PATHSMITH®
DURABLE SKILLS

Durable Skills Framework

STARTER EDITION

COMPETENCY AND SKILLS DEFINITIONS

AMERICA SUCCEEDS

Introduction to the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework

In today's dynamic economy, skills like communication, critical thinking, and leadership matter more than ever. These are durable skills: competencies that remain relevant across roles, industries, and career stages, no matter how technology or job markets evolve. They aren't "soft skills." They're critical ones.

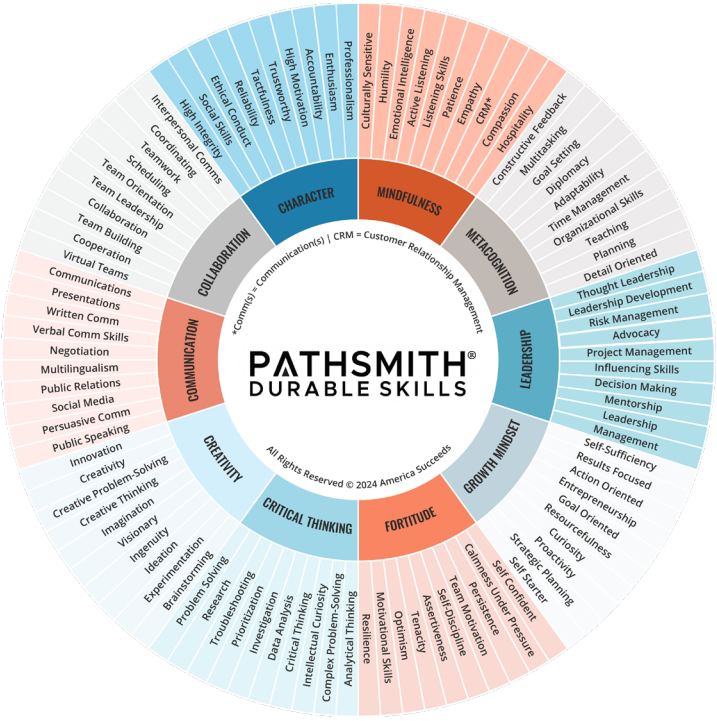
America Succeeds created the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework to meet the growing demand for these skills, translating employer demand, sourced from more than 80 million job postings, into an equity-conscious, industry-aligned standard. Developed with CompTIA and shaped by input from psychometricians, subject matter experts, educators, employers, and equity-focused researchers, the framework supports the delivery, development, and demonstration of durable skills across the full learning continuum, from early childhood to early career.

Together, its components create a connected system that gives educators, institutions, and employers a shared language for the skills that matter most, and practical tools to develop and recognize them, whether in a classroom, on a job site, or in a boardroom.

This introduction outlines the methodology, equity considerations, and performance levels that guide the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework, supporting its application in education, workforce development, and talent strategies.

Research Foundation

Before developing the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework, America Succeeds partnered with Lightcast to ground the work in real labor market demand. We began by cross-walking a wide range of existing frameworks, including 21st-century skills, human skills, and essential skills, to identify ten core, durable skills competencies. These ten categories, represented in the Pathsmith® skills wheel, are based on a curated list of 100 keyword terms commonly used in job postings to describe durable skills.



Using these terms, we analyzed more than 80 million job postings across sectors, roles, and geographies. The findings confirmed what many employers and educators already sensed: durable skills aren't just valuable, they're essential.

Key takeaways from the original 2019-2020 data analysis include:

- 7 of the top 10 most-requested skills in job postings are durable skills.
- The top 5 durable skills are nearly five times more in demand than the top 5 technical skills.
- Leadership and communication emerged as the most frequently requested competencies.

This research cemented durable skills as a critical foundation for career success and economic mobility, and positioned Pathsmith® as the gold standard to close the gap between what employers need and what traditional systems often fail to teach. In 2025, we published updated data in our Durable by Demand Report that proves the demand for this has increased.

Framework Purpose & Application Guidelines

The Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework is designed to serve as a foundational standard for understanding, developing, and assessing durable skills. It offers a clear structure for creating training content, designing learning objectives, and informing assessment tools that reflect real-world expectations.

