Durable Skills Tracker

Primer
March 2024
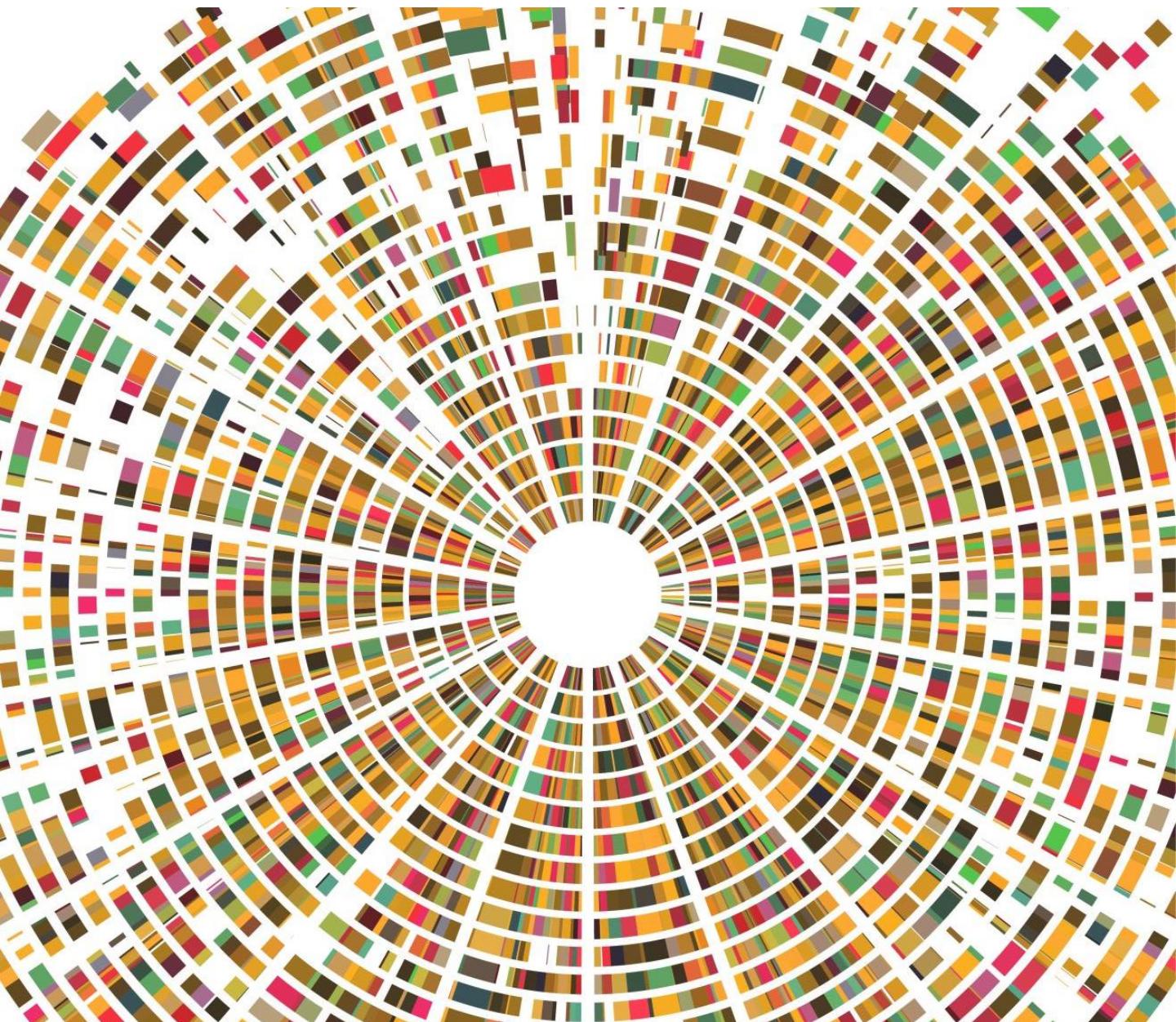
" **What gets measured, gets done!**

Tom Peters

Introduction:

ProjectSet help learners develop and showcase their durable skills (also referred to as soft skills, employability skills, 21st century skills, transferrable skills, non-cognitive skills, etc.). It has developed a *proprietary* framework and tool to help learners track and showcase their durable skills proficiency. This paper outlines the methodology and evidence underlying its framework.

1. Durable Skills Are Critical for College and Career Readiness

Durable Skills are a critical driver of career readiness and success around the world. Research confirms that these skills are important for academic achievement (Farrington et al., 2012) professional success (Care, Griffin & Wilson, 2018) as well as social and economic progress (Deming, 2017). A research study by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Centre states that 85% of career success comes from well-developed soft skills, and only 15% from sound technical skills and knowledge (hard skills). Another one from Microsoft and McKinsey predicts that more than a third of future jobs will rely primarily on soft-skills.

