Thinkubator Approach to Solving the Soft Skills Gap

Carol Stewart
Southern Connecticut State University

Sheryl Marciniec
Southern Connecticut State University

Denval Lawrence
Southern Connecticut State University

Laquita Joyner-McGraw
Southern Connecticut State University

A soft skills gap exists between what is needed for on-the-job success and what recent college graduates actually bring with them to the workplace. Employers continue to point out that college graduates lack the soft skills or competencies required for optimal job performance or even for getting hired. While higher education doesn't disagree, it has done little to change its curricula from predominantly knowledge-based to experiential learning that promotes soft skill awareness and development. Despite advancements in technology, soft skill terminology and means of measurement vary widely across organizations and within academia with no standard definitions or evaluation methods.

Keywords: soft skills gap, college graduates, Thinkubator, experiential learning, case study

INTRODUCTION

Every fall semester, college career fairs are abuzz with recruiters looking for diamond-in-the-rough potential job candidates. These upcoming college graduates tend to be confident of their academic achievements as well as their hard and soft skill levels. However, employers are saying not so fast (Twenge, Campbell and Gentile, 2012). No one would argue with job candidates' academic records or the hard skills they possess; i.e., "the knowledge needed to perform a task" (Downing, 2005, p. 10), including tangible achievements such as specific education, experience, and technical expertise. Academic experience and hard skills are easy to identify and verify. Soft skills, on the other hand, remain an elusive target as they are more difficult to define and equally difficult to measure. Sometimes called "people skills," soft skills are non-technical attributes associated with one's personality, attitude, and ability to interact effectively with others or to be optimally employable (Rainie and Anderson, 2017). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) refers to its top 20 soft skills as "desired attributes" within eight career readiness "competencies" critical for professional success (2019). The Society for

Human Resource Management (SHRM) used the term "applied skills" in its survey of employer hiring of college graduates in reference to non-knowledge-based skills (2015).

Whatever label is used, soft skills are believed to be just as valuable in the workplace as hard skills, if not more so (Kochhar, 2020). Soft skills are especially important in today's global marketplace where sensitivity to potential individual and/or collective diversity can tip the scale toward being hired or passed over (Reynolds, 2017). Employers, therefore, are increasingly frustrated at what they see as a growing problem: College graduates' lack of traditional soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, and problem solving (SHRM, 2015, 2016, 2019).

Research shows that college students and recent graduates themselves believe they are highly qualified in their soft skill levels (Stewart, Wall, and Marciniec, 2016). Explanation of the disparity in skill assessment between students and employers remains elusive. Whether due to over-confidence and/or narcissism (Twenge, 2006) or poor quality "signaling" (Stewart et al., 2016), the gap remains between what employers want and what they believe newly-hired college graduates actually bring to the workplace. Some academic institutions attempt to bridge this gap by incorporating real-world and hands-on learning opportunities within their degree programs and curricula. Tymon (2013) suggested that higher education has a responsibility to train students for the workforce, but that it may not be enough for students' employability skills. Even so, it is often considered the best place to gain the necessary foundation. For example, internships and cooperative education programs provide exposure to the professional world and allow students to develop both hard and soft skills. However, although internships provide valuable workplace experience and exposure to some students, Tomkins and Ulus (2016) stated, "In today's competitive job market, internships are not enough for students to gain the experience necessary for the workforce" (p. 158).

Universities should, therefore, supplement the on-the-job skill development available to some students by way of internships with alternate experiential learning opportunity offered to all students. AACSB accreditation standards recommend that business schools implement experiential learning activities in the classroom to keep students engaged in the learning process (Young, Caudill, and Murphy, 2008). Recent Pew Research Center findings suggest the need for a new "education and training ecosystem" along with a "focus on nurturing unique human skills" (Rainie and Anderson, 2017, p. 4). Many business schools, aware of the need for improvement in graduates, have already taken steps to develop courses focusing on soft skill development: Yale, Columbia, and Stanford are among those offering targeted courses and programs (Weiss, 2019). Universities' effectiveness to date in developing these "human skills" in graduating students remains debatable in light of employer feedback (Association for Talent Development [ATD], 2018; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2016; Wilkie, 2019). However, increased implementation of experiential learning may help in this effort, especially with a "Thinkubator" mindset.

