With the increasing demand for skills governing workplace behaviors, ACT's new WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment is designed to measure and develop these crucial competencies for the future. In episode 55, Dr. Alex Casillas delves into the vital importance of essential skills in both education and the workforce. Join us for a deeper exploration of how essential skills can boost job performance, satisfaction, and career advancement, and learn about the tools available to enhance these abilities.

Dr. Alex Casillas
Principal Research Psychologist
ACT

Links and Resources

- Episode 55 of the Podcast
- WorkKeys Essential Skills from ACT
- Technical Manual on ACT WorkKeys Essential Skills
- WorkKeys Curriculum
- Essential Skills Coaching Tools
- ACT Work Ready Communities
- ACT Workforce Solutions

Transcript of Episode 55

Opening Jingle and Music: Let's Get Ready for Work]

Alex Casillas: These are the kinds of things that my grandma and my parents taught me. We just now have the research to back all of that up. Of the ten most frequently requested skills, seven of them were essential skills.

Jasen: Dr. Alex Casillas from ACT joins us on episode 55 of Ready for Work to demystify essential skills, and, how employers can measure those skills for hiring and growth.

Jingle: Let's get Ready for Work!

Jasen: On today's episode, Alex examines the critical role of essential skills in education and the workforce. To keep pace with this growing demand, ACT's new WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment helps measure and develop these indispensable skills for the future. This podcast is longer than most of our episodes, but together we'll discover how essential skills can enhance job performance, satisfaction, and career advancement with the tools available to measure and improve these competencies.

Dr. Alex Casillas is a Principal Research Psychologist here at ACT with over 20 years in the testing industry. He specializes in assessment design, behavioral predictors of performance, and training program implementation. Alex has published over 80 articles and presented at 100+ conferences. His current research aims to help underrepresented groups achieve equitable outcomes in education and work. Originally from Mexico, he is a first-generation college graduate.

Jasen: Alex, welcome to the Ready for Work podcast. In the national skills space, we often see a wide range of terminologies. Let's level set with a simple description of essential skills.

Alex: Well, Jasen, essential skills are referred to by many names. So, you may have heard things like soft skills, 21st century skills, employability skills, or even durables skills. Regardless of the name that you use, they are important. These are very different from traditional core academic skills or foundational skills like math and reading. They are basically more interpersonal, self-regulatory, and task-related behaviors that research shows are really important for success in all sorts of settings, both educational as well as workforce.

For example, in education settings, these skills can help you to do well in your studies to finish your degree, to make sure that you're engaging in problem solving and team projects adequately. At work, these skills can help you perform well at your job. So, for example, it can help you to not only work well with others and make sure that you are getting your work done on time and to quality standards, but also to become a leader in your group, to be more satisfied with your work and also even less likely to quit. So overall, folks with these skills are more successful at their job and more successful at standing out so that they're more likely to be eligible for things like races and promotions and things like that.

Jasen: Thanks, Alex. We've heard from workforce development and education practitioners on their challenges in measuring essential skills and I'm looking forward to learning how this works. Which skills get measured with ACT's new assessment?

Alex: The WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment measures six skills that have been demonstrated in the research to relate to a variety of important outcomes, both in education as well as workforce settings. These skills, and we'll have a little table that is attached to the podcast for people to click on if they want to, include *work ethic*, which gets at people who show

Essential Skill	Demonstrates...
Work Ethic	persistence, goal striving, reliability, dependability, and attention to detail at work
Collaboration	the ability to work on teams, empathy, helpfulness, trust, and trustworthiness
Resilience	stress management, emotional regulation, a positive response to setbacks, and poise
Leadership	assertiveness, influence, optimism, and enthusiasm
Creativity	ingenuity, flexibility, open mindedness, and embracing diversity
Integrity	honesty, sincerity, fairness towards others, and modesty

persistence, goal striving, dependability. Also, *collaboration*, which is whether people can work in teams well and do they show empathy. Are they helpful? *Resilience*, which is how people manage stress, whether they can regulate their emotions and remain positive in the face of setbacks. We also have *leadership*, which is whether people can demonstrate assertiveness as well as is appropriate, and influence and optimism about their setting. And *creativity*, which includes whether people are able to be creative, ingenuous, flexible, open minded, open to new ideas and people. And of course, *integrity*. can people, demonstrated sincerity and open honesty as well as being fair and just generally engaging in rule abiding behaviors.

