EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WORKPLACE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS PROJECT
“LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF ARIZONA BUSINESS & INDUSTRY”

EXCERPTS FROM THE FULL REPORT
PRESENTED TO THE ARIZONA SKILL STANDARDS COMMISSION
FOR ACCEPTANCE ON MAY 24, 2011 AND ADOPTION, JULY 17, 2011

Arizona’s New Workplace Skills

Sponsored by Arizona Department of Education Career and Technical Education Division
in partnership with ASU Workforce Education and Development Office
and Corporate //Education Consulting, Inc.
in conjunction with Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry
and Arizona Joint Technological Education Districts
Standards Statements as Skill Sets: Arizona’s New Workplace Skills (see cover for illustration)

Core Human Interaction Skills in the New Workplace

1. Complex Communication: Employs complex communication skills in a manner that adds to organizational productivity.

2. Collaboration: Collaborates, in person and virtually, to complete tasks aimed at organizational goals.

3. Expert Thinking: Integrates a mastery of technical knowledge and skills with thinking strategies to create, to innovate, and to devise solutions.

Developing the New Worker

4. Professionalism: Conducts oneself in a professional manner appropriate to organizational expectations.

5. Initiative and Self-Direction: Exercises initiative and self-direction in the workplace.

6. Intergenerational and Cross-Cultural Competence: Interacts effectively with different cultures and generations to achieve organizational mission, goals, and objectives.

Redefining the New Workplace

7. Organizational Culture: Functions effectively within an organizational culture.

8. Legal and Ethical Practices: Observes laws, rules, and ethical practices in the workplace.

As Co-Chairs of the Arizona Skill Standards Commission, we are acutely aware of the inter-relationship between education and economic development in our state. We know that our schools cannot ultimately succeed without the support of our citizens, and the future of Arizona’s economy cannot ultimately succeed without a trained and literate workforce. This is the philosophical underpinning for the work of the Commission.

In a major step forward in accomplishing this goal, Career and Technical Education (CTE) students who complete CTE programs approved by the Arizona State Board of Education/ Vocational and Technical Education are now required to pass an industry-validated assessment of the skills that are taught in these programs. At this point, we are well on our way toward full implementation of these assessments – statewide, on-line and in real time – in 51 CTE approved programs. Students who complete the approved programs and pass the assessments receive certificates of skill attainment and transcripts that reflect these skills.

But the Arizona employers who have validated the technical skills that are now being measured have told us loud and clear that, while an employee’s proven technical skills are essential, they are not enough. No matter how proficient in the technical skills of a job – regardless of the business or industry – an employee who lacks the ability to communicate, collaborate, think, and demonstrate a work ethic that supports the goals and culture of the organization is not likely to get or keep, let alone advance in, a job.

In order to best determine just what these “essential workplace employability skills” are in the real world workplaces of 21st century Arizona, we recently conducted eleven statewide forums in which Arizona employers – large and small – told us the employability skills that were most important to them. From these sessions – “Listening to the Voices of Arizona Business and Industry” – we have distilled what we learned into a set of nine standards and supporting skills, from which assessments will be developed and administered to students who complete Career and Technical Education programs. This report contains the summary of our findings as well as a complete compilation of responses from each of the Forums. We invite and encourage your review of this impressive report.

To the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the superintendents of Arizona’s joint Technical Education Districts, and to participating employers, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, workforce training providers and local and county government officials, we express our thanks and gratitude for their participation and support. We are all partners in helping to ensure a bright future for our state, and we are counting on your continued involvement as we go forward.

Sincerely,

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace employability skills (“soft skills”) are critical to getting and keeping a job. While technical skills and “know how” are also critical, technical skills are almost always required by employers in combination with “soft skills” as they hire and keep employees on the job. The rapidly-changing world of work is prompting a new look at what employers expect for workplace employability.

This executive summary recounts what was heard while “listening to the voices of Arizona business and industry.” The workplace employability skill definitions, conceptualization, and standards are products of the dialogues with a broad spectrum of Arizona employers.

BACKGROUND

The members of the Arizona Skill Standards Commission, from its inception in 2007, have been committed to the establishment and ongoing development of the Arizona Career and Technical Education (CTE) Assessment System. Because of both federal and state mandates, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) through the Career and Technical Education (CTE) unit must annually report student attainment of technical skills in accordance with the approved State Plan. Therefore, the Commission’s initial focus has been on measuring technical skill attainment. In partnering with Arizona State University (ASU) / Workforce Education and Development Office (WEDO), ADE/CTE has, to date, criterion-referenced assessments of industry-validated technical skill standards in 51 CTE programs. Development is continuing to address technical skills in all Arizona CTE program areas.