The Thinkubator concept typically refers to designated non-traditional office space used to inspire creativity (Johnson, 2017), as well as a "corporate innovation program merged with a startup accelerator" (Crunchbase, n.d.). Google and Facebook were among the first companies to successfully adopt non-traditional office structures (Frankel, 2015; Richmond, 2017). They offer work schedule flexibility and designated work space, separate from offices or cubicles, where employees can go at any time for motivation and inspiration. Other businesses have followed suit, driven not only by apparent Thinkubator advantages, but also by the desires of today's Millennial workforce (Jezard, 2017).

Higher education can capitalize on this generational preference by offering similar Thinkubator opportunity by way of experiential learning. For example, business schools can adapt a Thinkubator approach to foster collaboration between employers and academia in defining desired soft skills, identifying objective means of measurement, and creating relevant case study assignments that allow for application and development of these skills. Doing so would provide an advantage not only to students via development of critical soft skills, but also to the companies providing actual work issues (Hiller, Pick, and Cook, 2016).

PURPOSE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The purpose of this research is to determine what universities can do to help students develop and exhibit the soft skills necessary to become optimally employable after graduation. To understand the root of the current soft skills' "gap," we looked first at what employers and researchers consider "soft skills." Not surprisingly, our research showed varied terminology that only contributed further to the problem of identifying and defining the desired skills. Even when grouping similar skill terms into a general category – e.g., "Teamwork" includes team building, collaboration, team player, and cooperation – the question remains of how skills are actually defined or perceived by various stakeholders. Does "professionalism" mean the same thing to a college student as it does to an employer? Is "flexibility" demonstrated in the same manner in the financial industry as in the advertising or hospitality profession?

We also examined how universities, in collaboration with employers, can best incorporate experiential learning activities in their curricula to promote soft skill development in students and address possible differences in terminology and definition. We believe adopting a Thinkubator approach will help drive employer-academia collaboration, as well as provide all students better understanding of what soft skills actually are and how best to develop and demonstrate them.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

In 2016, at the invitation of the Dean of the School of Business at Southern Connecticut State University, a dozen employers were invited to an off-site retreat to discuss what they look for in college graduates. The discussion led to universal agreement among the employers that college graduates lack the soft skills necessary to be employable. Thinking this problem would be an easy one to resolve, the authors soon discovered there were more obstacles than solutions. While trying to identify the actual skills in question, we found that researchers, employers, and various professional organizations refer to similar skills by different names. After reviewing more than thirty journal articles in search of soft skills, we compiled a list of eighty-eight words used to describe or identify the most highly desired skills. The list shows the eighty-eight original terms grouped into ten general skill categories (Appendix 1).

Using the newly created list of ten soft skill categories, a survey was developed and given to 214 students at Southern Connecticut State University to assess their self-ratings of these ten soft skill areas (Stewart et al., 2016). The survey was given over a two-week period in various upper-level business classes. The survey consisted of twenty statements on which participants ranked their soft skill levels based upon a Likert scale, where the number "1" represented strong disagreement with the statement up to the number "5" which represented strong agreement with the statement. The Likert scale is often used in surveys to determine varying degrees of opinions. The survey was given to students over a two-week period and the findings were analyzed. Although the number of females (52%) exceeded the number of males (48%) participating in this study, gender had little to no impact on survey results.

The study supported what employers had previously stated: The majority of college graduates are quite confident of their soft skill levels. However, the same skills in which college students rate themselves highly are those in which they fall short in the eyes of employers, with common noted deficiencies in problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and professionalism, among others (ATD, 2018; NACE, 2019; SHRM, 2015, 2016, 2019). The difference between the students' self-ratings and employer feedback led us to question how students and employers define each soft skill and how they then measure or rate someone's skill level.