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RESEARCH BY HARVARD UNIVERSITY, THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION AND STANFORD RESEARCH CENTRE

2. The Urgent Need to Measure Durable Skills

The increasing importance of Durable Skills is, unfortunately, not reflected in skill development practices, resources or outcomes. This is primarily due to a lack of data and evidence to help employers, educators and learners to adopt the right resources and methodologies to close the Durable Skills gap.

An estimated 60m students enter the workforce with inadequate durable skills, every year, incurring huge social-economic costs:

• The under-prepared students are 51% more likely to be underemployed and earn 33% less over their lifetime, thereby, limiting social mobility ;

• 41% employees fail within 18 months of joining their first job because of inadequate soft skills (while only 5% fail due to inadequate hard skills) (Collins, 2020).

These findings are corroborated by the sub-optimal levels of skill development and career readiness support from educators and employers:

• 41% of college students feel unprepared for work (Lammers, 2020)

• 90% of counsellors and 66% of teachers feel they could personally take steps to increase the teaching of durable skills in their classes/ schools (Lammers, 2020).

• Less than 25% of corporate training budget is spent on soft-skills and a majority is spent on hard skills (The National Soft Skills Association, 2020).

3. Key Challenges in Measuring Durable Skills

The lack of data and evidence primarily reflects a lack of consistent skill definitions and a lack of consensus on how these skills may be measured or assessed. A few initiatives (USAID, Gabriel et al) to connect or consolidate the various isolated and fragmented work are yet to bear fruit.

Our research suggests that the following key steps will help streamline collaboration among employers, educators and learners as well as increase the capacity for skill development through on-demand programs, outside the boundaries of the "classroom" and "summer windows".

- A shared language and definition (Career Readiness) to help stakeholders communicate meaningfully about skills;

- Clear, consistent definition, categorisation and mapping of durable skills to specific career pathways;

- A valid, reliable and usable instrument to measure skill proficiency levels, benchmarks and gaps, in a personalised way;

- Verifiable and valid sources of data to populate the instrument;

- An agreed set of impact metrics to demonstrate ROI of skill development programs.

4. Skills Tracker: The ProjectSet Approach to Measure Durable Skills

ProjectSet has developed a proprietary tool – the Durable Skills Tracker – to measure and assess soft-skill proficiency in learners. The tool builds on existing research through extensive collaboration with experts and practitioners. It showcases 12 key Durable Skill clusters (Figure-1):

- *Ownership and Initiative, Adaptability and Resilience* and *Learning and Reflection* to indicate how learners conduct themselves;

- *Conflict Management, Teamwork and Collaboration* and *Communication* to indicate how learners interacts with others;

- *Critical Thinking, Creativity and Innovation* and *Problem-Solving* to indicate how learners handle challenges; and

- *Work planning, Time Management* and *Decision-Making* to indicate how learners manage resources.

Figure-1: ProjectSet Durable Skills Tracker (*illustrative view*)
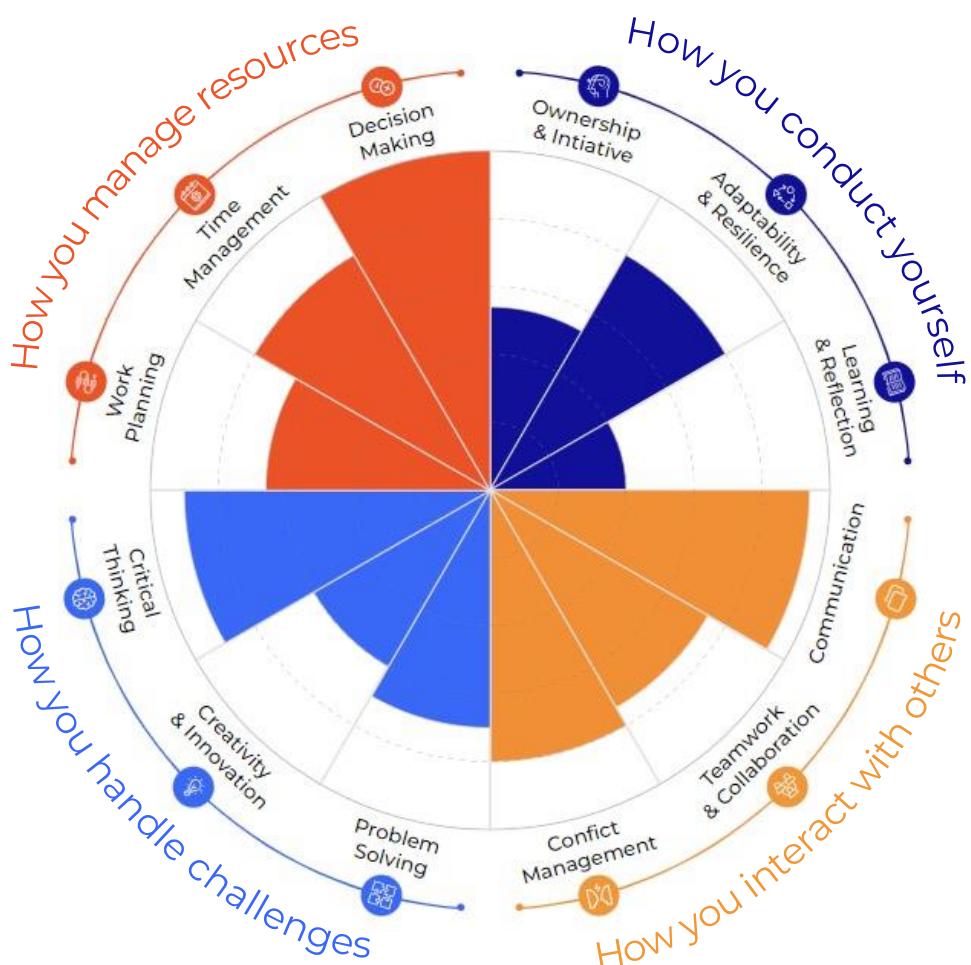
4.1 The 12 Durable Skill Clusters

