to earlier (GIZ, 2018). Those trainers who used it said they found it useful. Similar simple tools should be designed as an integral part of soft skills curricula for the TVET sector. To ensure these tool are used, they should be integrated into the continuous assessment processes that are now required as part of the CBET framework.

5.3 The Context Issue of Soft Skills (from BEST to CBET)

One of the major challenges in responding to the recommendations made by employers in this study will be to address the big context challenges that affect delivery of any skills in the Kenyan TVET system. These challenges include poor resourcing of TVET institutions, outdated models and curricula, poor or limited regulatory framework and lack of up-to-date information on which flexible demand-led interventions can be based. Two of the organizations engaged in this research (CAP YEI and CDACC) have been engaged in the development of frameworks and approaches that have potential to address some of these challenges. Two examples have already been mentioned, namely the Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST) model of CAP YEI and the Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) framework introduced by TVET CDACC as a key plank of government led TVET reforms in Kenya. Both approaches bear significant similarities and CAP YEI has been able to integrate them into a package for capacity building of TVET providers from different counties in Kenya. For a detailed description of these

approaches see annex 6 and 7. We recommend a deliberate effort to identify, adapt and scale up such models that have been shown to work anywhere in the world be considered. Annex 7 provides an example of how such a model could be mapped and adapted to address system wide challenges of TVET and youth unemployment. It is not perfect but then lack of perfect solutions should not be an excuse for inaction. The challenge of youth unemployment in Africa is too big and the needs of our youth and societies too great for us to wait to create perfect solutions that may never come.



CAP YEI students form a 'circle of trust' at the start of a soft skills practice session: Employers insist that soft skills delivery must be practical and oriented towards work behaviour change. Programs that are overly theoretical are therefore not likely to meet employer expectations.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

Harnessing the youths' potential is essential for Kenya's effective economic development. This potential must be accessed through education, training and employment. Success requires a concerted effort to bridge the skills gap between what the graduates from tertiary institutions are taught and what the job market requires. One of the important factors behind this skills gap is the dearth of soft skills training, despite the clear evidence that employers say these skills are required. Providing these skills will improve transition to the world of work for trainees. It will also have the added benefit of providing skills and attitudes that willing youth will find useful for the practice of entrepreneurship, as those who go into business will become future employers themselves.

This study suggests that people who possess soft skills have higher chances of gaining and retaining employment. The study has established that most employers prefer to recruit people with soft skills at both entry and management levels. The study also found out that employees with soft skills performed better than those without soft skills. Therefore, TVET and other tertiary institutions of higher learning should integrate soft skills into their curricula and adopt a more practical approach in their instruction. The study recommends the two frameworks used as study references, BEST and CBET, among others, as useful platforms for scaling up soft skills delivery and measuring learning and livelihood outcomes. This will provide an opportunity for empirical analysis of the impact of soft skill courses, as well as reveal remedial measures that need to be put in place.

There must also be cooperation between the private sector and education institutes to ensure that students are being trained in skills that are in demand. Vocational schools that partner with the private sector will be able to create a training-to-position pipeline that satisfies the needs of businesses while providing crucial employment to youth beneficiaries.

From the study, most employers would like the basic education system to integrate soft skills training at the early stages of childhood and youth development. This is critical as many educational institutions in Kenya rarely emphasize these skills, or only do so at the tertiary level when the full impact on learners is limited. It is imperative that the Ministry of Education develop a more progressive soft skills program relative to the socio-economic needs of the country and the emerging global economy (Assan and Walker, 2018). In this regard, career departments at the institutions of higher learning ought to actively and systematically engage with both students and potential employers in order to stay informed about contemporary trends and the needs of the labor market.

6.2 Recommendations

1. Employers face more challenges when hiring entry level staff than they do when hiring management level staff despite the large labor pool available to choose entry level staff from, This could be because these hires are mainly unknown quantities (young beginners) compared to management level staff, who usually come with a verifiable record of experience:
 - (i) It is recommended that this situation be mitigated by exposing students to the world of work as part of skills training (work readiness and other soft skills) so that they become much more prepared for entry level jobs.
 - (ii) As a policy, stakeholders, working with Government, should aim to ensure that every student in a tertiary institution is able to secure an opportunity for internship during training.