WHAT ARE SOFT SKILLS?

In 1994, Peter Drucker described how the decline of manufacturing had created a knowledge worker class. Drucker believed this knowledge worker class would represent at least one-third of the American labor force by the end of the 20th century (Drucker, 1994). He further defined the knowledge worker as

one who would work in teams, was a critical thinker, and could adapt to working with others; i.e., someone who possessed skills other than traditional technical or hard skills.

Since then, researchers have continued to discuss the importance of these soft skills in the workplace. In 2004, Muir, when referring to the interpersonal dimension of life at work, defined soft skills as "attitudes and behaviors displayed in interactions among individuals that affect the outcomes of such [interpersonal] encounters" (p. 96). In 2012, Robles defined soft skills as "interpersonal qualities, also known as people skills and personal attributes that one possesses" (p. 453). Robles further explained that "soft skills are the intangible, nontechnical, personality-specific skills that determine one's strengths as a leader, facilitator, mediator and negotiator" (p. 457). Stewart et al. (2016) defined soft skills as "those non-technical competencies associated with one's personality, attitude, and ability to interact effectively with others" (p. 277).

Many professional organizations also attempt to define soft skills and to identify the most critical or desired abilities. NACE regularly surveys its employer members and has identified 20 key soft skills, a.k.a. "attributes" (2019). The Association for Talent Development (ATD; formerly, ASTD) conducts similar studies; it found 12 soft skills in high demand among employers (2018). In its 2015 survey of human resource professionals, SHRM identified the top 17 "applied skills" employers believe college graduates lack (SHRM, 2015). Although the terms or labels used vary, the identified soft skills tend to fall into ten general categories: communication, interpersonal skills, professionalism, teamwork, problem solving, ethics, flexibility, leadership, diversity, lifelong learner (Stewart et al., 2016).

In addition to varied terminology, measurement methods also vary. Unlike hard skills, soft skills can be difficult to measure objectively and consistently. Although there are online soft skill assessment tools available, such as Koru and Pymetrics, some managers rely on instinct as a way to assess ability (Deepa and Seth, 2013). Other common methods include the use of behavioral or situational interview questions to gauge candidates' soft skill levels (McLaren, 2019). Although these methods may be individually effective, the lack of evaluation consistency within and between businesses can contribute to the current skill gap and possible confusion or ignorance among job candidates as to what they should strive to demonstrate during interviews.

THE ROLE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Along with consistent measurement and evaluation, clearer definition and development of soft skills would benefit college students and their prospective employers. College students comprise primarily Millennial and Generation Z individuals (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018), leading to a generational shift in today's workforce. Organizations now have five generations among their employees, including the newest, Generation Z (Roodin and Mendelson, 2013). Alsop (2008) said, "this new generation is shaking up the workplace" (p. 1). Although the newer generation may be the most technically savvy, they often lack the soft skills or employability skills needed in the current workforce (Tymon, 2013). Anderson, Baur, Griffith, and Buckley (2017) argue that Generation Z's interaction with technology affects how they want to lead and expect to be led in organizations. Anderson, et al. (2017) found the newer generations not only want to be prepared academically but, at the same time, want real-life work experience.

This desire for first-hand, in-person learning of workplace skills is well met by experiential learning methods. What is experiential learning? McCarthy (2010) explained by citing Kolb (1984): "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from a combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41); i.e., learning by doing or learning through experience. So what role can experiential learning play in preparing business students for the workforce? Tymon (2013) proposed interesting questions relating to experiential learning assignments and career readiness: "Can employability be developed and, if so, how? Can skills be developed?" (p. 841). Experiential learning assignments offer the opportunity for that skill development, leading to increased employability. According to Ewing and Ewing (2017), "experiential learning may create a relevant environment over many courses that mirrors a corporate setting" (p. 132), benefiting college

students looking for hands-on experience. Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp, and Mayo (2000) found experiential learning to include "case study, group projects, games, and simulations" (p. 16), assignments which complement traditional lecture and other rote learning teachniques.