 ProjectSet Durable Skills tracker showcases 12 Durable Skill clusters that reflect 100 underlying micro-skills.

The 12 Durable Skill clusters are the most sought-after skills by employers, based on a review of over 80 million job posts and its subsequent validation by leading employers. These skill clusters are also the most recurring sets across 25 major skill frameworks and tools covering key industry sectors and countries, including the Barclays/ CBI LifeSkils UK (Griggs et al, 2018), Cambridge Employability Framework UK (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2022), CBI Skills framework UK (Confederation of British Industry, 2021), Durable Skills USA (America Succeeds, 2021), Employability Skills framework from Perkins Collaborative Resource Network US (Department of Education, 2023), Erasmus+ EU (Hoertz, 2021), ESCO EU (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2024), NACE Competencies for a Career-Ready Workforce USA (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021), Partnership for 21st Century USA (P21 Resources, 2024), Skills for Success Canada (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2024), Skills Future Singapore (SkillsFuture Singapore Agency, 2023), World Economic Forum (Masterson, 2023) and IB (Horvathova, 2019).

4.1 Data Source for Skill Measurement

 ProjectSet Durable Skills tracker measures skills in a 5-point scale by synthesising input data from three distinct sources:

- **Self-assessment data** that reflect a learner's response in different simulated work-based scenarios or disguised role-plays (similar to the Behavioral Event Interviewing technique).

- Normalised **feedback data** from team-mates and mentors in projects and competitions.

- **Platform data** on various project tasks or milestones in the platform (e.g. task completion, level of communication, etc.) to "triangulate" or "augment" the scores for select skill clusters (e.g. communication, time management, etc.).

We expect a learner to participate in about 10 projects, on average, during their secondary and higher education. This is likely to generate feedback and platform data from 40 individuals at different times and work situations and consequently strengthen the reliability and robustness of the skill measure given the:

- Rapid increase in the number of data-points;

- Rapid dilution of any bias in self-evaluation;

- Increased diversity of the source and context of the skill data.

Research evidence confirms that Authentic Learning Environments (ALE) allows us to capture more valuable learning data by providing opportunities for learners to collaborate, innovate and reflect on their own learning (Herrington & Herrington, 2008, Lombardi, 2007, Herrington, Reeves, Oliver & Woo, 2004).

5. Strategic Value of ProjectSet Durable Skills Tracker

The Durable Skills Tracker offers learners complete ownership and control of their skill development journey:

- Across their secondary education, tertiary education as well as early career;

- Tailored to their personal career and skill-development goals;

- By providing consistent data and insights along the journey (rather than lose them in fragmented systems across different organisations).

In particular, the Durable Skills Tracker helps emerging talent showcase "what-they-can-do" (rather than "what-they-know" as showcased in traditional Resumes/ CVs). This is likely to unlock access to opportunities for an estimated 40m people who have various skills and are yet locked out of the traditional talent market due to a lack the formal credentials or degrees.

ProjectSet is developing sector-specific durable skills benchmark to help learners match their skills more closely to their chosen career pathways and goals.

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ProjectSet is a digital platform for learners to build and showcase their durable skills through personalised skilling programs and tools such as on-demand videos, accredited bootcamps, mentored projects and digital portfolio. The Durable Skills Tracker guides learners in their skill development journey by recommending career pathways and learning programs to close skill gaps. Please email your questions and comments on the Durable Skills tracker to info@projectset.com.

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