The Arizona Career and Technical Education Assessment System was envisioned and designed to be comprehensive, flexible, and expandable as emerging programs were added, as additional modalities of assessment became feasible, and as new needs of the Arizona workplace were identified. Employability and workplace skills have historically been included in Arizona career and technical education programs. Gaining employment for entry-level workers and sustaining employment by proving worth in the workplace have been high priorities for Arizona CTE educators. Yet with the hue and cry across America for preparing a “highly skilled workforce” with “21st century skills,” for “the new workplace,” much has been left undefined and ambiguous.

ARIZONA STATEWIDE FOCUS GROUPS

The Arizona Department of Education Career and Technical Education Division and Arizona State University Workforce Education and Development Office with Corporate Education Consulting, Inc. (CECi) coordinated efforts with The Arizona Joint Technological Education Districts (JTEDs) and Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry to convene eleven regional focus groups over a six week period to identify workplace employability skills and collect information about their importance and frequency of use in the workplace from the perspective of Arizona business and industry leaders. Nine meetings were hosted by eleven JTEDs and their local Chambers of Commerce, one by Arizona Western College, and a final meeting convened by City of Phoenix Economic Development Department.
While Carolyn Warner, former Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction, business owner and co-chair of the Arizona Skill Standards Commission, presided over nine of the meetings, Glenn Hamer, President and CEO of the Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry and David Bolger, COO of CECi, each chaired a focus group.

**CRITICAL WORKPLACE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

The skills used to spark participation during the focus groups were identified at the October 20, 2011, meeting of the Arizona Skill Standards Commission as skills required for workplace/economic success in a global knowledge and innovation economy enabled by technology. Seven emerging skills were brought to the Commission in October, and an additional four skills were added to the focus group survey in response to the Commissioners’ comments: collaboration, legal and ethical practice, professionalism, and initiative and self-direction.

**THE ORIGINAL ELEVEN AS IDENTIFIED FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS**

- **DIVERGENT AND CRITICAL THINKING, PROBLEM SOLVING, DECISION MAKING** (expert thinking)
- **COMPLEX COMMUNICATION** (person-to-person interaction, knowledge transfer)
- **CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION** (generating/developing new ideas, products, processes)
- **CULTURAL COMPETENCY** (interacting with diverse groups/individuals for common purposes)
- **SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR BUSINESS** (social media tools for branding, networking, customer service)
- **WORKING ONLINE IN GEOGRAPHICALLY DISTRIBUTED TEAMS** (global work in virtual spaces)
- **VISUAL, PATTERN-BASED THINKING, INVOLVING MATH AND QUANTITATIVE PROCEDURES** (computational thinking)
- **COLLABORATION** (communicating, planning, and implementing activities cooperatively with others)
- **LEGAL AND ETHICAL PRACTICE** (acting within the rules of conduct for business)
- **PROFESSIONALISM** (standards of behavior in the workplace)
- **INITIATIVE AND SELF DIRECTION** (controlling, guiding, and managing one’s own activities)

Focus group dialogue notes were coded and tabulated by the project team using the original set of eleven skills plus those topics or themes that emerged during the focus groups, including flexibility/adaptability, financial literacy, generational culture, organizational culture, customer service, and issues of implementation.

Both survey and focus group dialogue data brought trends and patterns to light. This information, considered with other research nationally and globally, resulted in a rich resource of concepts and ideas for drafting the workplace skill framework, standards, and performance objectives.

**DYNAMICS OF ARIZONA’S NEW WORKPLACE**

Additionally, the dialogue pointed toward the workplace as an increasingly dynamic space with a number of key drivers: rapid technological change, the interaction of multiple generations working side by side, and the pace of innovation, all of which place an increased demand for creativity and innovation on the workplace. This combination of factors constitutes Arizona’s “new” workplace and the need to address workplace skills within the context of these dynamics.
WORKPLACE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS STANDARDS AND MEASUREMENT CRITERIA
presented to the Arizona Skill Standards Commission for acceptance (5/24/11) and adoption (7/17/11)

1. **Complex Communication: Employs complex communication skills in a manner that adds to organizational productivity.**
   - Demonstrates mastery of traditional communication skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening within organizational contexts.
   - Uses technologies and social media appropriately to engage various audiences.
   - Exchanges knowledge and processes among team members, colleagues, and clients.
   - Communicates effectively with people of different cultures, generations, and life/work experiences in different situations.

2. **Collaboration: Collaborates, in person and virtually, to complete tasks aimed at organizational goals.**
   - Applies personal strengths to enhance the effectiveness of the team.
   - Builds on strengths and contributions of others to achieve common goals.
   - Works cooperatively with different cultures and generations.
   - Optimizes technology to collaborate with others.
   - Earns trust of partners and team members.
   - Exchanges essential information among collaborators.
   - Exercises shared leadership.