The content in this Starter Edition is specifically intended to evaluate the durable skills of early-career individuals, those who are new to the workforce or returning after a significant break, with roughly one year or less of job experience. It is built to provide practical, observable descriptions of how durable skills show up at different stages of proficiency, enabling consistent application across educational, training, and workplace settings.
The framework includes four levels of performance, described on the next page:

Emerging
- *Just beginning to learn and/or acquire the given skill.*

Developing
- *Moving in a positive direction in a professional career.*
- *Still learning with room for growth around the skill.*

Applying
- *Functional knowledge of the skill.*
- *Can apply the skills properly in specific on-the-job settings.*

Exceeding
- *Can apply the skill naturally, without thinking about it.*
- *Can apply the skill under stressful and/or challenging circumstances.*

To ensure fair and meaningful application, the framework should be considered within the individual's specific context, including their employment setting, cultural background, and degree of neurodiversity. The Pathsmith® approach recognizes that skill demonstration may vary based on environment, opportunity, and personal experience, and encourages interpretation that honors those differences.

Framework Domains

The Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework is organized around ten core skill domains that reflect the competencies most essential for long-term success in life and work:

1.0 Communication
2.0 Leadership
3.0 Metacognition
4.0 Critical Thinking
5.0 Collaboration
6.0 Character
7.0 Creativity
8.0 Growth Mindset
9.0 Mindfulness
10.0 Fortitude

The first draft of the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework was created during a 5-day in-person workshop by a select group of 20 Subject Matter Experts. Following the workshop, the framework then went through an extensive feedback collection process by CompTIA and America Succeeds. Feedback was gathered via a survey from over 670 global respondents and during in-person sessions from 348 participants. All feedback was thoroughly reviewed and integrated into the framework. The development process was also supported by a social impact consulting firm, Common Group, to ensure that the product would be equity-conscious in its design.

Following is a truncated version of the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework for early career professionals that includes summarized versions of the domain definitions at the 'Applying' level and definitions for each of the subdomains.

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1.0 Communication

The ability to transmit and receive information, ideas, and instructions clearly, accurately, and effectively in various forms and contexts within the professional environment.

Communication at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:

- effectively convey information through written, verbal, and non-verbal communication.
- appropriately use various communication channels or processes.
- understand how different types of communication influence interactions.
- use listening skills to adapt communication style when necessary.
- understand the intercultural factors that impact communication.

This individual can use communication techniques to reach agreements between multiple parties, persuade an audience, or effectively communicate with customers/clients.

Skill Definitions in Communication Include:

1.1 Communications (hybrid/remote)	1.5 Negotiation
The ability to effectively exchange information, thoughts, and ideas with others in various environments (virtual and in-person) using various channels such as verbal, written, and non-verbal.	The ability to strategically guide a discussion between two or more parties aimed at reaching an agreement or a solution.
1.2 Presentation	**1.6 Social Media**
The ability to effectively convey ideas or information to an audience.	The ability to create, manage, and leverage social media platforms to reach and engage with a target audience, promote brand awareness, and drive business objectives.
1.3 Written Communication	**1.7 Customer Service**
The ability to convey information, thoughts, or ideas in written form to others.	The ability to provide assistance and guidance to people before, during, and after they utilize the company's products or services.
1.4 Verbal Communication	**1.8 Public Speaking**
The ability to verbally convey information, thoughts, or ideas to others.	The ability to effectively deliver a message to engage, inform, and persuade an audience.

2.0 Leadership

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The ability to motivate and guide a group of people toward achieving a common goal or objective.

Leadership at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:
- influence and/or motivate teams and individuals to achieve goals.
- lead others toward a common goal.
- model an acceptable work ethic.
- break down basic information to establish clear communication.

This individual is decisive, adaptable, demonstrates initiative, and actively engages in learning opportunities.

Skill Definitions in Leadership Include:

2.1 Management	2.5 Project Management
The ability to plan, organize, and coordinate resources in order to achieve specific goals and objectives.	The ability to use specific knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to achieve specific project objectives and deliver value.
2.2 Leadership	**2.6 Advocacy**
The ability to motivate and guide a group of people toward achieving a common goal or objective.	The ability to defend, promote, and support a cause or issue.
2.3 Mentorship	**2.7 Risk Management**
The ability to provide guidance and support to others in their personal and professional development.	The ability to identify, assess, prioritize, and mitigate potential risks and uncertainties that may cause harm and/or negatively impact the success of a project or organization.
2.4 Decision Making	**2.8 Thought Leadership**
The ability to analyze information, evaluate options, and make logical decisions that align with goals and objectives.	The ability to develop and communicate innovative and insightful ideas and perspectives that position an individual or organization as a trusted authority in one's industry or field.