Experiential learning is a relatively new concept for most students, although research on its effectiveness dates back at least twenty years. Bobbitt et al.'s (2000) qualitative study explored the business student's perspective on experiential learning. Students responded favorably towards experiential learning exercises compared to other more traditional assignments. According to that research, "As a result of this assignment, students may have a better understanding of concepts and be more effective decision-makers. The implementation of the project has generated very positive feedback from students, administrators, parents, and the business community" (p. 17).

Experiential Learning Theory

John Dewey and Kurt Lewin set the foundation of experiential learning in higher education, but David Kolb (1984) developed the Kolb experiential learning cycle, featuring "four stages of learning: (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation" (Kolb and Kolb, 2005, p. 193). Each of the four learning cycle processes supports and feeds into the next cycle. In another key point, Roberts (2003) reviewed Dewey's concept of experiential learning and noted when educators apply experiential learning, it starts with passing information down to students from educators, then using that information to understand concepts based on past or present experience, including the testing of previous theories and gaining of new knowledge and/or experience. Therefore,

> Students have an experience (Concrete Experience), reflect on observations about that experience (Reflective Observation), analyze responses and formulate new ideas (Abstract Conceptualization), and then actively test these new ideas in new situations (Active Experimentation). This process is a continual cycle, with increasing complexity. (Kolb and Kolb, 2005, p. 194)

With this in mind, the concept of experiential learning was founded to enhance the learning environment for students and integrate theory into practice.

Experiential Learning in the Classroom: The Case for Case Study

Although experiential learning is practiced in many institutions today, Young et al. (2008) stated that in reality, experiential learning is "likely to be a risky proposition because it can be either accurate and efficient or errorful and biased" (p. 29). Therefore, the success of integrating Kolb's experiential learning cycle into the classroom impacts both the student and educator. "Scholarly evaluation is the key to developing a better understanding of the many intentional and inadvertent aspects of experiential activities that can positively or negatively affect the learning process" (Young et al., 2008, p. 31).

Becker (2012) confirmed that experiential learning meets the criteria of younger generations' learning styles. As The Chronicle of Higher Education recently pointed out regarding Generation Z, "Above all, they want an education they can apply" (2018, p. 3). Experiential learning addresses this desire via incorporation of case studies and other workplace simulation exercises. This shifts the learning process from one of primarily rote memorization and conceptualization to a cycle of creativity and innovation reflecting Kolb's four stages of learning. One way to accomplish this paradigm shift, to foster analytical problem solving and creative decision making, is to use case studies of real-life business problems. By offering course content in the format of narrative stories and combining them with questions and interactive group activities, case studies facilitate the development of the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning. Furthermore, they promote movement beyond the basic effort of knowledge recall to the processes of analyzing, evaluating, applying, understanding, remembering, and then creating. The creation process is key, as case studies aid in designing, building, constructing, and inventing new information from previously synthesized past knowledge (Derek Bok Center for Teaching

and Learning, 2019). The creation process certainly allows for students to be innovative when developing and applying contemporary solutions in analysis of case studies. Correspondingly, case studies allow for interdisciplinary learning and can be used to highlight the associations between detailed academic topics and real-world societal issues and applications. According to the *Harvard Business Review*, this has been reported to increase student motivation to participate in class activities, which promotes learning and further increases performance on future assessments (Ellet, 2016). For these reasons, case-based teaching has been widely used in business and medical education for many years. This paradigm shift in learning encourages and enhances many soft skills such as leadership, team work, communication, and problem solving.