- (iii) Government should support the development of an environment of work readiness by offering incentives to those employers who provide internships and by revising restrictive labor laws that exclude children and youth from positive work experiences.¹⁰
 - (iv) Programs targeting employers, to demonstrate to them the importance of signaling soft skills requirements at all levels to improve recruitment outcomes should be implemented.
2. From the responses of most employers, we can conclude that making soft skills a key point of emphasis at tertiary level is a good strategy to ensure a high transition to employment rate and progression from entry level jobs to higher level jobs:
 - (i) The Ministry of Education should make soft skills an integral part of the curriculum of the basic, secondary and tertiary Education sectors
 - (ii) Soft skills should be made mandatory and examinable in all TVET skills programs.
 - (iii) Government, funding agencies and other stakeholders, should work together to ensure the CBET approach is implemented across the entire TVET sector.
 3. The five most valued soft skills by employers are: *Communication, Integrity, Discipline Teamwork and Leadership*. These are confirmed by both the field survey and the desktop analysis of employer signaling through job advertisements.
 - (i) It is recommended that these be considered as core skills around which desired work behavior frameworks to underpin soft skills curricula for TVET institutions are constructed.
 - (ii) Tools for experiential curriculum delivery, as well as for measuring soft skills learning outcomes and impact, should be developed and their use mandated for skills providers.
 4. The development of market responsive, demand-led skills training programs in Kenya is critical. There must also be cooperation between the private sector and education institutes to ensure that students are being trained in skills that are in demand:
 - (i) Employers should be accorded a meaningful role in curriculum development, delivery, certification and the governance of all TVET institutions.
 - (ii) Government should introduce a system for gathering and sharing current data on employability conditions and trainee outcomes, through for instance, regional market scans, longitudinal surveys of TVET learning and livelihood outcomes and closer integration of TVET outputs with development plans.

¹⁰ Many years of well-intended legal and policy reforms in the interest of child rights and protection have had the unfortunate consequence that almost any kind of work done by children is viewed as negative child labor in Kenya. This unfortunate consequence of otherwise well-meant reforms needs to be revisited in the interest of better preparing children and youth for the world of work.

Annex 1: Questionnaire on employers' perspectives of soft skills

RESEARCH ON EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVES ON SOFT SKILLS

Date: _____ Interviewers name: _____

Dear Participant,

CAP Youth empowerment Institute (CAP YEI) – www.capyei.org - is a not-for-profit NGO that trains out of school vulnerable youth in job entry level skills through our Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST) model. CAP YEI has been successful in training over 36,000 youth in Kenya where 75% are placed in entry level jobs after training and about 8% start a business. This success has been attributed to the inclusion and emphasis placed on “soft” Life skills as well as on “hard” technical skills. **Soft skills** are also referred to as **Life skills, transferable skills or 21st Century skills**. Where used in this survey, these words are interchangeable and meant to mean the same thing (see definition of soft skills under section B, below).

CAP YEI in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and TVETA/CDACC (TVET Curriculum Development, Assessment and Certification Council) - the Government agency responsible for technical and vocational training curriculum development and assessment, are jointly conducting this research with the key objectives being to:

- Capture industry and employers perspectives on soft skills (life skills)
- Assess the importance of soft skills to industry and employers
- Validate or invalidate the current Life skills training curriculum of CAP YEI
- Inform the development of soft skills training and support in Kenya.

It is to that end that we are inviting you to participate in this research study by completing this survey. It will require approximately 20 minutes of your time. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your responses are confidential. If you have any questions, concerns or require additional information, please contact: **Sharleen Muthoni** at sharleen.muthoni@gmail.com or +254725335481.

We value your honest and detailed responses.

Yours Sincerely,

Ndũng'ũ Kahĩhu
Executive Director, CAPYEI
ndungu@capyei.org

Prof. Charles Ondieki
Chairman, TVET CDACC
charlesondieki@gmail.com

SECTION A:

Please tell a little us about yourself and your Company or organization:

Name of the organization:			
Type of organization (Private, NGO, Government etc.):			
In which sector/ industry is your organization:	Retail services	Communication	
	Manufacturing	Transport	
	Education	IT	
	Construction	Security	
	Beauty Care	Government	
	Agriculture	Non Profit (NGO)	
	Religious organization	Other: _____	
Location of the organization:			
Approx. No. of employees in the organization:			
Name of the person/ persons filing in the questionnaire (optional):			
Designation:			
Number of people you supervise:			
Do you make Hiring Decisions?	YES	NO	
Do you make Firing decisions?	YES	NO	
Contact Tel (optional):			

SECTION B

Tell us about Soft/Life skills

Definition of terms:

Soft Skills/Life skills: This is a term used to describe a set of basic skills acquired through teaching and/or direct life experience. Life skills enable individuals and groups to effectively handle issues and problems commonly encountered in daily life (work, home and social lives). The skills include creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, the ability to communicate and collaborate, and personal and social responsibility, which contribute to good citizenship—all essential skills for success in the 21st Century, both for healthy societies and for successful and employable individuals.

Technical Skills: This is a practical skill (not including soft/Life skills) required to accomplish a specific task and mainly acquired through training or practice.

