

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

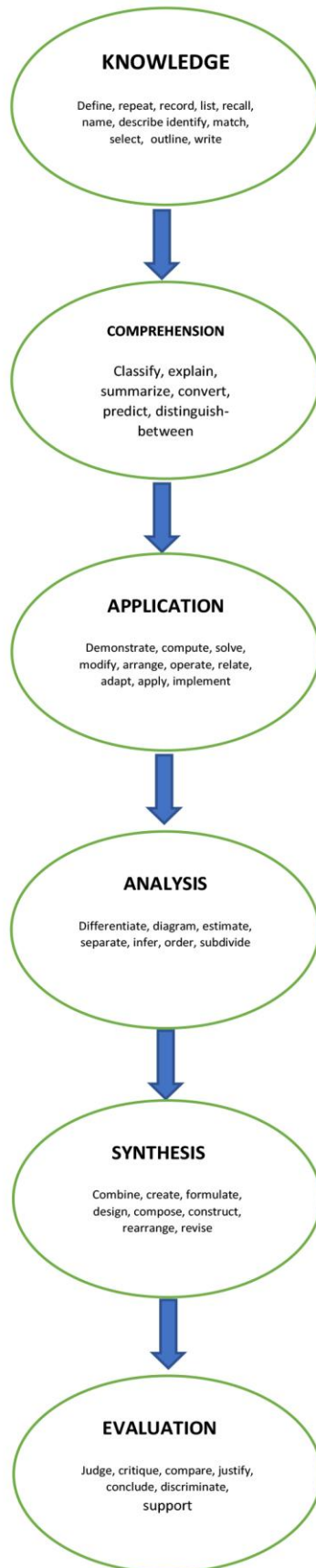
HARD SKILLS

It should be noted that skills development is divided into two: hard skills and soft skills. This part examines skills relating to any specific task which are usually easily quantifiable. They tend to be knowledge based, such as proficiency in a subject, certification, and technical skills. Fluency in English, skills in XYZ software, graphic design, and programming, website development, motor mechanic, carpentry, building, plumbing, aviation, medicine are all hard skills.

There is a bit more to skills development than just practice. The essence of skills development is the process of becoming more effective and efficient (faster, more precise, more contextually aware, etc.) at a task or set of tasks. The fact that most educational processes, courses, exams and tests etc., focus on and make 'knowing and thinking' primary in their curriculum says a lot. There is usually less focus on the psychomotor (physical skills) development unless you are engaged in training, and hardly any in many formal educational courses focusing on or even giving any significant space to affective (emotional and values) development.

To get more insight into the essence of skills development, it is pertinent to look at the following stages:

ESSENCE OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



1. **Knowledge** means just the ability to regurgitate or repeat something. There is no ability at this level of being able to do anything more complex than being able to repeat the content from memory. Neither is there any consideration of the length of time they can do this for. You are with the knowledge if you can and without the knowledge you cannot repeat it. Thus, knowledge is recalling previously learned material. All that is required is to bring the necessary information to mind; examples of verbs to be used in writing this level of objectives: define, repeat, record, list, recall, name the field of skills development such as accounts, data processing, ICT or website development, marketing, building, carpentry, motor mechanic, etc.

2. **Comprehension:** This is where this hierarchy first gets into trouble. Comprehension is an internal process. You cannot see it or test it directly. It is important to recognise that comprehension is understanding; comprehension is thinking. It is the ability to comprehend the meaning of material. The lowest level of understanding; examples of verbs to be used in writing this level of objectives: classify, explain, summarize, convert, predict, distinguish between issues in the area of skills development. Rather we tend to make an inference of comprehension based on what the person does with knowledge. If they can use it appropriately for the context, we make the assumption they understand it. The quality of their understanding depends in large measure on experiences encountered. This is why many tertiary institutions, for example, combine knowledge and comprehension. Actually, comprehension should be combined with application. This leads us on to the next level which is application.