3. **Expert Thinking: Integrates a mastery of technical knowledge and skills with thinking strategies to create, to innovate, and to devise solutions.**
   - Recognizes the existence of a problem, sometimes despite evidence to the contrary.
   - Engages in continuous learning through inquiry and reflection.
   - Exhibits expertise by asking relevant questions and listening actively.
   - Uses multiple thinking strategies, such as critical thinking, divergent thinking, problem solving, and decision making, to determine a course of action.
   - Takes action based on confidence in mastery.
   - Analyzes evidence based on mastery knowledge to solve problems.
   - Makes a well-reasoned case supported by evidence and mastery knowledge to explain conclusions.

4. **Intergenerational and Cross-Cultural Competence: Interacts effectively with different cultures and generations to achieve organizational mission, goals, and objectives.**
   - Uses relevant intergenerational and cross-cultural communication that acknowledges differences.
   - Honors the contributions of diverse partners and team.
   - Exercises cultural sensitivity while working in the global marketplace.
   - Promotes intergenerational understanding through active listening and respectful communication.
   - Contributes to an environment that enables different cultures and generations work together successfully.
   - Respects generational differences regarding the use of technology at the workplace.

5. **Professionalism: Conducts oneself in a professional manner appropriate to organizational expectations.**
   - Adheres to organizational protocol, such as behavior, appearance, and communication.
   - Manages time in accordance with organizational expectations, including punctuality, productivity, and time on task.
   - Represents the organization in a positive manner that reflects its mission and goals accurately.
   - Performs assigned tasks with a “can do” attitude.
   - Makes appropriate distinctions between personal and work-related matters.
   - Produces work that reflects professional pride.
6. **Organizational Culture: Functions effectively within an organizational culture.**
   - Articulates organizational history, structure and underlying vision, mission, values, and goals.
   - Meets expectations of the hiring organization regarding time commitment, dress code, communication protocols, jargon of the job, safety, and business procedures and practices.
   - Demonstrates skills needed to maintain organization’s expectations, such as teamwork, positive attitude, interaction with others, chain of command, initiative, informal learning, adherence to safety requirements, and organizational policy and procedures.
   - Integrates organizational values in performance of work.
   - Applies technology to benefit the organization’s culture.
   - Demonstrates etiquette and manners appropriate to the organizational culture.
   - Embodies organizational culture in customer service.

7. **Legal and Ethical Practices: Observes laws, rules, and ethical practices in the workplace.**
   - Respects the organization’s physical and intellectual property.
   - Demonstrates loyalty to the organization, its mission, and its resources.
   - Reports to supervisor conditions and practices that are harmful to workers.
   - Adheres to the policies and procedures of the organization.
   - Follows all applicable local, state, and federal laws.
   - Takes responsibility for one’s actions in the workplace, such as disclosing personal mistakes to supervisor.
   - Manages resources for the good of the organization.
   - Acts with integrity.
   - Interacts respectfully with co-workers and customers.

8. **Financial Practices: Applies knowledge of finances for the profitability and viability of the organization.**
   - Exhibits competence in personal and organizational financial management.
   - Articulates financial goals and strategies of the organization.
   - Contributes to organizational profitability.
   - Acts as a responsible steward of organizational resources.

9. **Initiative and Self-Direction: Exercises initiative and self-direction in the workplace.**
   - Takes action without direction within the boundaries of one’s job.
   - Exercises leadership and self-direction within organizational structure.
   - Asks questions and seeks information as needed, exercising curiosity.
   - Pursues opportunities to learn new skills.
   - Seeks responsibilities beyond one’s scope of work.
   - Generates ideas, opportunities, and strategies for the organization, contributing to its resources and goals, such as intellectual property and improved products and services.
   - Demonstrates focus and a drive for results.
   - Asesses consequences of potential actions.
   - Pursues career advancement opportunities within organization or field.
   - Engages in informal on-the-job learning within the organization.
   - Adapts to changing conditions/situations and expectations.
   - Exercises judgment on when, where, how and to what degree one acts alone or collaboratively.
**MOVING FORWARD**

The Workplace Employability Skills Project Team work in the near future includes:

1. continuing the employers’ role in the process in order to develop sample rubrics that manifest the skills indicated by the standards and measurement criteria;
2. creating a format for contextualized scenarios based on the rubrics for a pilot assessment in spring 2012; and
3. meeting the challenges of scalability across programs and geographic locations.

**CONCLUSION**

“Listening to the Voices of Arizona Business and Industry” has afforded a fresh perspective on the critical skills needed for getting and keeping NOT just a job – but to finding oneself within the ever-changing world of work. In preparing Arizona Career and Technical Education students with a full array of technical AND workplace skills, Arizona, this nation, and, indeed, the world will be better served.