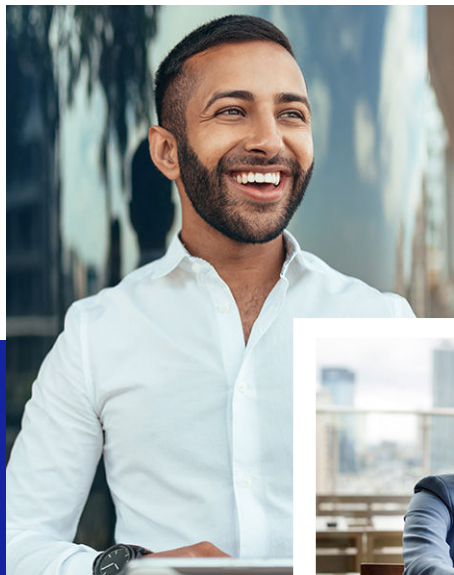




Tell me more about...

# Adding value to credentialing with soft skills

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# Contents

**02**

## **Opportunities to assess soft skills**

Page 8



**04**

## **What are soft skills?**

Page 16



**01**

## **Introduction**

Page 4



**03**

## **Soft skills assessments across the credentialing lifecycle**

Page 14



**05**

## **How are soft skills assessments used in healthcare?**

Page 18

## 06 How are soft skills assessed?

Page 22



## 07 What are the benefits of remote soft skills assessments?

Page 26

## 08 What are the most common concerns when it comes to assessing soft skills?

Page 28



## 09 The future of soft skills assessments in credentialing

Page 30

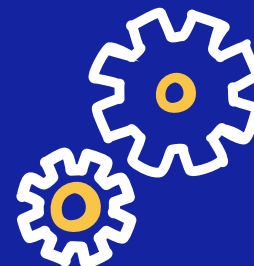
## 10 In conclusion

Page 32



## Introduction

# Soft skills - a new frontier for professional credentialing



Licensing and certification play a key role in **assuring professional competence. Whether it's licensing to protect the public and meet regulatory requirements, or certification to provide assurance of a certain level of proficiency or qualification.**

Traditionally, professional credentialing programmes have emphasized the assessment and development of knowledge and cognitive skills. However, increasing attention is now being given to the importance of the non-cognitive – or 'soft' – skills needed to succeed and competently perform in many careers.

It is significant that research into the growing importance of soft skills shows not only an increased demand for soft skills in professional occupations such as consulting, healthcare, teaching and legal services, but also a more rapid growth in wages for people possessing these skills. <sup>i</sup>

This presents a real opportunity for credentialing organizations to expand the scope of their services with soft skills assessments, and opportunities for candidates to develop these in-demand skills. And in doing so, increase their relevance in the market and enhance their brand – all while helping to advance the professions that they certify.



**"More than three-quarters of accountancy jobs advertised demand candidates who can demonstrate strong soft skills, and more than half include the term team work." <sup>ii</sup>**

This guide aims to explore the key questions you may have about the growing importance of soft skills in credentialing, as well as the potential for assessing these skills.



**"The most in-demand talent in a 2019 survey of graduate employers was listening skills – 74% indicated that this is a skill they value." <sup>iii</sup>**

The need for soft skills is heightened by a rapidly changing workplace. With the introduction of automation, robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI), as well as the pandemic-driven virtual age, employees are increasingly valued for uniquely human skills such as creativity, collaboration and communication. These so-called 21st century skills are becoming increasingly important in professional occupations and underscore the need for credentialing organizations to address soft skills in their programmes.

## **The workplace** ***is changing...***

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# *Opportunities* to assess soft skills



Non-cognitive assessments can be used to measure current behaviour or predict future performance in settings that require soft skills. Huge opportunities lie in the use of soft skills assessments for pre-credentialing, credentialing, individual Continuing Education (CE) and the maintenance of a credential or certification.



**"A study conducted by Harvard University suggested that as much as 80% of achievements in an individual's career are determined by soft skills and only 20% by hard skills." <sup>vi</sup>**

## More about...

### Soft skills assessments for *pre-credentialing*

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Recent studies point to significant gaps when it comes to the workplace readiness of many individuals.<sup>v</sup> At the same time, employers increasingly understand the importance of non-cognitive skills when recruiting and developing new talent. As a result, there is a growing emphasis on developing 21st century skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and flexibility. With a focus on behaviours that are malleable (trainable) and related to competencies.

This is important for credentialing, because with this change in emphasis comes a need to identify soft skills gaps in those working towards certification and licensure in many professions including accountancy, law, healthcare and IT.

There is the potential for credentialing organizations to add real value here – for individuals, employers and the professions they represent – through the use of diagnostic assessments that identify strengths and developmental needs. And to then link these needs to online learning and reinforcement through formative and summative practice tests.