3. **Application:** The ability to do something with the knowledge that is appropriate to the context. Application is the ability to use material that has been learned in new and defined situations and problems; examples of verbs to be used in writing this level of objectives: demonstrate, compute, solve, modify, arrange, operate, relate, adapt, apply, implement. Again, we tend to make an inference of comprehension based on the appropriate application of the knowledge. Our world faces formidable challenges that demand the next generation of college graduates to be capable leaders with expansive understandings of public life, honed skills of critical thinking, and the abilities to collaborate with diverse groups to solve problems and create change. Teaching cadres to apply knowledge and skills to benefit others or serve the public good is one exceptionally high impact method to foster skills development goals and community needs in project implementation that, when done well, enhance both cadres' learning and community socio-economic development.

4. **Analysis:** This refers to two things. The analysis of the application, or being able to see if it is working and work out why or why not. Secondly, analysis refers to the context. Being able to work out if the application of the knowledge is suitable for this context or if it needs to be changed or altered to fit the context. In other words, analysis is the ability to break material down into its component parts and to understand its underlying structure; examples of verbs to be used in writing this level of objectives: differentiate, diagram, estimate, separate, infer, order, subdivide. During solving various problems, a cadre performs thinking actions, going from knowledge of application formulations and initial conditions of the researched process to establishing the interrelations between the known and unknown characteristics of the process, explanation and quantitative evaluation of the result. Thus, the problem solving process facilitates the deeper comprehension of obtained knowledge and formation of a comprehensive idea of reality. The skill of analysis and problem solving is a professional quality required for any cadre and the best criterion for evaluation of the degree of material learning and mastering. Problem solving allows: understanding and learning the

basic applications and analysis, forming of the idea about their peculiarities and boundaries of application; developing the skills and ability to use general applications for solving specific and practical tasks. This leads on to the penultimate level of learning which is synthesis.

5. **Synthesis**, or the ability to change or transform the knowledge and application to suit the context or bring in or add new knowledge to create something new. In other words, synthesis is the ability to combine parts to form a new whole, to synthesize a variety of elements into an original and significant whole; examples of verbs to be used in writing this level of objectives: combine, create, formulate, design, compose, construct, rearrange, revise.

6. Finally, **evaluation**: This refers to the ability to be able to make good judgements using the knowledge and to be able to evaluate the worth of the knowledge in different contexts. It is the ability to evaluate a total situation, to judge the value of material for a certain purpose, combining the elements of all the other categories and also value judgements based on defined, fixed criteria; examples of verbs to be used in writing this level of objectives: judge, critique, compare, justify, conclude, discriminate, support, justify.

Everything is good so far and most people would agree that each level down is a different order of ability and complexity from the one above. A different level of learning. Thus, using this taxonomy to describe levels of ability, learning or complexity of functioning is both useful and makes sense.

We often take the idea of learning or skills development and having learned for granted and frequently make a series of rather large and unquestioned assumptions about at what point we can actually say someone has learned something. The evaluation of learning in many organisations, including our tertiary institutions, is frequently inadequate and does not really measure or describe what many certifications and records of learning suggest they are certifying.

We see “learning events” (workshops, training events, coaching, seminars, online learning, etc.) being provided with little or no idea about what the aim is in terms of learning beyond some vague exposure to content. Sure the ‘learning’ events all have outcomes or objectives, but deeper than that.

Just what are your objectives or learning outcomes actually saying? What are we trying to achieve here with learning? Affective learning, it can be argued, is the big untapped and most powerful learning process that we should call skills development. If learning means change, then having learned must mean having changed, or stability. It has happened and it is now stable; we have acquired the skills and can apply them in practical events. What are people doing, thinking, feeling that is different from before the skills development process? Skills development is rarely a single event, rather a series of events strung together in a process. What this means is that the skills obtained is now part of who we are, our character or personality. It, in effect, becomes a habit.

It is how we have acquired skills. We take novel actions and adaptations and turn them into habits so that we can then stack the habits and free up valuable attentional resources. Just consider the complex set of tasks and learning involved in learning to drive. At first you are taken somewhere safe like an airfield or car park as you learn the basic controls. As these become habituated, you then move on to more complex manoeuvres like negotiating city

traffic for example or parallel parking. Pretty soon you drive around without thinking about it too much until something out of the ordinary occurs.