Questions:

1. Have you had training in soft skills?:

YES	NO

2. If YES, where did you get the training? (choose all that apply):

In Secondary school	
In College/University	
At my place of work	
Through my religious organization	
Online course	
Other: _____	

3. What 3 words (or less) best describe what **soft skills** means to you?

(i) _____ (ii) _____ (iii) _____

4. How important are soft skills to your company/organization? (choose one)

Very important	
Somewhat important	
Neutral	
Somewhat unimportant	
Not important at all	
I do not know	

5. How do you assess whether or not job candidates possess the appropriate soft skills? (choose those that apply)

We include the requirements in job advertisements	
During the interview process	
From the candidates CV	
From education certificates/transcripts etc	
Recruitment tests	
Through referrals	
Through work performance evaluation	
Others: _____	

6. From where do you hire most of your staff?

Technical Universities (local)	
Other Kenyan Universities	
Universities abroad	
Professional Colleges	
Technical Colleges	
Vocational Training Centers	
Secondary Schools	
Primary Schools	
None of the above	
Other Institutions (list below):	

7. From the institutions most preferred by your organisation for hiring staff, which of the following are the key reasons for favoring them? Tick those that apply.

Reason	
They are more competent	
They have a positive attitude	
More productive	
Show greater initiative	
Become better Managers	
Learn faster	
Thy show Leadership	
Other: _____	

8. Hiring challenges:

(a) Have you had challenges hiring staff in your organization?

Yes:	No:
------	-----

(b) If YES, have you had more difficulty hiring entry level or management level employees?

Entry level employees	
Management level employees	
Other: _____	

9. What level of importance do you place on the following aspects when hiring entry level staff? :

Aspect	Very important	Somewhat important	Neutral	Somewhat important	Very unimportant
Work experience					
Education qualifications					
Education grade achieved					
Grade on certain technical courses					
Recommendations					
Technical skills					
Soft skills					
Criminal record					
Age of the candidate					
Physical attractiveness					
Candidate Salary Expectations					
Drug screening					

10. What level of importance do you place in the following aspects when hiring management or senior level staff?:

Aspect	Very important	Somewhat important	Neutral	Somewhat important	Very unimportant
Work experience					
Education qualifications					
Education grade achieved					
Grade on certain technical courses					
Recommendations					
Technical skills					
Soft skills					
Criminal record					
Age of the candidate					
Physical attractiveness					
Candidate Salary Expectations					
Drug screening					

11. How does your company/organization help employees to develop soft skills? (choose all that apply)

We don't do anything	
In house training	
Support to attend external training	
One-on-one coaching	
Online courses	
Mentorship	
Team building activities	
Motivation talks	
Preaching through a religious leader	
Others: _____	

12. Employers often complain about a 'skills gap' in Kenya; namely, that the skills young people get from training institutions do not match the requirements for employment. Which of the following statements do you feel best explains the cause of this skills gap?

Lack of soft skills	
Lack of technical skills	
Lack of strong leadership skills	
I do not think there is a skills gap in Kenya.	
Other: _____	

13. From the list below, please select the most common reasons for firing or disciplining an employee in your organization. Tick those that apply.

CAUSE FOR FIRING	
Lack of technical skills to perform the required tasks	
Poor written communication skills	
Poor verbal communication skills	
Lacked initiative	
Lack of creativity	
Poor time management	
Lack of prioritization skills	
Lack of multi-tasking skills	
Failure to follow instructions	
Inability to develop or achieve goals	
Poorly informed on current issues	
Poor leadership skills	
Rudeness to colleagues, customers etc.	
Poor team worker	
Failure to learn new skills	
Negative attitude	
Unethical behavior e.g. Sexual harassment, poor sexual behavior, dishonesty etc.	
Gender biasness	
Drug abuse	
Smoking in the workplace	
Proneness to accidents	
Poor physical abilities (Dexterity, physical fitness, good health etc.)	
Other causes (list below)	

14. Which soft skills are most valued in your organisation? Tick those that apply.

Skill /Rating	
Effective written communication	
Effective verbal communication	
Critical thinking and decision making	
Creativity	
Professional behavior and work ethics including honesty,	
Teamwork skills	
Self confidence	
Ability to be factually informed on current issues	
Ability to follow instruction	
Interpersonal skills	
Problem- solving skills	
Multi-tasking skills	
Ability to prioritize tasks	
Coping with stress	
Assertiveness	
Negotiation skills	
Conflict resolution skills	
Leadership skills	
Gender equity/ Lack of gender biasness	
Safety & standard records	
Physical abilities (Dexterity, physical fitness, mental fitness, good health)	
Knowledge on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS	
Other:	

15. Please rate the following statements by choosing between options given:

Statement/Rating	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Soft skills contribute a lot to my company/organization's productivity					
Soft skills are best taught by parents and religious leaders					
Skills training institutions should place equal emphasis on providing 'soft' skills as they do on 'hard' technical skills					
Employers have a responsibility to train their staff in soft skills					
All institutions of learning should incorporate soft skills as part of their programs					
Soft skills training should be taught as early as a possible in a person's life					
My company/organization would be willing to pay for staff to be trained in soft skills					
Soft skills cannot be taught; you either have them or you don't					
From my experience, people who have good soft skills tend to do better at work than those who only have technical skills					
If I had to choose between a technically competent person but with no soft skills and one with soft skills but limited technical know-how, I would hire the second person					

16. Thinking of your BEST employee, which of the following statements would best describe her/him? Tick those that apply.