Jasen: That's a helpful flyover, Alex. It's likely every member of our audience has heard from employers that want essential skills in their candidate pipeline.

Alex: Absolutely. Multiple surveys for workers as well as organizations show that essential skills are, well, essential, in order for people to succeed at work, both now and in the coming future. And when you talk to folks, you often say, these are the kinds of things that my grandma and my parents taught me that you should be doing these things. Absolutely, we just now have the research to back all of that up.

So, I'll give you a couple of examples. Internationally, there's been a variety of surveys done and one of them is a very large resource from McKinsey and Company that conducted a survey of over 18,000 workforce professionals across 15 countries. They basically ask the question, what are the skills that people will need in the near future to succeed at work.

Cognitive

Critical thinking	Planning and ways of working
● Structured problem solving	● Work-plan development
● Logical reasoning	● Time management and prioritization
● Understanding biases	● Agile thinking
● Seeking relevant information	

Communication	Mental flexibility
● Storytelling and public speaking	● Creativity and imagination
● Asking the right questions	● Translating knowledge to different contexts
● Synthesizing messages	● Adopting a different perspective
● Active listening	● Adaptability
	● Ability to learn

Interpersonal

Mobilizing systems	Developing relationships
● Role modeling	● Empathy
● Win–win negotiations	● Inspiring trust
● Crafting an inspiring vision	● Humility
● Organizational awareness	● Sociability

Teamwork effectiveness	
● Fostering inclusiveness	● Collaboration
● Motivating different personalities	● Coaching
● Resolving conflicts	● Empowering

Self-leadership

Self-awareness and self-management	
● Understanding own emotions and triggers	● Integrity
● Self-control and regulation	● Self-motivation and wellness
● Understanding own strengths	● Self-confidence

Entrepreneurship	
● Courage and risk-taking	● Energy, passion, and optimism
● Driving change and innovation	● Breaking orthodoxies

Goals achievement	
● Ownership and decisiveness	● Grit and persistence
● Achievement orientation	● Coping with uncertainty
	● Self-development

Digital

Digital fluency and citizenship	
● Digital literacy	● Digital collaboration
● Digital learning	● Digital ethics

Software use and development	
● Programming literacy	● Computational and algorithmic thinking
● Data analysis and statistics	

Understanding digital systems	
● Data literacy	● Cybersecurity literacy
● Smart systems	● Tech translation and enablement

Of course, they got a bunch of different responses. The researchers sorted them into buckets. You see some of the buckets that you might expect. You see some buckets around cognitive skills like critical thinking. You see some buckets around technology and digital types of skills, around digital literacy. And then you see a lot of interpersonal and sort of leadership and problem-solving types of skills, which are basically the essential skills.

Of the 56 skills that this study identified, 35, which is about 63%, were related to essential skills. They talked about persistence, collaboration, self-control. Clearly from an international perspective, these are seen as very important skills, not just now but for the future of work. A more recent study from the Web Economic Forum actually confirmed that as well.

Now if you turn more locally to the domestic US setting, similar surveys have been done. A recent one by America Succeeds and Burning Glass analyzed over 82 million job postings. Then they coded what were the most frequently requested skills. Of the ten most frequently requested skills, seven of them were essential skills. Whether you look at it now, or whether you're looking at it for the upcoming future. Whether you look at it domestically or whether you can look at it internationally, the skills are definitely seen as by employers as being important.

Jingle: Skills first solutions with life-changing impact, you're listening to Ready for Work from ACT.

Jasen: Alex, for our listeners on the frontlines building skills-first ecosystems that align worker talent and employer demand, what priority should we give to essential skills?

Alex: a question that we get a lot. I'm one of the authors of the holistic framework. In that framework we explain how education and work success involves a combination of knowledge and skills from a variety of areas. It's not just math and reading. It's things like essential skills. It's things like being able to navigate your interests and your abilities to find a good fit for job and education and all those things. It's not about pairing one thing above the other or prioritizing one thing above the other. It's really about how do you have these be complementary to each other. You need to develop your foundational or your core academic skills.

