



A NEW VISION FOR WORKFORCE PREPARATION

Convening Notes

January 20, 2015

9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Federal Reserve Bank of Boston

Connolly Center (4th Floor)

Boston, MA 02210-2204

WELCOME & EVENT OVERVIEW

- Regional and Community Outreach Department at the Boston Fed
 - Focus on household stability for low-to-moderate income people
 - Fed's economic growth initiative
 - Every place, every group
 - Economic mobility
- Andy Sum research shows:
 - Sharp declines in college completion rates
 - College enrollment up, completion down
 - Many young people getting no credentials, just going straight to college
 - Wage payoff data for completing AA degree
 - Addition in lifetime earnings in completing AA vs just HS diploma 325,000
- Middle skill jobs
 - Achieve report
 - MA: 43% of jobs considered to be middle skill
 - Only 34% of workforce has the skills for these jobs
 - Employers not getting candidates with skills they need
- Local level
 - Desire among local community to address these issues
 - Boston Fed – [Working Cities Challenge](#)
 - Grant competition looking to spur collaboration between agencies to support low-income populations
 - Any issue areas
 - Many cities focused on some aspect of workforce development
 - Would include WIBs, community college
 - Hunger for this work among communities
- Fed observations
 - Have the classic workforce system, and others on the outskirts trying to do workarounds and are achieving results
 - How do we improve the system as a whole to get the outcomes we're looking for?
 - Digital credentialing, badging, technology
 - Talking about "Badging 2.0" before having 1.0 – something to be said about piloting, learning, testing before ironing out all the kinks
- Trying to look at soft skills credentialing by using digital badging (programmatic perspective only)

RESEARCH ON THE "SOFT SKILLS" THAT OPEN DOORS

Laura Lippman, ChildTrends

- Key soft skills that lead to positive outcomes

- FHI360 looking at workforce measurement and wage outcome measurement
- Looking for a name that will replace soft skills
- Whole child approach, looking across all domains of wellbeing
- Youth obtaining jobs is critical for their overall success, and is necessary for developing human capital for the workforce
- Skills gap – academic, technical, soft skills
- Looking to build a consensus about which soft skills to focus on, and their definitions
- Soft skills literature
 - Empirical studies: personal traits, behaviors, most rigorous studies
 - Really only funded in developing world
 - Employer surveys: the kind of employee they wish to hire, gaps they want filled, type of people they want to be retaining and employing
 - Can't empirically link to outcomes
 - Consensus project: high level projects from government, research, etc.
 - Often based on empirical studies
 - Soft skills, academic, technical
 - Literature reviews, meta-analysis, program evaluation
- Review has reinforced that “soft skills” is not an adequate term to describe what employers need and are looking for
- Considerations when selecting soft skills to focus on:
 - Lead to workforce outcomes
 - Applicable across societies, across sectors
 - Malleable in and out of program
- What the review shows: empirical studies focus on social skills, self-efficacy
- Research around what is teachable?
 - Malleability by age 15-29
 - Need to factor in time, quality of intervention
 - Early childhood studies (longitudinal)
 - Young adult/adult studies need to be longer term
- Not many studies showing which traits/skills are really driving the positive workforce outcomes
- What are the systems to show that people actually have these skills?
 - Employer assessments
 - Program evaluation
 - Longitudinal studies
- There are measures out there, next step is to review and evaluate these measures/methods
- Need consistent definitions across the board that everyone can agree on before determining quality of assessments
- IE3 looking at international youth workforce development

BUSINESS PANEL RESPONSE TO RESEARCH: Joanne Pokaski, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center; Krista Blair, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston; Amanda Maher, City of Somerville; Christine McCarthy, Legal Sea foods

QUESTION: Applicability of skills presented by Laura

- Christine McCarthy
 - Essentially aligned
 - Major skill = work ethic, and has definitely been a disconnect
 - Work ethic and integrity should be higher up in ratings
- Amanda Maher
 - Frequently hear that employers are looking for young people with positive attitudes
 - Didn't seem to appear as most important from research
- Krista Blair
 - Integrity much higher; includes hardworking, showing up on time

- Positive attitude (productivity, not drag down team)
- Timeliness
- Agree with high level = social skills
 - Good handshake
 - Good eye contact
 - Thank you note, etc.
- Knowing social cues in meetings; new employees often don't get body language, such as when to stop talking
 - Social cues: not uniform across cultures
 - Trainable but there are differences to be aware of
- Joanne Pokaski
 - Skills can be seen as a pyramid, at base:
 - where you are supposed to be when you need to be there...people get fired if they are not
 - Positive attitude
 - Listening skills
 - "These 3 are the base...then others will invest in you....if have this base, maybe employers will invest in you."

QUESTION: Do employees need to arrive with these skills or train on the job?