Skill /Rating	
Good problem solver	
Takes initiative	
Learns new things quickly	
Is disciplined	
Compassionate	
Good listener	
Self-confident	
Communicates well	
Solves conflicts	
Follows orders	
Good negotiator	
Critical thinking	
Has good social skills	
Is decisive	
Other: _____	

17. Any other comments you would like to offer about the issue of soft skills?

18. Would like to be informed about the findings from this research?

YES	NO
-----	----

If YES, please give your email address: _____

Annex 2: Employers' responses to different statements about soft skills

Order	Statement	Percent					Missing (%)
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	Soft skills contribute to my company/organisations productivity	70.2%	23.5%	2.3%	0.0%	0.1%	4.0%
2	All Institutions of learning should incorporate soft skills in their programs	60.3%	28.2%	5.4%	0.4%	0.0%	5.6%
3	Soft skills training should be taught as early as a possible in a person's life	59.0%	23.8%	10.3%	0.8%	0.2%	5.8%
4	From my experience, people who have good soft skills tend to do better at work than those who only have technical skills	52.9%	29.8%	8.8%	2.1%	1.0%	5.4%
5	Skills training institutions should place equal emphasis on providing 'soft' skills as they do on 'hard' technical skills	51.7%	33.7%	8.2%	0.5%	0.2%	5.7%
6	Employers have a responsibility to train soft skills	35.9%	36.9%	15.3%	4.1%	2.3%	5.5%
7	If I had to choose between a technically competent person but with no soft skills and one with soft skills but limited technical know-how, I would hire the second person	30.4%	38.6%	18.3%	5.7%	1.6%	5.4%
8	My company/organization would be willing to pay for staff to be trained in soft skills	27.9%	28.7%	27.2%	6.5%	2.9%	6.7%
9	Soft skills are best taught by parents and religious leaders	25.7%	27.3%	26.9%	11.4%	2.1%	6.5%
10	Soft skills cannot be taught, you either have them or not	6.0%	7.3%	22.2%	30.1%	27.5%	6.8%

Annex 3: Triangulation of top soft skill preferences from the questionnaire responses and analysis of job advertisements

Question/Cluster/Preference	Implied Soft Skill	Rank	Total Score
1 What 3 words (or less) best describe what soft skills means to you?			
Honesty	Integrity	5	18
Discipline	Discipline	4	16
Communication	Communication	3	18
Hard working	Motivation	2	
Integrity	Integrity	1	
2 Most common reasons for firing or disciplining an employee			
Rudeness	Teamwork	5	11
Failure to follow instructions	Communication	4	
Unethical behavior	Integrity	3	
Poor time management	Discipline	2	
Drug abuse	Discipline	1	
3 The soft skills that are most valued in your organization			
Professional behavior/work ethics	Integrity	5	
Ability to follow instructions	Discipline	4	
Verbal communications	Communications	3	
Teamwork	Teamwork	2	
Self-confidence	Self-confidence	1	1
4 Qualities of best employee			
Is disciplined	Discipline	5	
Communicates well	Communication	4	
Takes initiative	Leadership	3	10
Good problem solver	Analytical	2	2
Learns new things quickly	?	1	
5 Preferences from analysis of job advertisements			
Leadership	Leadership	5	
Communication	Communication	4	
Teamwork	Teamwork	3	
Decision-making	Leadership	2	
Interpersonal skills	Teamwork	1	

TOP 5 SOFT SKILLS

RANK	SOFT SKILL	DESCRIPTION	SCORE
1	Communication	Verbally communicates well; good listener; asks for clarification	18
2	Integrity	Honest; ethical behavior; trustworthy	18
3	Discipline	Times management; follows instructions; avoids substance abuse	16
4	Team work	Collaborates with others; good interpersonal skills; shares responsibility	11
5	Leadership	Takes initiative; communicates instructions; give feedback; takes responsibility for decisions and outcomes	10