Up to the point of characterization's habituation the point at which it just becomes part of who we are we are still learning; we are still bringing it in and making it a habit; an ongoing process. The strategy is not only to solve today's problem of technology transfer and skills development but to start building long term value associated with employment creation for school leavers and for the community in general.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (SOFT SKILLS)

This section highlights emotional intelligence to include some of the following skills: communication, leadership, time management, stress management, decision making, adaptability, ability to deal with adversity, and networking. These are skills relating to personality and tend to be transferable.

Wider areas of intelligence enable or dictate how successful toughness, determination, and vision help achieve our goals. But emotional intelligence, often measured as an emotional intelligence quotient, or EQ, is more and more relevant to important work related outcomes such as individual performance, organisational productivity, and developing people because its principles provide a new way to understand and assess the behaviours, management styles, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and potential of people. It is an increasingly important consideration in human resource planning, job profiling, recruitment interviewing and selection, learning and skills development, and client relations and customer service, networking, among others. Thus, the Emotional Quotient (EQ) model measures a set of emotional and social skills that influence the way we:

- a. perceive and express ourselves;
- b. develop and maintain social relationships;
- c. cope with challenges;
- d. use emotional information in an effective and meaningful way.

A person who possesses a high degree of emotional intelligence knows oneself very well and is also able to sense the emotions of others. He/she is affable, resilient, innovative and optimistic.

By developing their emotional intelligence, individuals can become more productive and successful at what they do, and help others become more productive and successful too. The process and outcomes of emotional intelligence development also contain many elements known to reduce stress for individuals and therefore organisations by moderating conflict; promoting understanding and relationships; and fostering stability, continuity, and harmony. Last but not least, it links strongly with concepts of love and spirituality.

It is rhetoric to mention here that individuals have different personalities, wants, needs, and ways of showing their emotions. Navigating through this requires tact and shrewdness especially if one hopes to succeed in life. This is where emotional intelligence theory helps. In the most generic framework, five domains of emotional intelligence cover *personal* (self awareness, self regulation, and self motivation) and *social* (social awareness and social skills) competences. These are enumerated as:

⌘ Self-Awareness

- 1) Emotional awareness: Recognizing one's emotions and their effects;
- 2) Accurate self assessment: Knowing one's strengths and limits;
- 3) Self-confidence: Sureness about one's self worth and capabilities.

⌘ Self Regulation

- 1) Self control: Managing disruptive emotions and impulses;
- 2) Trustworthiness: Maintaining standards of honesty and integrity;
- 3) Conscientiousness: Taking responsibility for personal performance;
- 4) Adaptability: Flexibility in handling change;
- 5) Innovativeness: Being comfortable with and open to novel ideas and new information.

⌘ Self-Motivation

- 1) Achievement drive: Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence;
- 2) Commitment: Aligning with the goals of the group or organisation;
- 3) Initiative: Readiness to act on opportunities;
- 4) Optimism: Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks.

⌘ Social Awareness

- 1) Empathy: Sensing others' feelings and perspective, and taking an active interest in their concerns;
- 2) Service orientation: Anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers' needs;
- 3) Developing others: Sensing what others need in order to develop, and bolstering their abilities;
- 4) Leveraging diversity: Cultivating opportunities through diverse people;
- 5) Political awareness: Reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships.

⌘ Social Skills

- 1) Influence: Wielding effective tactics for persuasion;
- 2) Communication: Sending clear and convincing messages;
- 3) Leadership: Inspiring and guiding groups and people;
- 4) Change catalyst: Initiating or managing change;
- 5) Conflict management: Negotiating and resolving disagreements;
- 6) Building bonds: Nurturing instrumental relationships;
- 7) Collaboration and cooperation: Working with others toward shared goals;
- 8) Team capabilities: Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals.

In brief, the five domains relate to knowing your emotions; managing your emotions; motivating yourself; recognizing and understanding other people's emotions; and managing relationships, i.e., managing the emotions of others.

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