3.0 Metacognition

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The ability to reflect upon and understand one's own thinking processes, enabling one to make informed decisions, adapt strategies, and continuously enhance one's own learning and problem-solving approaches.

Metacognition at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:

- exhibit flexibility to changing conditions or circumstances.
- create processes to ensure details are addressed, deadlines are met, and time is used effectively.
- break down projects or large tasks into smaller tasks and recognize the need for prioritizing certain tasks.
- provide and take feedback to improve job, task, or project performance.
- share related job information and experience to learners in order to achieve a desired learning outcome.

This individual has an awareness of details impactful to a task or project deadline, can envision the end goal for planning purposes, and can measure success in the context of goals.

Skill Definitions in Metacognition Include:

3.1 Detail-Oriented	3.5 Time Management
The ability to pay close attention to the small details of a task and to be aware of all details impactful to a task.	The ability to estimate how long it takes to complete a task, to assess the progress of a task against the timeline for completion.
3.2 Planning	**3.6 Adaptability**
The ability to envision the end goal and the process required to achieve the goal.	The ability to be flexible to changing circumstances and understand the impact of changes to task timelines in order to adjust plans efficiently.
3.3 Teaching	**3.7 Goal Setting**
The ability to effectively impart or convey knowledge, skills, and/or values to others.	The ability to establish clear and achievable objectives and to develop a plan to achieve them.
3.4 Organizational Skills	**3.8 Constructive Feedback**
The ability to identify the appropriate resources needed to complete a task and implement those resources effectively to facilitate the thorough completion of a task.	The ability to provide specific and actionable feedback to colleagues or employees with theaim of improving their performance and achieving organizational goals.

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4.0 Critical Thinking

The ability to analyze and evaluate information in order to make objective and informed decisions.

Critical Thinking at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:
- process and synthesize information in a given context or on a particular topic.
- apply and articulate logic and reasoning to make judgments and draw conclusions.
- articulate pros and cons related to entry-level situations or a single fact.

This individual can effectively explain and articulate the rationale used to make decisions or arrive at conclusions and assist in determining potential future outcomes.

Skill Definitions in Critical Thinking Include:

4.1 Problem-Solving	4.5 Critical Thinking
The ability to define a problem, determine the cause of the problem, evaluate alternatives for a solution, and implement a solution.	The ability to analyze and evaluate information in order to make objective and informed decisions.
4.2 Research	**4.6 Intellectual Curiosity**
The ability to gather and analyze information systematically to gain insights and solve problems.	The ability to show willingness and desire to seek knowledge and understand new information by asking questions, exploring ideas, and continuously learning.
4.3 Prioritization	**4.7 Analytical Thinking**
The ability to effectively organize and manage tasks according to their level of importance and urgency.	The ability to evaluate and interpret complex information to draw insights and make informed decisions.
4.4 Investigation	
The ability to gather and analyze information from various sources to identify and resolve problems or issues.	

5.0 Collaboration

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The ability to work harmoniously with others, leveraging diverse strengths and ideas to achieve common goals, and contribute positively to team dynamics and outcomes.

Collaboration at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:

- consider the thoughts and feelings of others and use those to communicate effectively.
- engage respectfully with people of diverse backgrounds and differing opinions.
- willingly recognize the importance of inclusion and belonging.
- align resources towards a common goal.
- accept the larger purpose, setting aside their own interests to prioritize the organization's goals.

This individual can categorize, apply structure to, validate, and support the analysis of information, as well as dissect large projects into manageable chunks.

Skill Definitions in Collaboration Include:

5.1 Interpersonal Relationships	5.5 Team-Building
The ability to communicate effectively and build relationships with others by considering other's thoughts, emotions, and perspectives.	The ability to effectively organize a team through actions that contribute to the team's cohesiveness by enhancing relationships, celebrating strengths, acknowledging weaknesses, and actively participating in team experiences and events.
5.2 Coordinating	**5.6 Cooperation**
The ability to understand priorities and apply them to the organization of time, people, and resources to achieve a common goal.	The ability to prioritize the common goal of a group over one's personal goals for the benefit of the larger group and be flexible to complete a task being asked of you.
5.3 Teamwork/Team-Oriented	**5.7 Remote/Virtual Teams**
The ability to contribute to a team by clearly communicating one's work, leveraging one's unique strengths, and being adaptable in the face of change to continue working towards the common goal.	The ability to effectively collaborate and build relationships with team members who are not in the same physical location.
5.4 Scheduling	
The ability to manage time and resource constraints in order to plan for the completion of tasks in a way that maximizes the efficiency of the plan and does not create a burden for those involved in the scheduled events.	