Alongside right in parallel, you also need to develop your essential skills, because we know that these help you to succeed in a variety of settings. And so, I'll give you a couple of examples. Within

the education setting, whether it's K-12 or post-secondary, we need to develop these skills because we know that these skills matter beyond the knowledge of math and reading and science. They're vital for building good relationships, for making plans and following through on them, for staying resilient in the face of challenges. We know that these are all critical for personal and professional contexts, more specifically within the workplace context. I already shared with you that employers value these skills.

We know that these skills help people to be good team players, to be better leaders, to communicate more effectively and to stay flexible in the change in the face of challenges. If we know anything about the world of work these days is that it's all constantly changing. Not only does that help you may be more valuable as an individual to your team and to your employer, but as other additional challenges in the world of work set in like automation, like technology, like generative AI and all the things that are in our world these days, asset changes, job landscape, these skills help you to remain more resilient and better prepared to face those challenges. Those challenges may be either human competition, or now machine-based competition. But these skills help you to set apart from your competition.

Jasen: Thanks, Alex. That's a helpful approach on prioritizing essential skills. Walk us through how this assessment works.

Alex: Yeah. It's got a variety of features that are designed to optimize the information that examinees and administrators receive in a short amount of time. One is that it's multi-method and that it's research-based. What that means is that it combines different methods like *Likert*-type questions, which are your traditional *I like to do these kinds of things* or *I'm usually this way or that*, with something that is called *situational judgment* task types of items. What those items do is they present a brief situation and then they ask *how will you behave in that situation*. And you've got some choices to make based on the response prompts. What is shown is that the combination of these items are more engaging and also more valid.

Multi-Method, Research Based
- Based on decades of research on Big Five and HEXACO frameworks.
- Combines Likert and situational judgment items resulting in an engaging, multi-method assessment that's less susceptible to response bias.

Anytime/Anywhere Online Testing
- Online administration allows examinees a streamlined experience, using ACT's learning management system or your existing system.
- Proctoring is not required.

Short Test Time
- WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.
- Easy to read—assessment items are written at a fifth-grade reading level.

Digital Badging
- Individuals who earn at or above the 84th percentile in each measured essential skill will receive a micro-credential that can easily be shared with employers via Credly digital badge.

Robust and Actionable Data
- For educators, examinee score reports and aggregate-level data are available and can be downloaded from their learning management system as soon as 15 minutes after testing is complete.
- Organizations can grant and manage user access to ensure authorized individuals can access data.
- Data resources and free coaching tools are available to ensure that institutions and organizations can use WorkKeys Essential Skills data to understand and support examinee skill development and success.

Dedicated Support
- ACT provides comprehensive training materials and resources to ensure successful administration.
- Dedicated WorkKeys Customer Support ensures that administrators have easy access to solutions and troubleshooting.

Then also it's research-based, the validity and research authorities, what ACT solutions rely on and have for decades. These items and these types of assessments are based on common models of personality and industrial-organizational psychology, the big five and the Texaco model. These models have literally decades of research behind them showing that assessments developed with these models in mind are more reliable and more valid at predicting all sorts of important outcomes.

Also, it's anytime and anywhere because it's online. You can take this assessment online as long as you've got a reliable internet connection. It's not very long. So, then you don't have to be there for hours or anything and proctoring is not required. So that also makes it easier to deliver. It's relatively short as I've mentioned. Most people take about 15 minutes, sometimes maybe a little bit longer, but on average about 15 minutes.

It's also reader-friendly because we were very intentional in making sure that the language of the assessment wasn't going to be one of the hurdles that people needed to jump over in order to

assess their skills. It's actually written at about a fifth grade reading level which most people find very easy to access.

It also has a cool feature that if you score high on any of those skills you can get a digital badge. This is through Credly so we can talk about that a little bit later. But you can get a micro credential which then can be shared easily with employers or through your social media outlets, whichever ones you have.

It's got robust and actionable data. Whether you're an examinee looking at your individual report, or whether you're an administrator at an institution or an organization, you can use these data, especially at the aggregate level, to be able to then filter, or slice and dice the data in any way that you want in order to meet the needs of your institution or the needs of your organization.

The last one is also it's got dedicated support from ACT so we provide comprehensive training materials and resources to make sure that you are successful in your own administration of this assessment. Of course, if you ever have any questions you can always contact your friendly customer service representatives and they're always happy to address your questions.

Jingle: This is Ready for Work from ACT, bringing you innovation and inspiration for the workforce ecosystem. Let's Get Ready for Work!