## More about...

### Soft skills assessments for *credentialing*

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As recognition of the importance of non-cognitive skills in the workplace increases, more credentialing organizations are beginning to assess soft skills as well as knowledge and practical skills. Both when granting and renewing certification or licensure.

For example, a number of organizations that certify IT professionals already test communication, collaboration and creative thinking skills, in addition to a candidate's technical skills. And while training for doctors has often overlooked the skills needed to effectively communicate with patients

and manage teams, this is changing with the increased expectation that doctors will take on management and leadership roles.

The assessment of soft skills is still in its early stages for most credentialing organizations. But it's a rapidly growing area and organizations will need to recognize the importance of soft skills if they want to keep current with the changing workplace, expand their markets and demonstrate value to credential holders and the organizations in which they work.



**"The three most in-demand soft skills of 2019, according to LinkedIn, were creativity, persuasion and collaboration." <sup>vii</sup>**





**"Accountants increasingly need to be able to explain the meaning behind the numbers. Just over half of Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) say that they value hard and soft skills equally when recruiting, and 10% give more weight to soft skills." <sup>viii</sup>**

## More about...

### Soft skills assessments to guide *development*

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Soft skills assessments combined with learning and development activities present an exciting opportunity for credentialing organizations to apply talent assessment and management tools within certification and licensure programmes. This will serve to augment the existing focus on technical knowledge and skills with increasingly relevant soft skills.

Soft skills assessments may be used at different points of the certification lifecycle in different ways, as individuals progress in their career.

Credentialing organizations in many sectors, such as nursing and accountancy, grant a licence and then offer a further credential for additional skills development, which can include soft skills.

A certified accountant, for example, might be good with numbers but will need non-cognitive skills if they want to progress to management level and become a business leader.

Credentialing organizations can support their members to measure and develop these skills.

# Soft skills assessments across the *credentialing lifecycle*

1.

## Pre-certification and licensure

### Diagnostic and practice tests

Where are you now and where do you need to be?

2.

## Granting certification and licensure

### Assessments

Do you meet the required standards?

3.

## Re-certification or license renewal

### Assessments

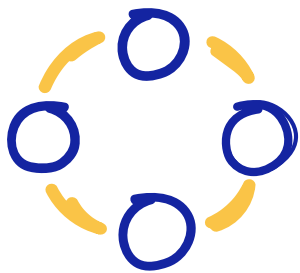
Are you maintaining the required standards?

4.

## Individual development

### Diagnostic tests and assessments

Where do you have opportunity to grow, either in your current role or to reach new career goals?



**Non-cognitive domains  
make up 45% of Knowledge,  
Skills, Abilities and Other  
Characteristics (KSAOs) for  
over 1,000 jobs. <sup>ix</sup>**



More about...

# Soft skills

What are soft skills?



Human performance can be classified into three major domains. All three domains contribute to an individual's overall skillset and drive their performance:

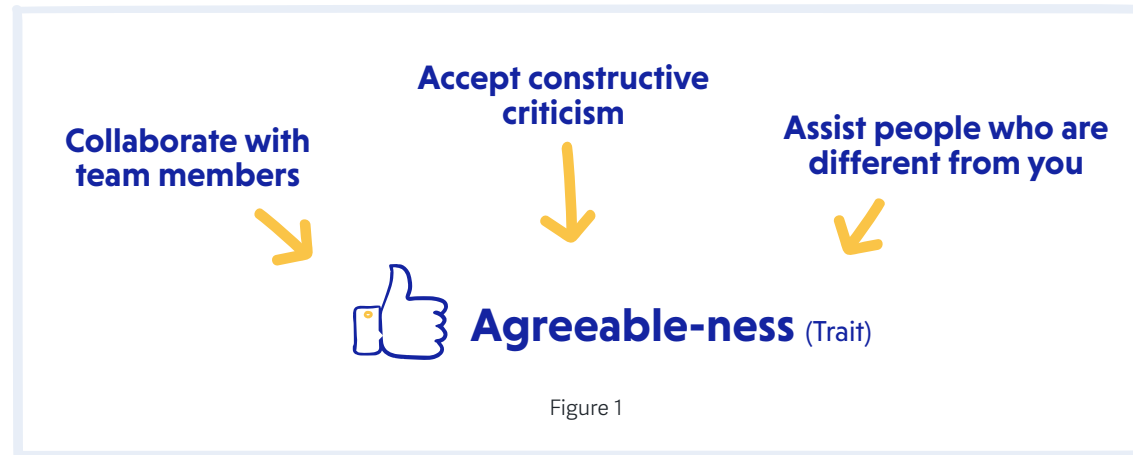
- 1. Cognitive**  
for example memory, numerical ability, reasoning.
- 2. Psycho-motor**  
gross motor skills (movement of the arms, legs and other large body parts) and fine motor skills (hands, fingers, eyes).
- 3. Non-cognitive**  
personality traits such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion.

