

# Employers' Insights on Social and Emotional Skills



## Social and emotional skills are in high demand

What can employers do to recruit top talent?

Social and emotional skills (SES)—also called soft, human, or people skills—are increasingly important for the future of work.

To better understand employers' needs and challenges,

- we analyzed six years of Canadian knowledge-based job postings data, and
- we interviewed 73 human resources professionals in knowledge-based organizations nationwide (employers represented small, medium, and large businesses in 14 different industries).

We asked employers about the kinds of SES they want in new hires, how they assess SES during hiring, and the challenges they face when recruiting for and evaluating these skills.

## SES are increasingly important

Almost all the employers we spoke with told us that SES are equally if not more important than technical skills. Knowledge-based job postings data also show an increased hiring demand for SES in knowledge-based sectors across Canada.

These are the top five SES employers indicated are key for success in their organizations:

- Communication
- Empathy
- Collaboration
- Listening
- Emotional intelligence

We found that artificial intelligence, remote work, and an increased focus on workplace mental health are shaping the types of SES employers value and the way employees apply these skills in the workplace.

## Why recruit for SES?

SES are indispensable in the workplace. Employers told us that employees with strong SES help create a positive workplace culture, making it easier to attract and retain staff. Employers also told us that hiring employees with strong SES can lead to productivity gains, ultimately driving businesses' bottom lines.

## Practices to help recruit candidates with necessary skills

Employers that would like to better recruit for SES in hiring can implement the following practices:

### [Adopt clear definitions and assessment criteria](#)

Although employers say they highly value SES, almost half told us they lacked clear definitions or competencies of these skills. This is particularly true for small businesses, 64 per cent of which weren't using clear definitions.

Using clear definitions and competencies throughout the hiring process helps establish a shared understanding of job requirements and reduces ambiguity.

### Ensure job postings align with desired skills

It's clear employers need socially and emotionally skilled talent. But SES are more important for some roles than others, and the specific SES needed varies depending on the role.

Job postings should highlight the most valued skills for a given position. They should also reflect the appropriate balance between SES and technical skills relevant to each role.

### Evaluate candidates' SES with skills-based assessments

Interviews are the most common way employers assess SES. But they admit that interviews are not the most effective method. Employers describe interviews as "artificial" and say that since interview questions are often routine, it can be hard to accurately gauge candidates' skills. Instead, consider using the following:

- Skills-based assessments such as work samples, role-playing scenarios, and simulated job tasks or activities
- Psychometric tools or measurements

Determine how you will evaluate candidates' skills prior to the assessment, and test a range of skills.

### Protect against biased SES assessments

Culture, gender, neurodiversity, and other factors affect body language and how people communicate. They also influence how we assess other people's skills.

To help mitigate bias in interviews, consider techniques such as these:

- Use structured interviews where candidates are asked a set of predefined questions.
- Use diverse interview panels.
- Train hiring managers on SES and the different ways they may be demonstrated.
- Focus on objective skill requirements in job postings, and avoid language like "good cultural fit."
- Offer alternative interview formats (e.g., in-person, virtual, phone, one-on-one, panel).
- Provide interview questions in advance.
- Review SES requirements for bias, such as masculine language, that may prevent candidates from applying.



## Want to learn more?

Read our issue briefing [SES in the Workplace: Insights From Canadian Employers](#) to find out more about how SES are shaping Canadian workplaces.

Check out the [data briefing](#) to see hiring demand for SES across the country.

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Funded by the  
Government of Canada's  
Future Skills Program

Canada



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Blueprint

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