Predict Candidate Success Through Soft Skills

How to assess the key predictors of successful hires
The reality of hiring today:

It isn’t easy to hire and retain superstar talent.

With such a competitive market, it can feel like the odds are stacked against you. But there’s good news. You can predict how successful a candidate will be in their new role before you make a hiring decision.

Proficiency in key soft skills is the best predictor of success in almost every job.

For those who manage people or projects, this might look like setting goals, assigning tasks and providing feedback. For executives and leaders, predictors include the ability to set a course and motivate others.

These soft skills are what matter most in hiring. To accurately assess a candidate’s proficiency in these skills, talent acquisition teams need an objective and scalable system.

These soft skills predict success:

- Professionalism
- Interpersonal skills
- Problem-solving and adaptability
- Personal value commitment
- Ability to work remotely
- Managing others
- Leadership
The key to predicting future performance: past performance

There are several reasons why it’s difficult to evaluate soft skills.

- Competencies such as professionalism and interpersonal communication are not as clearly defined as hard skills.
- Common assessments for soft skills are generic and not job-specific.
- The predictive validity of most personality tests is questionable.
- Meaningful reports from past managers and coworkers are rarely available.

At iCIMS SkillSurvey, we built our solution on the scientific fact that prediction of on-the-job success is based upon access to reliable and valid data on past performance.

Our validity studies of over 22,000 new hires have revealed that reference feedback available through iCIMS SkillSurvey’s automated reference checking helped organizations reduce first-year turnover by over 35%.

With a data-driven approach, your teams can be empowered to make hiring decisions based on what matters most: the competencies proven to be critical to job success.

Let’s take a more detailed look at each one.
Professionalism

Professionalism tops the list of success predictors and is the “price of entry” for most positions. It encompasses a wide range of traits and behaviors that contribute to a positive, inclusive and productive work environment.

But how would you define professionalism? Clearly, professionalism in a customer-facing sales role differs from someone working behind the scenes developing products, stocking the store or cleaning it.

Predictors of professionalism should, therefore, be job-specific. However, a variety of skills apply to professionalism across the board, like:

• Dependability
• Following instructions
• Work ethic

For some positions, professionalism might also include:

• Ability to stay on top of trends
• Command of certain software tools
• Commitment to health and safety (critical in oil and gas industries, for instance)

Ultimately, the most telling indicator of a candidate’s professionalism will come from their colleagues’ views on what it was like working with them.
Interpersonal skills

Can personality tests provide insight into a candidate’s interpersonal skills? Yes. Can they reveal how well the candidate worked in team situations in prior jobs? Not very well.

However talented the candidate may be, having interpersonal skills like the following will make them far more likely to succeed.
• Listening
• Relationship-building
• Collaboration

How might these skills help candidates succeed in roles across your organization?

How effectively a doctor or nurse communicates with patients is critical to the patients’ outcomes, the overall patient experience and, ultimately, hospital and provider ratings. Similarly, a construction supervisor’s ability to communicate the importance of safety standards can be critical to their team’s well-being.

Problem-solving and adaptability

Problem-solving and adaptability are also top predictors of success. Every job requires some degree of problem-solving, specifically, the employee’s ability to assess issues and identify solutions. What’s more, every job requires adaptability to changing conditions.

When evaluating candidates, aim to understand how well they:
• Analyze and summarize information
• Make decisions
• Adapt to change

You’d expect that an engineer would need these skills, but a cashier or marketer might as well.

The more you’re able to assess problem solving and adaptability based on the challenges of a specific job, the better you’ll be able to predict a candidate’s success.
Personal value commitment

As someone your employer relies on to evaluate and hire talent, you must assess a candidate’s personal values such as ethics and honesty (or lack thereof).

Your goal is to understand to what degree the applicant possesses:
• Integrity
• Respect for diversity
• Adherence to standards and policies

There are positions that provide employees with access to sensitive, personal, financial or security data. A candidate’s commitment to values and ethics directly impacts your liability.

Standard background checks and personality assessments typically don’t measure these qualities, and some candidates will attempt to fake their way through personality tests.

Again, your truest metric is past job performance and feedback from peers.

Ability to work remotely

In recent years, more and more workers are working remotely or on a hybrid schedule.

When it comes to recruiting and hiring, finding candidates with the right soft skills to work remotely is crucial for many organizations. Even candidates with little or no experience often possess the skills needed to be successful remote workers.

Organizations are increasingly seeking candidates who can:
• Work independently
• Manage their time effectively
• Communicate and collaborate well with others
• Self-motivate and take initiative

With this insight, recruiters and hiring managers can zero in on these important soft skills to make the best hiring decisions for remote-based roles.
A great number of positions demand management skills. For those that don’t, you probably hope a new hire will bring in these skills to become management material in the future.

Your goal is to understand to what degree the applicant possesses skills in the areas of:
- Selecting and retaining talent
- Leading a team
- Holding others accountable

While many jobs clearly demand management skills, others will use them less frequently. Project managers are a great example. They may not directly manage a team, but they will require management skills to successfully lead team-based projects.

Do your current interview and hiring processes help you evaluate management skills based on the requirements of the actual position?

The truly high-profile jobs – where leadership is required – call for an even larger set of competencies.

When you’re looking for leaders, aim to understand how well the candidate handles:
- Setting direction
- Managing change
- Motivating others

The list above is just the beginning. With leadership, specific roles call for specific skills.

Think for a second about your organization’s C-suite. As you know, using the exact same criteria to assess candidates for roles like the CFO, CEO, COO, or CIO is bound to result in some very expensive mistakes. Drill down to the specifics of the job to create a more predictive assessment.
Final thoughts

If your organization experiences high turnover, mediocre performance and inefficiencies, it’s time to ditch the traditional assessments.

When your teams can measure the right skills in the right way, your hiring will become far more predictive of success. And you’ll find it easier to identify the superstars who consistently perform well, stay for years and contribute to overall business success.

In short, that’s why automated reference checking solutions help progressive organizations build world-class workforces in every industry.

Three ways to predict candidate success:

1. Identify and assess a meaningful set of soft skills for each job

2. Use objective data and predictive talent analytics

3. Use detailed references from former managers and coworkers
The right talent acquisition tech can help you solve your greatest hiring challenges.

See how our all-in-one recruiting platform helps attract, engage, hire and advance the best talent.

Learn more