Soft skills are the surface level behaviours that reflect underlying personality traits and characteristics. Soft skills are malleable and can be coached and developed in a relatively short timeframe, while traits are enduring characteristics that tend to persist throughout life. Examples are shown in Figure 1.

# What do soft skills contribute to the workplace?

Soft skills add substantially to the make-up of a person's professional competence, going beyond what the individual 'can do' technically, to what the individual 'will do' with respect to behaviour in various situations. Soft skills can be the difference between a 'good enough' employee and an excellent team member.

Agreeableness is just one example of a trait that enables a person to function and thrive within an organization, which is demonstrated through a range of behaviours.



# How are soft skills assessments used in *healthcare*?

While the assessment of technical competence and clinical skills in medicine remain essential, there is increased recognition of the need for soft skills such as empathy, teamwork, and resilience for successful performance among healthcare professionals. Particularly for allied health and nursing roles.



## Pre-credentialing

When recruiting for nursing roles, employers in healthcare ranked communication, empathy, listening and a strong work ethic as the most essential soft skills.<sup>x</sup> **Empathy**, for example, enables a better understanding of the perspectives and concerns that a patient may be experiencing.<sup>xi</sup>

In order to develop this, it is helpful to assess aptitudes and characteristics in the early stages of a student's career. And then provide a profile of their strengths and development opportunities.



**"Empathy is defined as the capacity to recognize and understand feelings experienced by another person. Studies suggest empathy plays an important role in successful patient care outcomes." xii**





## Credentialing

Important soft skills can also be assessed during the credentialing process. According to a study published in the American Journal of Public Health, **teamwork** is essential to patient care in systems involving multiple disciplines and levels of health workers.<sup>xiii</sup> Teamwork is something that can be assessed in the credentialing exam using patient simulations and Situational Judgment Tests.

## Post-credentialing

The importance of **resilience** in healthcare was well recognized prior to the Coronavirus crisis, but the global pandemic has highlighted a need to support our healthcare workers, so they have the soft skills needed to cope with sustained pressure and stress. In the post-credential phase, resilience can be addressed in an individual assessment and development program, by measuring an individual's current ability to cope with adversity, and highlighting their existing strengths and future development needs.

# How are soft skills assessed?



Assessment tool	Overview
Self-report measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Measure attitudes/opinions, self-descriptions and situational responses.</li><li>• Measure specific personality traits.</li></ul>
Situational Judgement Tests (SJT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examinee evaluates and selects from optional responses to a scenario.</li><li>• Measure a range of KSAOs, including soft skills.</li></ul>
Role play, simulation and behavioural interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate behaviour, take action.</li><li>• Respond in a realistic and relevant scenario.</li></ul>





### **More about...**

## **Self-report measures**

This type of assessment is commonly used in measuring personality traits and attributes. One response format is where candidates are presented with a statement or description of themselves which they either agree or disagree with.

Self-report assessments are especially useful when you want a quick and efficient measure of traits, such as the Big 5 personality factors (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience and extraversion).

## More about...

### Situational Judgement Tests (SJT)

Where self-report measures are well suited to assessing an individual's static personality traits, SJTs can assess how effective individual development has been in advancing behavioural strategies to cope. For example, tools to manage being an introvert or to develop empathy.

SJTs are useful in an individual development program, as a follow-up to a diagnostic assessment and learning activities.

## More about...

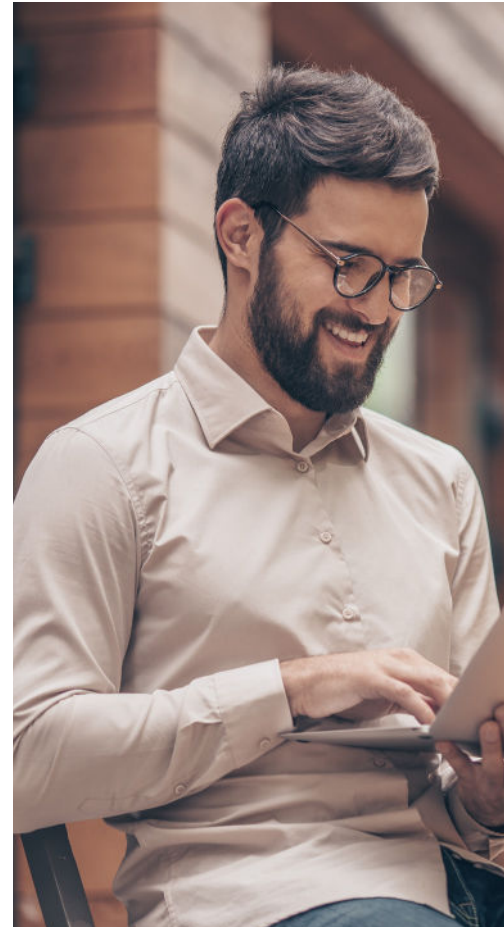
### Role play, simulation, behavioural interviews

Role plays simulate a real-life situation to evaluate how an individual would perform in a certain situation. This type of assessment is often used in Virtual Assessment Centres.