6.0 Character

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The ability to demonstrate ethical and moral qualities, including integrity, accountability, and professionalism, which shape one's behavior, decision-making, and interactions in the workplace.

Character at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:

- take responsibility for their own work, behavior, performance, and work outcomes.
- share and present information in a balanced and complete fashion.
- articulate their own purpose and personal motivations within the context of organizational goals.
- perform consistently well in their work.
- demonstrate actions and behaviors that are aligned with strong ethical standards.

This individual is positively predictable, exhibits dependability, is prompt, on time, consistently fulfills commitments, treats others with respect, and does the right thing even when no one is looking.

Skill Definitions in Character Include:

6.1 Accountability	6.4 Tactfulness
The ability to take ownership of responsibilities, meet expectations, take corrective action when needed, and accept the consequences of one's actions or decisions.	The ability to navigate situations with sensitivity, behaving and communicating in a way that is respectful and considerate of others.
6.2 Self-Motivation	**6.5 Reliability**
The ability to stay driven, focused, and committed to achieving goals and delivering results without the need for constant direction and supervision.	The ability to consistently produce high-quality work and fulfill commitments to others.
6.3 Trustworthy	**6.6 Personal Integrity**
The ability to demonstrate honesty, reliability, and ethical behavior during interactions, and consistently follow through on commitments and promises made to others.	The ability to consistently act in accordance with a set of values and principles, and be honest and transparent with others.

7.0 Creativity

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The ability to generate original and innovative ideas, solutions, and approaches, fostering a dynamic and resourceful environment in professional contexts.

Creativity at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:

- explore non-linear, indirect, non-traditional thinking processes to approach a problem or situation.
- summarize existing and new information to identify unrecognized possibilities.
- understand the process of trial and error and learn from failure.
- organize thoughts and ideas to generate innovative or novel suggestions that are focused and actionable.

This individual has the ability to craft, create, and share new ideas while keeping desired outcomes in mind and can work with others through idea generation and brainstorming.

Skill Definitions in Creativity Include:

7.1 Innovation	7.4 Ideation
The ability to generate new ideas and creatively apply them to drive business growth and/or solve problems in a unique and effective way.	The ability to generate and develop new ideas with the aim of addressing business challenges.
7.2 Creative Thinking	**7.5 Experimentation**
The ability to approach problems or tasks in a non- traditional way, and generate new ideas and solutions that can lead to improved outcomes.	The ability to appropriately use the iterative process of testing and validating ideas, products, and services.
7.3 Visionary	**7.6 Brainstorming**
The ability to think beyond the present, and envision and plan for a future state.	The ability to contribute to group problem-solving with spontaneous contribution of ideas.

8.0 Growth Mindset

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The ability to demonstrate an inclination to embrace challenges, persist through setbacks, and actively seek opportunities for learning and development in order to achieve continuous personal and professional advancement.

Growth Mindset at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:

- take initiative to start new tasks without the help of others, but at the direction of a manager or supervisor.
- identify opportunities to contribute.
- exhibit a desire to take action.
- demonstrate a drive to learn going beyond the surface.

This individual is resourceful, confident, trusts in themselves, and finds connections and new information in areas of interest to improve performance.

Skill Definitions in Growth Mindset Include:

8.1 Self-Starter	8.5 Entrepreneurship
The ability to work independently and take initiative to complete tasks without external direction or motivation.	The ability to identify and pursue business opportunities by taking calculated risks, creating innovative solutions, and effectively managing resources.
8.2 Proactivity	**8.6 Action-Oriented**
The ability to take initiative and anticipate potential issues or opportunities before they arise.	The ability to take initiative, set goals, and actively work towards achieving them.
8.3 Curiosity	**8.7 Results-Focused**
The ability to be eager and open to learning new things, seeking out new information, and asking questions to better understand and solve problems.	The ability to meet or exceed specific goals and objectives, and focus on the outcomes rather than the process it takes to get there.
8.4 Resourcefulness	**8.8 Self-Sufficiency**
The ability to quickly find effective solutions to problems, even in situations where resources may be limited or unclear.	The ability to work independently, take ownership of tasks, and complete them with minimal or no supervision or guidance.

9.0 Mindfulness

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The ability to practice staying fully present, attentive, and nonjudgmental in one's thoughts and actions, enhancing focus, emotional regulation, and overall well-being in the work environment.