For example, consider the topic of motivation and how case studies can be applied. The following assignment prompt and exercise was recently used in a university's Organizational Behavior classroom: What happens to employee motivation when there are other factors that impact an organization? Twenty students were divided into groups of five and each group was given one of the following scenarios: 1) Take over as a new manager and build a more motivating workplace for an organization that hasn't changed any cultural aspects in 20 years; 2) Deal with an unmotivated and tenured team of employees; 3) Motivate a sales team within an organization that just laid off 3200 employees; and 4) Enrich a boring and monotonous job (this position has been around for a decade with no changes made to accommodate its new clients). Students were given the task of designing a solution to address the deficiencies, then implementing them through consulting methodologies, controls, training, etc. This exercise introduced students to thinking like consultants, while helping them also foster leadership skills (as leaders emerged through the groups), along with communication, collaboration (team work) and problem solving.

Four additional case studies were given throughout the semester with each being progressively more detailed and complex. Not only were students observed to have analyzed and collaborated well on each assignment, but as the semester progressed there was also a noticeable increase in the amount of creative ideas applied to each narrative. Students were creating unique and contextualized solutions drawn from personal origins, then cognitively manipulating those respective experiences to appropriately fit each case study and its given issues. Doing so highlighted both the development and enhancement of their creativity and problem-solving skills. Students also demonstrated innovative solutions when addressing issues of group dynamics, communication, leadership, and stress management, all relevant topics in today's workplace environment.

Case studies such as these are commonly used in graduate level studies. Introducing them in the undergraduate setting may prove to be an effective solution to not only create a cognitive priming outcome for students to begin developing a foundation of soft skills, but also to gain exposure to real world business examples that aid in perpetuating progressively advanced thought. In a study conducted at Iowa State University, professors in the Department of Genetics, Development and Cell Biology investigated the efficacy of case studies with improving student learning in a 200-level Anatomy course. This study was also done in a large lecture format which included 518 students pre-survey and 475 students post-survey. During the study, professors used detailed and complex anatomy and physiology case studies to teach important concepts that students could better synthesize and relate to their everyday lives. This approach furthermore helped students to remember these important concepts while enhancing their soft skills of analytical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration (Saldanha and Haen, 2016). The outcome of the study was rather encouraging as not only did students do exponentially well on their post-tests in comparison to pre-tests, but the case studies also positively influenced student interest in the course topics. In other words, most students preferred the case studies to traditional lecture style learning approaches and were able to tie complex concepts to real-life examples while scoring higher on final exams.

Case studies have been used by Harvard Business School for over 99 years. In fact, the Harvard case method has been deemed the pedagogical system of choice as one of the world's most elite business schools. In the 1920's, the case method was introduced with scenarios that reflect the most up-to-date developments in all aspects of leadership and management, leveraging what has happened in the past to help scholars understand the challenges they may encounter in the imminent future. Nearly 100 years

later, the case study method is now known as Harvard's signature contribution to the world of management and is used at top Fortune 500 companies during training. The school's most renowned alumni, which include some of the world's most powerful and influential corporate leaders such as JP Morgan Chase CEO, Jamie Dimon, and Facebooks's Chief Operating Officer, Sheryl Sandberg, are just some of the modern results of the case study method personified (McLellan, 2018).

We believe using case studies to address the challenge of closing the soft skills gaps will prove to be a remedy of great efficacy as well. Case studies are an effective solution because they can be tailored to address any soft skill gaps that are identified amongst individual students or an entire classroom. The case studies are proven real life business cases that foster pre-thought and even metacognition as students can draw from their personal awareness through their respective experiences to contribute to the collaboration process. Educators can increase the complexity and amount of detail in case study narratives to achieve their respective learning objectives and further tackle or introduce other soft skills.

Case Studies and Soft Skill Definition/Demonstration (or, Thinkubator to the Rescue)

The use of case studies and other experiential learning techniques supplements and complements internships' on-the-job soft skill development, but the question remains of how soft skills are defined. As noted previously, there are most likely differences in perspective of what exactly constitutes any particular skill. For instance, is professionalism a personality characteristic or exhibited behavior? Do college graduates believe communication skills refer to proper grammar and punctuation or to the speed and ease of electronic messaging? What are employers looking for when listing "strong work ethic" in a job posting and how can job seekers demonstrate that quality on resumes or during interviews? Can it be that the skills gap between student self-ratings and employer feedback is due, to some degree at least, to semantics?