Role plays are most useful when you wish to assess behaviour related to soft skills such as empathy, for example in a live patient simulation in a healthcare scenario where tactful communication is required.

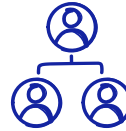
With technological advances, all of the tools used to assess soft skills can now be delivered remotely and securely.

What are the *benefits* of remote soft skills assessments?





## For ***organizations***



- ▶ Expand markets and revenue
- ▶ Engage candidates across the career cycle
- ▶ Industry leadership
- ▶ Brand enhancement
- ▶ More qualified workforce across key professions
- ▶ Increase growth and member retention

## For ***individuals***



- ▶ Understand how your personal strengths can be leveraged for career success
- ▶ Develop strategies to be effective in challenging situations
- ▶ Increase effectiveness in your role
- ▶ Develop skills to grow and advance in your career

# What are the most common concerns when it comes to assessing soft skills?

## Faking it

One of the most common concerns with non-cognitive self-report measures is the opportunity for test takers to receive coaching on, or fake, their responses. <sup>xiv</sup>

To address this, organizations should consider appropriate test types, methods, and applications for the intended purpose of the assessment. For example, in high-stakes testing the use of SJTs with certain response formats, and simulations, can offer an approach to measuring non-cognitive competencies while reducing the potential for faking. <sup>xv</sup>



# Validity and reliability

As with other test results that are used for decision-making, validation is also needed for non-cognitive assessments.

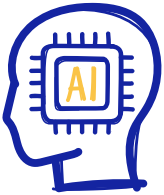
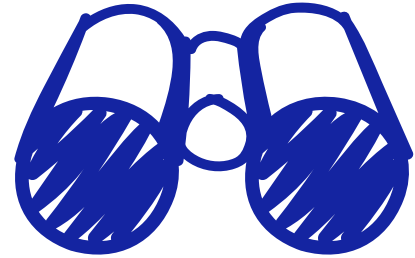
This means that there should be evidence to support the use of assessment scores for their intended purpose, and the assessment must be a reliable measure of the soft skill, or competency. Equally, the soft skills should be clearly documented as important for successful performance in the occupation. When non-cognitive assessments are used for decision-making, such as screening, selection and promotion, there must be evidence to support them.

## Fairness

Non-cognitive assessments tend to show comparable performance across racial/ethnic and gender groups and are therefore helpful in promoting diversity in organizations. <sup>xvi</sup>



# The future of soft skills assessments in credentialing



## Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI is having a twofold impact on soft skills assessments. As more processes are automated, and machines take on many of the roles previously undertaken by humans, there is a rise in demand for the soft skills that AI isn't able to replicate.

At the same time, AI is being used in remote assessments to support ID verification (in the form of voice or facial recognition) and to recognize suspicious behaviours (with object recognition).



## Use of emerging technologies

Multimedia SJTs are already successfully delivering realistic, inclusive and fair soft skills assessments in recruitment. What's more, emerging technologies such as mobile-first design, animation and Virtual Reality simulations will inevitably become more common in soft skills assessments.



## Developments in secure test delivery

High-stakes assessments will always require some form of secure delivery, this is also the case when assessing for soft skills. Traditionally, secure testing centres have been used to address these risks. A more recent development is the use of remote proctoring. This can involve the use of either live or record & review proctoring. Another option is mobile testing kiosks that are at least as secure as test centres, incorporating an ID scanner, HD cameras and software that connects the test taker securely to an online proctor.



# In conclusion...

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Credentialing organizations have traditionally focused on knowledge and skills, and yet occupational analyses have shown that soft skills comprise a substantial portion of the requirements for success in virtually every job. Furthermore, the world of work is changing. With the rise of automation and AI, non-cognitive skills are becoming ever more important in almost every profession.

While soft skills assessment has gained increasing attention in certification and licensure, with successful examples in the field of healthcare, there is still significant potential for wider use. The good news is that proven solutions are available today to provide credentialing organizations with the tools to expand their offerings and advance the professions they serve.



## What are the benefits of working with ***PSI Credentialing?***

PSI is unique. We are the only major provider working across both Credentialing and Talent Management. With the technology, content and expertise to deliver assessment and development for:

- ▶ Pre-credentialing
- ▶ Awarding licensure and certification
- ▶ Individual development
- ▶ Re-certification and renewal of licensure



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