Annex 4: Employers' reasons for firing or disciplining an employee

Order	Item	Frequency		Total	Yes (%)
		Yes	No		
1	Rudeness to Colleagues/Customers/Others	1002	340	1342	73.5%
2	Failure to Follow Instructions	826	516	1342	60.6%
3	Unethical behavior	872	470	1342	63.9%
4	Poor Time Management	725	617	1342	53.2%
5	Drug Abuse	712	630	1342	52.2%
6	Smoking in the Workplace	454	887	1341	33.3%
7	Poor Team Worker	453	889	1342	33.2%
8	Lack of Technical Skills	443	895	1338	32.5%
9	Poor Communication Skills	442	898	1340	32.4%
10	Inability to Develop or Achieve Goals	428	914	1342	31.4%
11	Lacked Initiative	284	1058	1342	20.8%
12	Poor Leadership Skills	247	1095	1342	18.1%
13	Gender Bias	219	1123	1342	16.1%
14	Failure to Learn New Skills	206	1136	1342	15.1%
15	Lack of Prioritization Skills	201	1140	1341	14.7%
16	Lack of Creativity	180	1162	1342	13.2%
17	Lack of multi-tasking Skills	114	1228	1342	8.4%
18	Proneness to Accidents	100	1241	1341	7.3%
19	Poorly Informed on Current Issues	68	1274	1342	5.0%
20	Poor Physical Abilities	50	1291	1341	3.7%
21	Other Causes	50	1291	1341	3.7%

Annex 5: Individual Youth Learning and Development Plan (IYLDP)

Name of the student: _____ Course: _____
 Center: _____ Batch #: _____

Assessment #: [First] [Second] [Third] Date of this assessment: _____

Rate the above named student on the dimensions given below. These dimensions indicate job readiness in the BEST trainees. To enhance objectivity, each of the dimensions are broken down into specific items – under which indicators are given to aid assessment. The rating scale runs from 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest mark. Please keep in mind that this assessment is meant to be used for enhancing learning outcomes of trainees and not as an appraisal tool.

I	Time Management	
#	DIMENSIONS	Rating (1 to 4)

A)	REGULAR ATTENDANCE	
4	Comes to BEST everyday - is very regular for all classes	
3	Comes to BEST most of the days. Has a valid reason when absent	
2	Takes very frequent days off but has a genuine problem/ difficulty	
1	Takes frequent days off without any valid reason	
B)	PUNCTUALITY	
4	Comes to BEST on time - is very punctual for all classes	
3	Comes to BEST on time most of the days. Has a valid reason when late	
2	Comes late quite frequently but has a genuine problem/ difficulty	
1	Comes late very often without any valid reason	
C)	MEETING DEADLINES	
4	Submits all assignments on time	
3	Submits most of the assignments on time & informs when unable to submit	
2	Submits assignments late but seems to have a genuine difficulty	
1	Never submits assignments on time	

II	Interpersonal Skills	
----	----------------------	--

A)	TEAM WORK	
4	Works well with the entire group and is liked by everyone	
3	Is seen as part of the team but has low participation	

2	Is very withdrawn and never works as part of the team	
1	Keeps getting into fights and arguments with other team members, cannot work well as part of a team	
B)	AUTHORITY	
4	Respects and obeys those in authority	
3	Shows respect but does not obey those in authority	
2	Completely defies any person in authority	
1	Does not interact with authority - seems fearful/scared/hostile	
C)	INTERACTION WITH EXTERNAL PEOPLE FROM INDUSTRY	
4	Interacts actively with external people from industry by asking lots of questions and listening attentively	
3	Interacts to a reasonable extent with external people from the industry and is attentive	
2	Does not ask many questions, seems shy but listens attentively	
1	Is very closed and seems indifferent during interactions with external people from industry	
D)	SENSITIVITY	
4	Is very sensitive to all group members - understands them and shows care and concern	
3	Tries to be sensitive but is unable to do so constructively	
2	Looks out for self without considering others; has a <i>"live and let live"</i> attitude	
1	Is perceived as a very insensitive person - looks out for self at the cost of others	
III	Communication	
A)	LISTENING	
4	Listens to everyone very attentively (authority, external people as well as fellow batch mates)	
3	Listens to what is being said only by people in authority; does not listen to peers	
2	Listens to only a select few people in authority and not to everyone	
1	Does not listen at all to what is being said by anyone	
B)	PARTICIPATION	
4	Is very participative in all group/ class activities and discussions	
3	Shows average participation in group/ class activities and discussions	
2	Shows very low/ no participation in group/ class activities and discussions	
1	Disrupts groups/ class activities and discussions by negative participation	
C)	SPEAKING	
4	Speaks in a clear manner and demonstrates good diction	
3	Speaks clearly but needs to improve her/his diction	
2	Has poor skills while talking - in terms of diction and clarity	
1	Does not talk at all	

