

Navigating In-Demand Skills: Social Emotional Skills and the Future of Work The Conference Board of Canada Research Primer

Context

The purpose of this primer is to provide attendees to the Peer Learning Group on “Navigating In-Demand Skills” with information on the Conference Board of Canada’s social and emotional skills (SES) research. The following outlines key research findings on how SES are understood, developed, and applied in the workplace and in post-secondary education.

Background

The Conference Board of Canada (CBoC), on behalf of the Future Skills Centre (FSC), has generated substantial insights on SES and the future of work. Our findings show that Canadian employers continue to emphasize the growing importance of SES (e.g., communication, problem-solving, cultural competence) for success on the job.

Rapid digitalization of our world continuously offers new opportunities and tools in the workplace. Yet, understandings of how these workplace shifts impact the skills Canadian workers need remain murky—especially when it comes to SES. Though SES continue to be some of the most in-demand skills in Canada, more research, community engagement, and education is required to better support Canadian job seekers in learning, understanding, and articulating these skills to prospective employers.

Research for Breakout Room Discussion

While our work spans a variety of themes, two key SES projects include:

1. Social and Emotional Skills and Racial Identity in the Workplace
2. Teaching and Learning Social and Emotional Skills in Canadian Colleges

Below is a description of these projects, which will be further discussed in Breakout Room 1.

Overview Project 1: SES and Racial Identity in the Workplace

To explore how racial identity may impact SES evaluation in the workplace, we conducted a national survey of over 9,000 respondents to understand how Black working professionals perceive the development, expression, and evaluation of SES at work¹. We have also performed over 60 in-depth interviews with diverse Canadians to ground our understanding in people’s lived experiences. An overarching theme that emerged from our survey data was that it’s crucial for workplaces to recognize diverse understandings of SES. This will help create spaces where people feel they can safely express their skills regardless of identity.

Overview Project 2: Teaching and Learning SES in Canadian Colleges

The goal of this project is to understand college instructors’ and students’ perspectives of teaching and learning SES. To do this, we interviewed 40 college instructors and 25 college students across Canada to explore how SES are taught in adult learning programs and what elements of SES programs are most effective. We found that although both instructors and students say that SES can be taught, students have difficulty articulating their skills strengths because they are not clearly outlined as course or program outcomes. To help students be more marketable to employers, students need to better understand the skills they are developing through their studies and the applicability of their SES in the workplace.

¹ Smith and Gorea, [Bridging the Gap Between Identity and Social and Emotional Skills](#).