Grouping the 88 most common soft skill terms into ten general categories aided understanding of what employers desire in college graduates, but didn't provide better understanding of skill definition. Some skill definitions or explanations do exist. For example, as previously noted, NACE refers to its top 20 soft skills as "desired attributes" within eight career readiness "competencies" critical for professional success (2019). Each competency includes detailed explanation of behaviors and traits that demonstrate that particular skill, such as:

> Professionalism/Work Ethic: Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image. The individual demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind, and is able to learn from his/her mistakes (NACE, 2020).

Knowing the specific behaviors and attributes provided for this competency would help promote mutual understanding for employers and college graduates of what is desired and what would demonstrate that skill. Unfortunately, there is no one universally accepted, commonly-used resource of soft skill definitions used by employers and college students alike. NACE, SHRM, O*Net, ATD, and countless other institutions offer information and explanation of skills, but again, terminology and definitions vary, along with potential usage of these resources. So how can employers and college students learn to speak the same language?

The Thinkubator business model can help. In conjunction with experiential learning and employer input, it can be applied in higher education to develop relevant case study exercises that allow for identification of critical soft skills as well as how to develop and demonstrate them. A business school in the United Kingdom accomplishes this with its annual "Thinkubator Challenge ®" event, originating in 2014 (Hiller et al., 2016). Local employers work with the university and its students to devise unique solutions to actual business problems. The event has been nationally recognized as successfully offering students "a unique experiential learning opportunity" and employers, "a medium to take the first

important steps towards developing longer term relationships with the school" (p. 6). This innovative collaboration provides hands-on learning and demonstration to students of what soft skills are needed and how they actually manifest or can be applied in different business scenarios.

Similar initiatives can be incorporated throughout our country's higher education system no matter the class size or school environment. The Thinkubator approach requires only the lifting of traditional educational boundaries to incorporate ongoing collaboration with employers and current case study scenarios and to encourage student-driven creativity and innovation. Overall the Thinkubator model and experiential learning are similar in theory. Both concepts provide students with the opportunity to hone application of soft skills while gaining feedback from instructors. Through this process, students and employers can develop clearer understanding of useful skills, how they are demonstrated, and how they might be measured, leading to more effective and successful job postings, interviews, and hirings. This may not lead to that idealistic common source for soft skill definition and means of measurement, but it may help close the skills gap, one collaborative Thinkubator group at a time.

RUBRICS AND SOFT SKILL MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION

To further assist with closing the skills gap, educators can adopt more objective and consistent means of evaluation. Hale (2018) suggests a more successful way to measure soft skills is to use performance checklists and rubrics. She maintains that one "begins by defining exactly what you mean by the behaviors, characteristics, or attributes that demonstrate the skill in question" (p. 62). This is accomplished by asking people, such as employers, who have perfected a specific skill or who observe others as having (or lacking) the skill. Hale points out that performance checklists are useful in that either people have the skill in question or they don't. Educators can record whether the behavior is present or absent, not the quality of the skill. That measurement is left up to rubrics to measure.

Many educators are already familiar with rubrics and how to use them. Rubrics measure how well a person performed a particular behavior and provide a customized scale (of at least three attributes), such as excellent, good or poor. Since rubrics are designed and created by whomever is measuring the behavior, they can include any sliding scale appropriate to measure mastery. A primary benefit of rubrics is that they include not only the scale, but also descriptions of the demonstrated behaviors or attributes that illustrate each level of performance. For example, instead of having only "'good listener,' you'll have three descriptions that differentiate between poor listening, good listening, and exceptional listening" (People First, 2017). This helps lessen potential subjectivity and vagueness of evaluator ratings and provides consistency between evaluators as well, especially in regard to soft skills. Even when using different labels for any particular skill, behavior descriptions would provide definition; e.g., two evaluators, one of whom is rating "collaboration," the other, "teamwork," could find common ground in a rubric describing three behavior levels of either term. In other words, the descriptions themselves indicate the desired ability and its performance levels, not the label used.