D)	CONTENT	
4	Answers questions / presents valid points concisely	
3	While answering questions / presenting view points, only half the matter is relevant	
2	Seems completely off the mark while answering questions or presenting view points	
1	Does not attempt to answer any questions at all	
E)	COMPREHENSION	
4	Comprehends when he/she reads something by self as well as listens to someone	
3	Comprehends by listening when someone is reading out something/speaking but unable to comprehend when reading by self	
2	Comprehends when reads something but not by listening to what is being read out/ spoken	
1	Has very poor comprehension – both by reading or listening	
F)	BODY LANGUAGE	
4	Has positive body language - uses appropriate gestures and good overall posture while communicating	
3	Body language needs some improvement – while posture indicates openness and attentiveness, does not use appropriate gestures to aid communication	
2	Poor body language – seems very uncomfortable and closed and has poor posture	
1	Has a negative body language – leads to misunderstanding or miscommunication	
IV	Maturity	
A)	DECISION MAKING	
4	Arrives at a decision by looking at the issue from different perspectives and generating/weighing several options by self	
3	Arrives at a decision by understanding everyone's opinion about the issue & deciding by self	
2	Arrives at a decisions simply based on others opinion	
1	Shows no ability to take decisions	
B)	FOCUS	
4	Is focused on the future and is clear on how to go about it	
3	Has a fairly good idea of what he/ she wants in the long term but is unclear about details	
2	Understands what he/ she wants in the short term but has no clarity regarding the future	
1	Has no intentions of planning own future (completely dependent on others)	
C)	UNDERSTANDING OF THE JOB MARKET	
4	Takes an active interest to understand the job market through field visits, interactions with people and reading relevant articles & magazines	
3	Tries to understand the job market through field visits, interactions with people but does not read books and magazines	
2	Tries to understand the job market by reading relevant articles & magazines but does go out on the field visits or interact with external people	
1	Makes no attempt to understand the job market and work environment	
D)	HANDLING RESPONSIBILITY	

4	Volunteers to take responsibility and fulfills the same				
3	Does not volunteer to take responsibility, but when entrusted with some, does what is required				
2	Refuses to take any responsibility				
1	When entrusted with a responsibility, does not do what is required to be done - acts irresponsibly				
E)	REPORTING				
4	Keeps people concerned informed of the status of work and other related issues				
3	Communicates all issues and problems being faced but not the overall status				
2	Does not keep concerned people informed about the status or problems on own accord but volunteers information when asked				
1	Unwilling to face an issue; simply distances self from BEST when facing issues or does a disappearing act				
V	1. Leadership skills (Please tick whichever is appropriate)				
A	Initiative	Excellent 4	Good 3	Average 2	Poor 1
B	Managing a team when group work needs to be done	Excellent 4	Good 3	Average 2	Poor 1
C	Resourceful - Ensures that the work gets done	Excellent 4	Good 3	Average 2	Poor 1
D	Creative - giving new ideas and perspectives	Excellent 4	Good 3	Average 2	Poor 1
E	Able to cope when under stress & disharmony	Excellent 4	Good 3	Average 2	Poor 1
V	2. Personality (Please tick whichever is appropriate)				
A	Etiquette	Excellent 4	Good 3	Average 2	Poor 1
B	Confidence	Excellent 4	Good 3	Average 2	Poor 1
C	Grooming	Excellent 4	Good 3	Average 2	Poor 1

Please give your overall comments / observations about the trainee:

Feedback given by: _____

(Name, date and signature of person giving feedback)

Annex 6: Soft skills and the Basic Employability Skills Training model

Soft skills are delivered by CAP YEI within an integrated nine step BEST model (see diagram). The first time that students are introduced to soft skills is in step 2, during a one week induction phase that is



used also as an orientation, before selection of technical courses. But the truth is, the process of identifying key soft skills starts much earlier, during the market scan phase (step 1). It is at this stage that CAP YEI engages potential employers to identify who they hire and what skills, attitudes and behaviors they look for.

Thereafter key soft skills are reinforced regularly in each of the nine linear steps, both within and outside the classroom. A dedicated 'work readiness module' is offered as preparation for the trainees' transition to the world of work. Delivered with the input of employer partners and mentors, this module focuses on the application of some of the soft skills offered earlier, such as self-confidence, grooming, communication and initiative.

