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Salesforce

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Partner Summary: Salesforce is a big global company known for being the world's #1 AI CRM (customer relationship management). Recently they've begun to also move into the education space - creating new tools that can help students with learning and job prospects. For this project Salesforce is working with UMSI to look at how technology can track skills that don't appear in school records.

Problem Summary: Universities and career centers have trouble when it comes to showing off student soft skills like teamwork, adaptability, and communication. Employers express the importance of soft skills in the workplace, but students lack the tools to properly display them. Salesforce has asked us to explore possible tools to track and measure student soft skill development in ways that connect to job hiring.

What this Report will Answer: This report will answer the following questions.

1. How do students perceive the value of soft skills?

2. How do students choose to develop these soft skills?

3. How would students engage with tools that measure and track these skills?

Introduction

In today's workforce, jobs often emphasize the need for soft skills like teamwork, communication, critical thinking, and adaptability. These skills are sometimes even more important than the technical or academic knowledge students acquire at university. Yet universities aren't able to track or measure soft skills effectively, and career services don't have the data to show employers. Salesforce is working with UMSI to solve this dilemma through exploring ways that soft skills could be measured, tracked, and then connected to jobs.

This paper aims to focus on the student's perspective: Do students find soft skills to be valuable? How do they go about developing soft skills? And lastly, if some kind of measurement tool or micro-credential was created, would students actually use it?

Students Value Soft Skills

One clear thing across global studies is that students themselves value soft skills and believe they are important. Lan (2023) in Vietnam found students considered soft skills as equally or more important than the content knowledge. They stated communication, teamwork, and leadership were necessary skills for career success. In Serbia and Hungary, Slavić et al. (2024) found a similar pattern, with almost all students saying communication and teamwork are essential for employability. Stewart (2017) showed U.S. technical college students believed soft skills matter not only when it comes to getting hired, but also with job retention and future promotion. It becomes clear that students across different countries and backgrounds value soft skills, and find them to be necessary.

Formal Education Seen as Insufficient

Even though students want soft skills, they don't think universities are the place to develop them. Lan (2023) stated that universities in Vietnam focused too much on theory and did not give practice or application. Students wanted more applied work but mostly received lectures. Slavić et al. (2024) found that students in Serbia and Hungary held a similar view - that formal education contributed minimally to soft skills. They believed education was too abstract and old-fashioned, and not in line with the modern workplace. Stewart (2017) also reported that U.S technical programs were all about hard skills and left soft skills to chance, or that they'd be picked up along the way.

The "why" here is important. Students complain that; classes are mostly lectures, curriculums are often outdated, and the teaching is not designed to show how soft skills apply in jobs. While the labor market is constantly evolving, universities are struggling to keep up, and students are finding themselves dissatisfied with the mismatch.

Alternative Pathways to Development

In response to this feeling of dissatisfaction, students attempt to find other means to develop soft skills. Lan (2023) documented that many Vietnamese students sought out extracurricular activities, clubs, volunteer programs, or internships as spaces to develop their soft skills. Similarly, Slavić et al. (2024) writes that Serbian and Hungarian students relied on informal education like student groups or side jobs for soft skill development. Additionally, Stewart (2017) in the U.S writes that students in technical programs utilized mentorship and journaling

exercises when those were available. In all cases, students are being proactive, looking for outside paths to practice teamwork, leadership, or communication.

This shows that students are not passive when it comes to developing their soft skills. They recognize the value, and the gap, and try to fill it in themselves. Seeing as students are not lacking motivation in developing soft skills, I believe this is a missed opportunity for universities.

Students Want Structured Support

However, just because students find their own ways doesn't mean they don't want institutional help. Stewart (2017) especially highlighted that students asked for structured opportunities and explicit teaching of soft skills. They didn't want to be left to figure it out on their own, they wanted universities to make it a part of their program. Even though students were capable of seeking out opportunities to develop their soft skills individually, they desired scaffolding, mentoring, and formal recognition. This pattern across contexts shows that students want to balance independence with support.

Mixed Responses to Measurement Tools

However, when digital badges, micro-credentials, or other tools to measure soft skills were introduced, students had mixed reactions. Goulding et al. (2024) reported on students in an Australian course where badges replaced grades. When the badges were introduced many of the students felt anxious - concerned about whether or not outside people like employers would care.

But some students preferred the badges because they could see which competencies or soft skills it represented.

Yet, when Coursera (2025) surveyed students on credit-bearing micro-credentials the responses were very positive. 9 in 10 students said micro-credentials are key to job success. About 85% said it improved their job prospects, and 91% said it would help once employed. The difference seems to be about credibility. Whereas Goulding et al.'s case is classroom badges with no recognition outside, Coursera's offering credit for the micro-credential established what students believed to be legitimacy in the eyes of employers. This suggests that degree integration would be integral in adopting soft skills into university curriculum.

Salesforce Opportunity

When we bring these studies together, it becomes clear that globally students value soft skills and see institutions as underperforming in supporting them. Understanding this presents a clear opportunity for Salesforce to create tools that are transparent, legitimate, and practical to fill in the institutional gaps. Just because a tool exists doesn't mean students are willing to use it, so let me emphasize the importance of the tool being transparent (they understand what it measures), legitimate (recognized by employer or counts for credit), and supported (fits into a structure that helps them grow. This can be accomplished through: dashboards that track progress on skills across time, integrating credentials into degree programs so they count for credit, and translating the skills into language employers care about, so students see direct career benefit.

Conclusion

The research shows the same conclusion across different places. Students believe soft skills matter. They also state they don't feel universities are able to provide them with these desired soft skills, and often seek them out themselves. Students desire structured support from their universities when it comes to soft skills. They are open to measurement tools, but only if those tools are credible. Salesforce has a chance to create something that fills this space, but it must design carefully so that students trust it.

Works Cited

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