Jasen: Let's jump to the actionable data feature. Tell us about the report options available.

Alex: Yeah, absolutely and we'll have a sample report attached to the materials for this podcast for anybody that wants to browse it. There are two types of reports available. One is an examinee report and that's for the individual person who takes the assessment. The other one is a roster report. I'm just going to talk a little bit about each of them in turn.

For the examinee report. It provides detailed information about that person's taking of the assessment. Each individual completes the WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment. It includes obviously the scores of the six skills, as well as interpretive information about what each score means. The report also includes a link to free coaching tools that have exercises and other activities to help people develop their skills.

The report is laid out in the following way. At the top you're going to have your header with the information about the examinees name, etc. Then you're going to have an overview of your scores, and your scores are always sorted from high score to lower score.

We firmly believe that organizing in this way allows people to sort of think about the results in ways that they can first leverage their strengths. So, if you have high scores, how do you leverage continue to leverage those. Because that's great. You need to continue doing those.

WorkKeys Essential Skills Report
Jane Doe
August 10, 2023

This report includes your percentile scores on each of the six skills WorkKeys Essential Skills measures. Percentile scores show how your scores compare to others who have taken the assessment. For example, a score of 60 means that 60% of test takers scored at or below this score.

Your Essential Skills Profile

- **Creativity** (ingenuity, creative thinking, inquisitiveness, flexibility, open-mindedness, and embracing diversity) — 86
- **Collaboration** (can work on teams, empathy, helpfulness, trust, and trustworthiness) — 76
- **Integrity** (honesty, sincerity, fairness towards others, and modesty) — 65
- **Resilience** (stress management, emotional regulation, a positive response to setbacks, and poise) — 47
- **Work Ethic** (persistence, goal striving, reliability, dependability, and attention to detail) — 22
- **Leadership** (assertiveness, influence, optimism, and enthusiasm) — 15

Percentile scores at or above the 84th percentile indicate you demonstrate these skills often and independently.
Percentile scores between the 17th and 83rd percentiles indicate you demonstrate these skills sometimes, and sometimes require help or prompting from others.
Percentile scores at or below the 16th percentile indicate you rarely demonstrate these skills and do not yet demonstrate them independently.

For more information on interpreting your scores and developing your skills, visit www.act.org/workkeys-essential-skills-for-examinees

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Then you may have some scores in the middle and those are skills that you can always continue to develop. Then for some folks, they might also have some low scores and low scores are really seen as kind of growth edges. These are things that you definitely should pay attention to and potentially prioritize developing these skills sooner rather than later. Because these are the things that might trip you up or they might cause stalling access to a potential opportunity. You don't want to do that. So, let's say if I were low on collaboration, those might be the skills that I want to develop first, because those can really limit my ability to work in teams or to succeed in certain aspects of work.

So, that's the front page and then the back page basically has more detail interpreting each of your scores. It gives you score, but then it tells you more information about - here's the kinds of things that you can do, or here's the kinds of things that you can aim for. Again, with the intent of it being more of a formative aspect that helps you to then take the next step, which then connects to our curriculum.

As I mentioned before, the report has a link to free coaching tools. And of course, some folks, some institutions may already have access to our WorkKeys Curriculum as part of a paid license, which also provides really great resources for individuals to develop their skills.

So that's the examinee report. And then the roster report, as you might expect, it kind of catalogs all of the examinees that have taken the assessment. And you can specify a time period so you can filter in various ways. But generally, what you find is the following information. So, that roster has the examinee name and email and other basic identifying information. It has the date and the time that they took it. It's got a variety of demographics, including education level or employment status that people report. And then, of course, it's got the examinees percentile scores for each of the six skills.

When you download a roster report it comes as a CSV file, which means that you can open it in any kind of spreadsheet type of application, like Microsoft Excel. And as a result, as an administrator you can then filter or sort or merge those data in any way that you want to make it as useful for your institution or for your organization as possible.

Jasen: I like how the WorkKeys Essential Skills can be paired with the NCRC for a digital badge.

Alex: Yes, yes they can. An examinee, if you earn a high score on any of the six skills, you can claim a digital badge through Credly and Credly is the largest and most connected digital credential network in the US. It's also the same provider there we're using for folks who earn an NCRC. They can also claim digital NCRC badges through Credly.