Mindfulness at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:

- use cordial, polite greetings and introductions keeping in mind cultural competencies.
- ask questions to better understand the emotional state and needs of another person.
- demonstrate sensitivity to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another person.
- sustain calmness and poise.
- control their actions in relation to their emotions.
- recognize their own emotions and others' emotions to guide their behavior.

This individual is self-aware, welcoming and respectful of others, open to hearing what others are saying in a non-defensive and non-judgmental way, and takes an authentic and genuine interest in others.

Skill Definitions in Mindfulness Include:

9.1 Hospitality	9.5 Active Listening
The ability to provide friendly, attentive, and welcoming service to customers or clients.	The ability to fully concentrate on, understand, and respond to verbal and/or nonverbal communication in order to comprehend the speaker's message, and demonstrate engagement and interest in the conversation.
9.2 Compassion	**9.6 Emotional Intelligence**
The ability to empathize and show kindness and understanding toward others.	The ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions, as well as empathize with and effectively communicate with others.
9.3 Empathy	**9.7 Humility**
The ability to understand and share the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of others.	The ability to have the self-esteem to understand that even though you are doing well, you do not have to brag about it.
9.4 Patience	**9.8 Cultural Sensitivity**
The ability to maintain a calm and composed attitude in the face of challenging situations and to persevere through difficulties or delays while maintaining a positive and productive outlook.	The ability to show the knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of the values, norms, and beliefs of another group that is not one's own, accompanied by a willingness to adapt one's behavior accordingly.

10.0 Fortitude

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The ability to demonstrate inner strength and resilience in navigating difficult situations, and display courage, determination, and composure while overcoming challenges and pursuing goals in the professional realm.

Fortitude at the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework Applying Level:

This early career individual can:

- recover successfully from unexpected situations by resuming the plan.
- adapt despite setbacks.
- understand their team members' "why" and see their perspectives.
- understand team dynamics.
- display self-accountability and perseverance.
- focus on long-term goals.

This individual encourages others to pursue a goal, celebrates team members successes, models behavior desirable in others, sets expectations, performs well under pressure, trusts in their abilities, and exhibits a belief in themselves with a balance between humility and confidence.

Skill Definitions in Fortitude Include:

10.1 Resilience	10.5 Assertiveness
The ability to respond in the face of adversity in order to successfully recover from unexpected situations and resume or revise a plan to achieve the desired outcome of the original task.	The ability to confidently and willingly advocate for oneself while engaging in constructive discourse without being aggressive.
10.2 Motivational Skills	**10.6 Self-Discipline**
The ability to use contextually appropriate strategies and tactics to elicit a desired reaction from a group that contributes to achieving the common goals of a group.	The ability to regulate one's actions and emotions in order to stay committed to achieving a goal and keep oneself accountable for their responsibilities.
10.3 Optimism	**10.7 Calmness Under Pressure**
The ability to maintain a positive attitude and focus on the best possible outcomes for events and tasks..	The ability to stay composed and level-headed when faced with challenging or high-pressure situations.
10.4 Tenacity	**10.8 Self-Confident**
The ability to stay focused on the process and have unwavering determination when completing a task. The ability to exhibit passion and persistence in the face of adversity.	The ability to trust one's abilities and present information with poise. The ability to have realistic confidence in one's judgment while knowing when to ask for assistance.

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About America Succeeds

America Succeeds is a national nonprofit that works at the intersection of education and workforce development to advance economic mobility.

By providing cutting-edge research, strategic advocacy, cross-industry partnerships, and the Pathsmith® Durable Skills Framework, America Succeeds bridges the gap between education and industry leaders to ensure that every learner and earner can contribute to their local community and compete in the global workforce.

Our employer-informed, research-backed insights and framework are shaping the future of education and the workforce of tomorrow, today.

About Pathsmith®

8 of the 10 most-requested skills in job postings are durable skills. 6 in 10 employers have already let go of a recent hire, not for what they couldn't do technically, but for how they communicated, collaborated, and showed up. These are the most wanted skills and the least developed.

The Pathsmith® framework is built to close that gap.

Created by America Succeeds and validated against 82 million job postings, the Pathsmith® framework is the world's first employer-generated, equity-driven durable skills framework. It provides a common language for what mastery looks like and can be embedded across PK-12, postsecondary, and the workforce to make durable skills teachable, measurable, and portable.

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