CAP YEI delivers the BEST model in Kenya through three different strategies, each of which lays priority emphasis on soft skills:

- (i) **Demonstration Centers:** This refers to direct training, support and placement through CAP YEI's fully owned and run centers. A recent innovation of this approach is the 'portable demonstration center,' where CAP YEI brings youth from far away to a common center, usually residential, before seeking internship and placement back in their communities. The full package of the BEST model, including soft skills, is offered under this approach.
- (ii) **Replication Centers:** Replication centers are training centers where CAP YEI provides youth training at its own cost, but in a host public or private TVET institution that offers facilities for free or at a small cost. The training approach is similar to that of demonstration centers, but the host TVET gets to copy and replicate many of the BEST model innovations, including soft skill curriculum, tools and the experiential training approach.
- (iii) **Capacity building:** This is a program approach started in 2013 in which CAP YEI seeks to ensure sustainability of its program in Kenya by training other, mainly government, TVET providers to apply the principles of the BEST model to their skills programs. Some of the results of this approach have been: increased integration of soft skills in VTC training, with resulting improvements in learning outcomes like reduced drop outs; increased enrollment, and improved perceptions by public and youth.

The CAP YEI approach is chiefly targeted at meeting the needs of the most marginalized youth and would probably not work for all contexts. However the model provides a useful framework, a proven approach that can be modified to meet different needs and conditions. Past experience has shown that this is indeed possible. For instance, in 2018 a report by an external 'learning partner' confirmed the potential of the CAP YEI approach to serve as a tool for supporting Government TVET reforms. The report recommended that the capacity building approach be enhanced by further deepening the range of

engagement to include training and exposing beneficiary partners to the full range of the BEST model principles and processes.

The Competency Based Education and Training Framework (CBET)

One of the potentially farthest reaching TVET reforms Kenya has made recently was the introduction of the CBET approach in 2016. Introduced under the direction of the Curriculum Development, Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC), this is the most ambitious attempt to introduce a demand led, competency based framework for skills training in Kenya, one that mandates an active role for employers in curriculum design, implementation, assessment and review. For the intents of this research CBET provides an important platform for scaling up soft skills, as it mandates their integration in all TVET curricula.

CAP YEI has been one of the biggest supporters of CBET in Kenya, and with good reason. While Professor Charles M Ondieki, the Chairman of CDACC observed at a CAP YEI dissemination conference in 2016, that the “concepts, principles and practices of CBET are new to most of the key stakeholders,” an analysis of the new framework showed many similarities in the core principles and processes of CBET and BEST. A summary of the key similarities, based on a comparative analysis presented by Professor Ondieki at the same conference, is shown below:

COMPARISON OF BEST AND CBET	
Learning is student centered and the role of the trainer changes to that of consultant and facilitator	Student centered learning; facilitators rather than teachers
Flexible, not time-based – learners progress through units/elements at their own pace	Short courses that can be offered through flexible modular system
Practical oriented. Theory is taught mainly as underpinning knowledge	BEST is 60-70% practical
Reflects the expectations of performance in the workplace	Engagement of industry employers and mentors is key
Employment-led: standards are set by the concerned industrial sector	Market based - all training is preceded by market assessment and employers play a key role in course design and delivery
No entry restrictions – anyone can apply for a program as long as they have the ability to follow instructions	Deliberate focus on the most vulnerable youth
Curriculum is developed by using Occupational Standards which are developed by the relevant industry; the occupational standards are developed through Job/task analysis	Curriculum is developed by using the Market scan data with the input of relevant sector industry (employers), and is reviewed every year.
Life skills and entrepreneurship skills are offered but they are not major	Life skills and entrepreneurship skills are mandatory core skills offered to all trainees

Based on these similarities, CAP YEI has revised its capacity building strategy and approach to integrate CBET training for all targeted VTC partners. In this approach, participants receive a grounding in the CBET framework, while the BEST training centers are used as practical demonstration of how application of some key CBET training delivery principles could be done. This collaboration between CAP YEI and CDACC offers a basic model that could be used for scaling up introduction of soft skills in a structured way while at the same supporting other sector-wide TVET reforms. Skills providers that wish to raise capacity in the TVET system should consider supporting the implementation of the CBET framework as a priority.

Annex 7: Suggested system-wide application of the BEST model

The nine steps of the BEST model are described in some detail below. Suggestions for how each, or similar principles can be applied to the wider TVET system are given against each BEST step.

- (1) Market scan:** This the first step in the linear BEST model. A market scan is done to obtain the basic information from the market in terms of the potential employers the skills they require (including soft skills) and to ascertain various entry level job opportunities. It also collects data on the requirements of trainees—their beliefs, attitudes, and the skills they are looking for, etc.

System wide application:

- (i) A system of regular assessments to identify employability opportunities and employer preferences for 'hard' and 'soft' skills. Preferably carried out in different sectors and regions of the country with the data shared widely with skills providers and others*
- (ii) Integration of County and National development plans and projections into TVET skill delivery planning, reviewed from time to time*
- (iii) Capacity building of TVET institutions to: collect and store data and apply it to course design, planning, delivery and review*

- (2) Curriculum development:** Once the market scan is done a selection of courses to be offered is made and a curriculum designed or adapted specifically to deliver these courses. This includes the integration of soft skills and their reinforcement during curriculum delivery.