Basically, we have this kind of one-stop where people can display and showcase their, their badges and their credentials. Because increasingly as we move to a more digitally savvy set of workplace uses, digital badge is becoming very common as saying, *here's how you can display your skills and how you can promote them*. You can signal to employers that, look, I've got these skills, and you can put this on your resume. You can put this on your social media profiles and any other ways that you might want to self-promote that you have essential skills.

Jasen: What types of resources may working-learners use to improve their essential skills?

Alex: There's a common misconception that one's ways of feeling and thinking and behaving are set and that they don't change or that there's types of people that have particular skills, and if you're not a particular type, then you won't be able to get those skills. However, there is a lot of evidence from research that shows that these are really misconceptions.

Just like reading, just like doing math, you can learn these skills and you can improve them and continue to get better at them. So, there's a couple of ways. One, is that studies have shown that people-skills naturally sort of mature and change over their lifespan. But as you can imagine, if you think about what you were like when you were younger and what you were like now, chances are that you are more mature now, that you are more able to persist when challenges arise, and cooperate with others, or manage emotions in stressful situations, things that might have thrown you off, something like ten or so years back, don't throw you off the same way now. And that's because of experience. We've matured and we learned with those experiences. However, research has also found that people can change their skills on purpose, through simple activities like behavioral challenges through learning tools and curriculum. They work the kind of curriculum that I mentioned earlier that is available, whether it's provided through your institution, basically, at school, or whether it's provided through an employer, or some other workforce development setting, you can learn these skills and you can practice them in order to improve them.

To help facilitate these, WorkKeys has, as I mentioned earlier, two different approaches to it. One is that there is the paid curriculum for those folks who already have access to that paid curriculum through their institution or through their organization. They can have access to essential skills curriculum just like they have access to the foundational skills curriculum. We also have free coaching tools because we strongly believe that folks have access to these tools in order to develop their skills. That's part of our mission of ACT of doing work that's part of the public good. Both of these types of tools, whether it's the free coaching or the paid curriculum, they're both aligned to the assessment, and they help individuals to improve their essential skills.
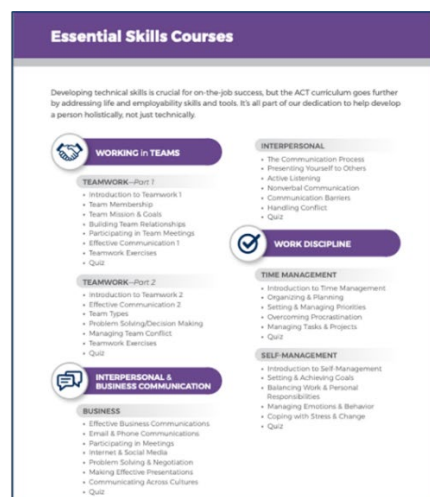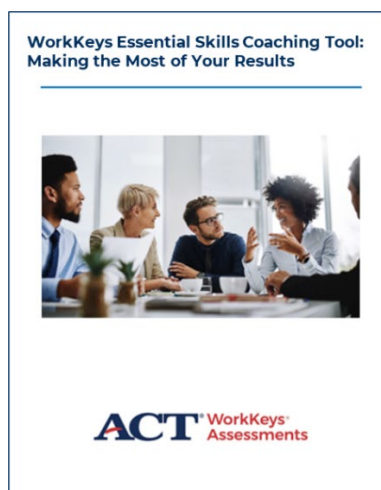
Jasen: This is a great transition to get into a deeper dive on the assessments themselves because we have individual practitioners in the field that will want to know that these assessments of essential skills are reliable.

Alex: Yeah. So, this is where I'm going to put on, if we were on video, I would put on my little propeller head. Because, as a researcher, that's the kind of thing that really gets me excited.

First of all, you want to clarify that the reliability of a test reflects the stability or consistency of test results over time. So, if you say that a test is reliable, what it means is that a person who takes the score right now - if you were to take it again in ten minutes or in a few days - that you would get a similar score. That test really is just consistent. And what research has reported on assessments of essential skills is that they repeatedly do display moderate to high levels of internal consistency through reliability. What that means is how well the items relate to each other, how well the items relate to how people are responding to the content of the assessment.

In the case of our WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment itself the reliability falls in the high range. And so even though it's a relatively brief assessment, because it's got multiple methods and because the questions are really designed well to assess these skills, we can still get a pretty reliable view on an individual when they took the assessment, even though it's relatively brief.