Rubrics and performance checklists can be used at any point in the evaluation process; they can also be used to provide feedback to students and point out areas that need improvement. For instance, educators could start the semester by having their students write a one-page paper in order to evaluate written communication skills. A performance checklist would indicate whether or not the written communication skill is present or absent. Most likely, college students know how to write (as demonstrated via social media use). They may not write well or they may write grammatically incorrect sentences, but the checklist is to determine only if they can or cannot write. Using a pre-designed rubric, educators can then evaluate students' level of writing skills. Once the entire class of students has been evaluated, educators can determine the aspect(s) of writing students need to work on and focus on those specific areas throughout the semester. In regard to other soft skills highly desired in the workplace, collaboration with employers could help refine descriptive behaviors and distinctive performance levels, along with providing relevant case study scenarios. Additional evaluations conducted mid-way and late in the semester would indicate levels of progress and allow for modification of assignments if needed.

Employer feedback on subsequent new hires' soft skills prowess would further elevate the effectiveness of this approach, leading to increased flexibility in assignments and accuracy of evaluation.

CONCLUSION

Paradigms are useful. It's easy (and sometimes faster) to stick with tried and true methods and preconceived notions. A paradigm shift involves a change in traditional ways of thought or activity. These changes are often uncomfortable because they are unknown or unfamiliar to us. Research has shown, however, that some type of change is necessary in the world of academia in regards to student soft skill development. Employer feedback shows a gap between what is desired in the workplace and what college graduates demonstrate upon hire. Shifting from traditional methods of teaching to experiential learning, with employer collaboration and case study assignments, can help students develop and hone critical soft skills. Incorporating the Thinkubator business model along with experiential learning in the world of academia will further promote soft skill understanding on both sides of the interview desk.

We want our students to learn academically, but we also want them to be able to navigate and excel in their careers post-graduation. Providing them with the tools and resources to shift their mindset to an analytical perspective conducive to workplace problem solving and critical thinking will help them accomplish both.

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APPENDIX 1
COMMON SOFT SKILL TERMS USED BY RESEARCHERS, EMPLOYERS,
AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Communication					
communication	communication skills				
oral communication					
written communication	writing skills	basic spelling	grammar	ability to read	follow instructions
listening	ability to listen and document what was heard				
presenting	presentations	professional presentations			
Interpersonal skills					
Interpersonal skills	relationship building	soft skills	interpersonal communicatic	relationship-building skills	
emotional intelligence					
friendliness					
courtesy	courteous				
Professionalism					
professionalism	work ethic	ethical			
professional appearance	good personal appearance				
dependability	responsibility	dependable	accountable	common sense	
persistence	staying on the job until it's finished				
Teamwork					
teamwork skills	teamwork	team work	team-work	team spirit	Ability to work in teams
collaboration	cooperation				
Problem solving					
analytical ability	data interpretation	analytical reasoning			
decision making	decision-making				
problem-solving	problem solving	critical thinking			
organizational ability	organize				
Ethics					
ethics	integrity	social responsibility	personal integrity	follows the rules	honesty
Flexibility					
flexibility	open to new experiences				
adaptability	agility				
business acumen	awareness of how business w	work experience			
Leadership					
leadership	personnel management	taking initiative			
motivational skills	positive attitude	good attitude			
coaching	coaching skills				
conflict resolution					
diplomacy					
Diversity					
diversity					
cultural awareness	cultural sensitivity	understanding diverse cultu	cross cultural communication		
Lifelong learner					
lifelong learner	lifelong learning	willingness to learn	self direction	self-directed	