System wide application:

- (i) Soft skills curriculum design taking into consideration different groups of youth and ability*
- (ii) Policy to make soft skills mandatory and examinable in all TVET institutions*
- (iii) Subject curriculum design to integrate multiple points for reinforcing desired soft skills.*

- (3) Road shows:** This refers to the stage of identifying needy youth and enrolling them into the program. This is done as an outreach process through various methods and media including mentors who also participate in soft skills delivery and reinforcement during the course.

System wide application:

- (i) Special programs and incentives designed to reach different groups of youth, such as the handicapped, as well as marginalized regions of the country*
- (ii) Programs to integrate a gendered approach to TVET. A five year longitudinal survey of the CAP YEI program showed that Gender was the most important predictor of youth capacity to 'get ahead' as opposed to simply 'getting by.' (Mastercard Foundation, 2018)*
- (iii) Training and capacity building for skills providers on reaching out to special groups and the best way to support them so that they benefit from skills programs*

- (4) Induction:** The youth are given induction training in soft skills and other important elements. These include, self-esteem, team building, body language, HIV / AIDS etc. This is done over a dedicated seven days. The aim of this induction is to give the youth a good start by exploring critical questions about themselves: Who am I? Where am I now? Where do I want to go? How do I get there? At this stage youth also receive aptitude testing and counseling

System wide application:

- (i) Changes and guidelines to make pre-training induction programs meaningful for students*
- (ii) Ensure career and guidance counselors are available in all TVET institutions and receive regular training and refresher in soft skills*

- (5) Classroom training:** After induction, students are organized into their respective training courses, and the actual classroom training starts here. This includes reinforcement of key soft skills and resultant behavior change. This is the point where measurement of soft skills impact is carried out via the IYLDP. IYLDP summarizes the most important soft skill concepts and the most important behavior changes that youth must exhibit to show success. It provides a score

that is used to give feedback to each youth during training. It also acts as a peer reinforcement mechanism.

System wide application:

- (i) *TVET teacher training and refresher in soft skills. Research shows that soft skills are “best delivered by the same trainers who deliver other technical subjects as this creates a platform for reinforcement and for building positive student-trainer relations.” (GIZ, 2018)*
- (ii) *Introduce a tool for measuring the impact of soft skills on trainees*
- (iii) *Mandate a meaningful role for employers in curriculum design, delivery and TVET institution governance*

6. Assignments: The BEST model relies heavily on practical, experiential learning. Students are helped to find practical assignment opportunities with various businesses, corporates, show rooms, mechanical workshops and others. This is where students are challenged to apply key soft skills such as self-confidence, resilience, teamwork and communication. For instance while the facilitator will help in securing opportunities for practical assignment at the beginning, students are expected to secure subsequent opportunities by themselves.

System wide application:

- (i) *Design experiential tools for delivering TVET curriculum*
- (ii) *Provide incentives for industry partners to offer student practicums*
- (iii) *Mandate structure roles for industry in TVET training*

7. Work readiness: Students are given training to prepare them for the world of work. This includes teamwork, grooming, work place behavior, resume writing, interviewing and many others. Whenever possible these sessions are offered by employer partners and mentors.

System wide application:

- (i) *Integrate work readiness as a component of all TVET soft skills courses*
- (ii) *Carry out research to establish critical soft skills for self-employment and deliver them*

8. Placements: After work readiness training, trainees are supported to secure internships and, later, job placements. This serves as the ultimate test of the soft skills taught as the students are expected to play a key role in securing these internships and placements themselves. This step also includes supporting youth who wish to engage in entrepreneurship to do so, which further tests their new skills and attitudes, especially self-confidence, resilience and teamwork.

System wide application:

- (i) *Create and support a national policy that will ensure all youth in TVET are able to secure internships during training or after*
- (ii) *Review youth entrepreneurship program to integrate their objectives and delivery more closely with those of skills providers, including TVETs*
- (iii) *Offer incentives for industries that engage marginalized youth in entry level employment*

9. Program review: At the end of the training cycle a program review is carried out and the findings and lessons learned incorporated into improving the next cycle. This is often done through Business Mentor Network meetings (BMN) and Industry sector meetings stakeholders come together to critique all elements of the program, including student performance during internship or work. After the review, the CAP YEI team works to incorporate some of the changes indicated, either through curriculum review, staff training or retraining and classroom delivery processes.

System wide application:

- (i) *A national longitudinal assessment system that tracks trainees to assess learning, livelihood and life outcomes of different courses against employer expectations and industry changes – with results shared widely and regularly*
- (ii) *Teacher training and refresher to integrate soft skills in the repertoire of TVET instructors skills and keep them up to date*

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