If we want to go into the technical details we'll include a [link to the technical manual](). We're always improving those kinds of documentation as we do the research to make sure that people are able to be on top of those details if they want.

Jasen: It's been so interesting and fascinating to watch the progression of these resources over the last decade or so. Thank you for that update on the reliability. Let's shift to validity. Are assessments of essential skills valid?

Alex: Absolutely. So again, I'm going to sort of set the tone by saying validity refers to the degree to which the empirical evidence and the theory support both the adequacy and the appropriateness of conclusions that you make from assessment scores. What that basically means is, does the assessment actually measure what it claims to measure. So, when I'm measuring essential skills, I'm not measuring your ability to read. Those are different skills measured by different assessments. And so, studies looking at assessments of essential skills have shown that when they're properly designed, that they are valid predictors of many aspects of work performance. And that includes things like quality and quantity of work, teamwork, leadership behaviors, turnover and absenteeism, counterproductive work behaviors, which are things like, if you lie or cheat or steal from your organization, as well as organizational behaviors, like when you are a good organizational citizen. That means doing favors for others and you're being kind and just helpful in general, not because it's part of your job description just because you are a good human.

So, these all contribute to a helpful work environment, to a good job climate. As a result, they also help to predict things like better job satisfaction, better tenure, and also better job earnings. Because people who perform well on a variety of these skills end up being seen as more valuable to employers. And employers usually reward those behaviors as well.

These assessments are predictive of a variety of consequential outcomes, not just at work, but also in education and life settings. So just a brief example in education is that these types of

assessments help to predict better grades. They help to predict a more positive attitudes toward schooling, and also more likely for people to complete a degree or a credential.

And then in life, these types of assessments help to predict better life satisfaction, better health, and even longer lifespan. There are a variety of reasons why these skills are important in a variety of contexts.

These assessments are linked to those frameworks that I mentioned before, like the big five and the hexagon, that have been shown in the literature as being very robust predictors of a variety of outcomes. Then again, we have another way in which, from a validity perspective, we can link our specific assessment to the types of outcomes that are present in the literature. And again, for more details, always feel free to consult our technical manual.

Jingle: Showcasing voices of excellence in the workforce ecosystem, you're listening to Ready for Work from ACT.

Jasen: In many of our workforce development and education settings, Alex, we think of the importance of an assessment as a standalone activity when really it should be part of a sequence of activities and services that our partners on the ground are providing to working learners as they move through these systems.

When we think about the impact of knowing your skills and how to improve your skills and how to advance on a career pathway to get a better job, we think about all of the outcomes in the objectives of how these assessments can be useful. So, let's shift, if you will, to this function of providing guidance counseling to the individual, whether it's career counseling or around the training side. How do examinees respond to these types of assessments in their flow of services?

Alex: Yeah, that's an excellent question. I'm actually going to flip the way that I was going to respond to this. I first start with, in more selection types of applications where people can be sometimes a little bit defensive about their use of assessments. Their response is kind of in the middle and I'll qualify that. They like it more than cognitive types of assessments, but not as much as an interview, because often people feel like in an interview you can kind of explain more details or clarify things which you might not be able to do in a formal assessment.

And so that makes sense. That they're right in the middle of those types of methods. However, in a training or development context, that's where these types of assessments really shine. People are seeking feedback about, first to validate, *where am I at* in terms of these skills. Then some feedback about *what can I do about this.*

I've been in the industry long enough to know that for a long time the way we did assessments was basically assessments and a cloud of dust. You got your score report, and basically we said, have a nice life. But that's not the way that we do things right now. What we do now is that we not only provide this assessment experience that gives you scores with some insights about your behaviors and your skills in this case, but then also connect those with, *now what can you do about these? What can you do to develop your collaboration skills or your leadership skills or your creativity skills?*

And then, is what I think I'm very excited about, and our users also see a lot more potential because they say, *yeah, I can see how these scores can help me* in improving my skills, how I can connect these skills to the kinds of things that employers want either in general, or my particular employer wants me to develop in a more specific way so that I can be successful at work. And if

I'm successful at work, that also means that I'm more likely to get better pay or better benefits in some way. Or I can claim the latter to the kind of job that I really want and establish the kind of life that I want to make for myself or my family or whoever your community is. That's where I think being able to really connect the assessment to things like curriculum and training, basically that *what's next*, it's really powerful.