- Joanne:
 - Base skills + maybe a little coaching (base skills mentioned above)
 - Other skills people may be willing to train
- Krista
 - Need baseline of communication/social skills coming in
 - Other things can be coached/trained on the job (presentation skills, meeting leadership, business writing, etc.)
- Amanda
 - Applicable skills not the same across industries/job positions; some may not need to interact with people as much
 - Young adults/youth: important to have them working with someone prior to applying for job, help them develop skills and understand how those skills are applicable to the job they're applying for and how to communicate that in interviews
- Christine
 - Expects people to have baseline skillset that involves all of the skills Laura presented. Doesn't think they are really teachable unless you have a particular baseline; can work on these, but needs to be a foundation, won't succeed without self-control, etc.
 - 15 year old very different than 29...if 15, more forgiving; if 29 and you don't have the skills, then businesses don't want to take the chance.
 - Could take most of the skills and develop them further, but really would prefer candidates to come in with these skills
- Amanda
 - Expectations very different for 15 y/o vs 29 y/o
 - How many people show up with a baseline level of skills?
 - Employers really looking for candidates to have a baseline coming in, regardless of age
 - Co-op experiences important, need some sort of on-the-job coaching/supervision to let them know in real time what is appropriate and what's not
 - Young people need to understand the meaning of training/employer's investment in their training
 - 1:1 coaching prior to and during employment, finding an on-the-job mentor
 - Young people may not understand what skills they already have, what skills they should develop → helps to have an on the job mentor to highlight this more clearly for them
 - Contextual factors should be taken into consideration

QUESTION: How do you assess qualities like integrity?

- Resume can tell some things but should also have behavior-based interviewing
- Give employer a feel for how people think
- Christine – Legal Sea Foods does profile/personality testing
 - Behavioral interviewing + testing
- Krista – Fed doesn't do assessment, but does do behavior-based interviews
- Amanda – wary of personality testing
 - If coached in advance, can navigate personality tests

QUESTION: Thoughts on other traits/soft skills?

- Timeliness/dependability
 - Teachable/coachable (programs with very rigorous stop and start times, strict attendance)
 - Young people need to start learning this very early on and usually do if they get jobs earlier on
 - Need to have a boss that is clear about times and the consequences if employee is late
 - Harder to teach than people give credit to
 - Tough when individuals coming in with a poor attitude, maybe due to feeling beat down, lacking opportunities
 - Hard to communicate value of soft skill development
 - Somehow incentivize the soft skills training to get them to at least show up
 - Show up, speak up, dress up, respect work
 - Need new employees to ask more questions; afraid to say "I don't know," afraid to look stupid
 - Employers/coaches/trainers should encourage new employees to ask more questions
- Diversity
- Basic openness and willingness to learn
- Customer focus – orientation toward serving whoever customer is (whether internal or external)

QUESTION: What factors into "promotability"?

- Personal and professional drive for quality and success
- Have potential to move up throughout company
 - Succession management (especially with boomers retiring)
 - If you have the ability to be cross-trained, are interested in moving up

General Insights from Panelists

Thresholds: how much is enough?

- Differences by age
- Some skills are considered foundational
- Demonstrating in the workplace
- Existing staff need to model behavior....need these behaviors

Asked audience from 18 to 23: do they have foundational skills?....Not a lot of hands went up

Contextual factors: expectations may be different based on sector (example: tech sector needs less social skills)

Integrity: rate higher. How to assess as part of hiring process? Joanne: Sometimes resume, behavioral interviewing, personality testing, assuming they are honest with themselves

At Fed; don't do assessments: behavioral interviews: "Tell me a time when you told a white lie." Not always the best assessment as candidates can be coached around these questions

Showing up on time: needs to be implanted early on, but still may only have impact if a boss says it.

Any other attributes? NH Michael Power learned employers expect young adults to “show up, speak up, dress up.” If youth are afraid to say “I don’t know,” creates problems

Other hiring needs: Diversity, and openness; customer focus

Low-income youth don’t want to go to training; bad attitude; need incentives

Screening at entry level is changing: promotability potential

Drive: personal and professional drive to do best and focus on quality

Succession management

DIGITAL AND OPEN BADGES: THE FUTURE OF CREDENTIALING?

Jonathan Finkelstein, Credly

- How do we make existing skills visible – transferrable/visible/traveling credential
- Building ownership of skills
- Ability/awareness to bundle skills
- Open badge movement
 - Started with Mozilla foundation
 - Badge alliance
 - Way of coming together to unlock achievement, make them portable, visible, own-able
 - Make them stackable
 - Standardization
- More granular than a certification or set of courses
- MOOCs
- Peer recognition as a new form of conducting skill assessment
- Workforce development
- Combining with prior learning assessment
- Focus should not be badge itself, but learning experience and/or opportunity that can be achieved following attainment of badge
- Badge =/= assessment but allows us to create mini assessments and credentialing
- Shift toward competency-based education
 - Rather than course time/credits
 - Soft and hard skills
- ACT career readiness assessment

DISCUSSION

Jonathan Finklestein: Credly. Turn their skills into something visible and more useful. People need to own their skills.

Self-awareness, consciousness

Badges can include: skills people demonstrate, choices they make, communities in which they engage, and what organizations are willing to put their badge on

Has a component of peer recognition as well as objective; not just self-report

Badges as signposts...pass on way as part of a journey

ETS...jobfit...; assessments, like Kuder.

CLOSING REMARKS: JEFF FURHER

- Soft skills are hard to measure
- Digital badging we do need, but is soft skills credentialing the best way to use them?
- Building new collaborations across different arenas is critical to move forward