Jasen: Thanks, Alex. Here's another common question from our listeners. Could examinees cheat on this type of assessment?

Alex: There's always like *where there's a will there's a way* type of a response. But in general, the research has shown that whether you call it cheating, whether you call it fake ability, which some folks in the literature, call it, then it really has a fairly small impact on the validity of these types of assessments. And there's a couple of reasons for it. One is that most examinees tend to respond pretty honestly to these. That's just their nature particularly, and if you instruct them. *Hey, where we will we want you to make sure that you're honest*. And for development purposes, the best policy is honesty. If you're faking it then you're not going to get the kind of feedback that actually is helpful for you to develop your skills.

So, the other way in which we can address potential faking is that, remember how I said that this assessment has a couple of different methods that it uses. And part of the reason for that is that not only do they enhance the validity, because we're basically asking questions about behaviors in a couple different ways, which helps you to kind of really get a more comprehensive picture of that skill for that person. But it also turns out that by using different methods you actually can help to mitigate against potential biases from people who respond by exaggerating their behaviors in one way or another.

So, that really is one way of addressing that potential faking, although, again, in developmental types of applications, which is where this assessment will really shine, you don't tend to see a lot of people faking, because that's actually just counterintuitive for the kinds of purpose that they want to use the assessment for.

Jingle: Thanks for listening to Ready for Work, from ACT.

Jasen: One last question as we begin to wrap up, and I know whether it's through the equity lens or even the risk management lens, both are super-important and both can be true at the same time. Do these assessments result in any adverse impact we should be aware of?

Alex: Yeah. So again, first of all, let me kind of start by providing a quick definition of adverse impact for our listeners. It refers to the likelihood that a selection tool will systematically select members of one demographic group over another.

So, for example, if an assessment was, men always scored higher than women, that would be one example of a potential adverse impact, especially if it was wholly selecting men for jobs, or for women. That would be a clear example.

In terms of adverse impact, where we've done the research, both in general for these assessments as well as for the WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment, in particular, what the research shows is that they only show small amounts of adverse impact, and in every case, smaller than other assessments that are still commonly used.

There's a variety of cognitive assessments that often show more adverse impact that these types of assessments. And consistent with the literature, our WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment shows that this does not really result in substantial adverse impact in any way. We slice and dice data in different ways for different groups including things like, obviously gender. We've done it by race, ethnicity. We've done it by socioeconomic status, various demographics that we capture, and it shows that there's very small differences that are unlikely to result in an adverse impact. The last thing that I'll say is that, when you look at the literature, are there lawsuits happening in this space where you tend to see lawsuits, it's not in the space of assessments that look at essential skills, again, because they still don't tend to show much adverse impact. You tend to see it in other types of assessments, but not for this one.

Jasen: Alex, thank you. This has been a great journey into essential skills. What would you say are the big takeaways that our listeners might consider deploying? How could they get more information if they want to take that next step?

Alex: Absolutely. So, first of all, go to our website, which we will have a link to in the podcast, so that you can learn more about it. Peruse our resources. And then, if once you look at that and you say, *hey, I'm excited about this, I want to learn more information*, contact your friendly representative because they'll provide you with the best information about how you can get set up to use this assessment.

But most importantly, it's about why you should be caring about essential skills in general. Hopefully, I've made the argument that these skills are important for a variety of outcomes, both in education, the world of work, and in life itself. These skills are particularly important at this time in our history where we are facing a variety of competition from different sources.

In order to stay relevant in the world of work, all of us need to continue to learn. And one of the areas where we need to continue to develop is our essential skills that will help us to do better at work, whether that competition is human beings writing, people being offshored or anything else, or whether that competition is coming from machines in terms of like generative AI or whatever technology comes next, that helping to develop these skills will put you as an employee in a better position to manage whatever changes come your way.

Jasen: Alex, thank you for sharing your insights with us. It's been a joy to have you here on Ready for Work.

Alex: Great. Thank you, Jasen, for hosting. And thank you, listeners. It's always a pleasure to participate in these.

Jasen: Thanks for staying with us during this deep dive into WorkKeys Essential Skills. Alex referenced several resources which you'll find linked to our show notes.

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