Validating Durable ("Soft") Skills: A Four-Part Framework

Unlocking Potential: How Validation and Credential Wallets Enable Workforce Transformation

A **three-part learning series** about how **skills validation** + **LERs** (learning and employment records) create and communicate **accurate information** about an individual's skills.

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Validating Durable ("Soft") Skills: A Four-Part Framework *February 27, 2025*	**Evidence + Evaluation: A Formula for Validating Skills** *March 12, 2025*	**Digital Wallet Design and Discovery Workshop** *April 2, 2025*

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Your Presenters

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Skills Validation

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Today's Objectives

1. Discover a new **four-part framework** for validating durable skills

2. Discuss **challenges that remain** in validating durable skills

Today's Agenda

Topic
Welcome
The Lab + Durable Skills
Four-Part Framework for Validating Durable Skills
Overview
Example
Sticky Questions
Reflection + Closing

About the Lab

We co-design, test, and build new models and approaches to better address program **affordability** , **relevance** , **portability** , and **visibility** in a rapidly changing knowledge economy.

1,190
Colleges + Universities + Organizations

950
Employers

24
Ecosystems
States, systems, cities

Designing Postsecondary Education **with** Learners

Who are the learners we primarily work with?

Frontline Workers

Transfer Students

Single Parents

Non-degreed Adults

First-generation Students

Underinvested Communities

Learners

Institutions

Employers

Above all, our design approach serves as an engine for action and iteration in addressing barriers that exist between so many of us and our hopes for the future.

Core Principles

Understand

Ideate

Prototype

Action

Iteration

Transformation

Innovation
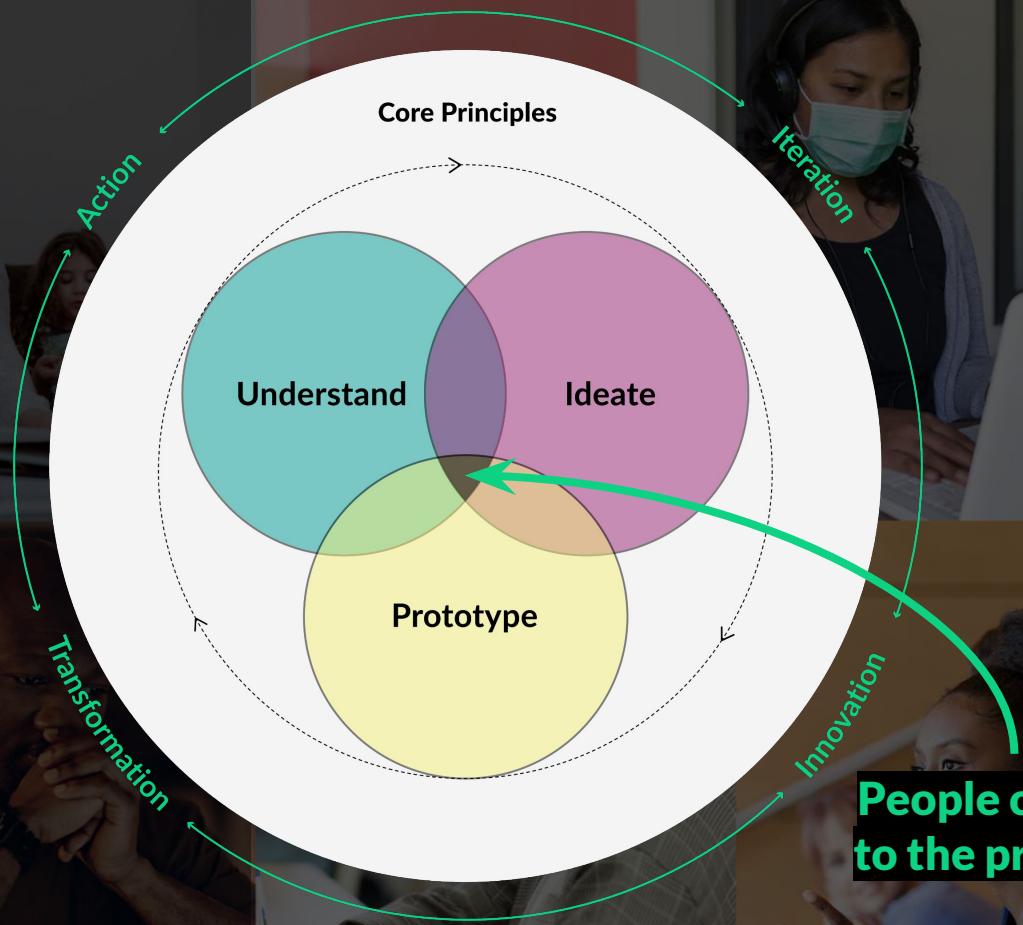
People closest to the problem

Design Question

How might we **validate (and credential)** durable skills to make (l)earners more **visible** in the talent marketplace?
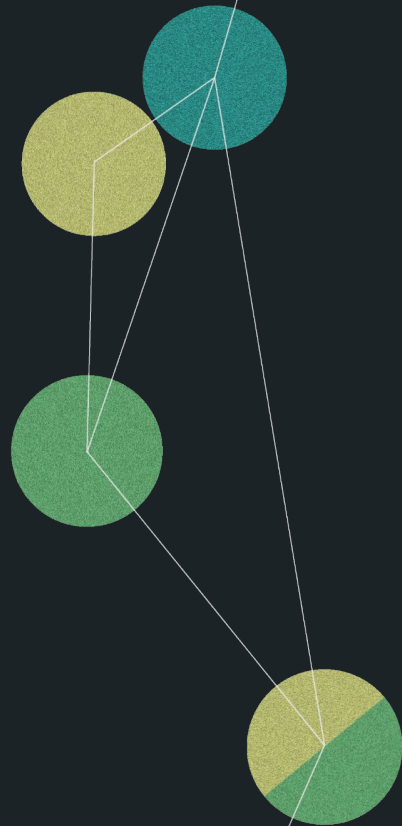
Durable Skills
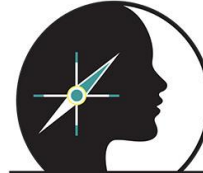
What is Skills Validation?

- Typically conducted by qualified third-party
- Based on a "shared understanding" of the meaning of that skill
- Indicates level and context
- Conducted through various methods (e.g., assessment, demonstration, artifact)

Skill

Driving a car

U-turn | Obey laws
Back up | Park
Change lanes

Validator

DMV

Assessment

Driving Test

Trusted Credential (Market Signal)

DRIVER LICENSE

Driver's License

Levels

Commercial Drivers License (Classes A, B, and C)

Four-Part Framework

Validating Durable Skills: A Four-Part Framework

1 **DEFINITION**

Define a skill, along with what it looks like in practice

2 **METHOD**

Identify the method by which the skill will be validated

3 **LEVEL**

Identify the level at which the skill must be demonstrated

4 **CONTEXT**

Identify the context in which the skill must be demonstrated

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Definition

Definition

Durable Skills Competency Framework

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Initiative

Initiative in the 21st century includes self-efficacy and the capacity to identify needs and respond proactively. Individuals who exercise initiative show four core sub-competencies: self-awareness, learning from both "failure" and "success." They lead without an official "leader" role or title, motivate others and catalyze necessary action.

Sub-competencies

Lead Without a Title
Motivate and guide action; raise the morale of their groups and take responsibility for what needs to be done.

Act as a Catalyst
Galvanize action; identify and seize opportunities for change; and overcome inertia.

Demonstrate Self-Awareness
Enlarge the conversation; challenge their own performance; recognize their motivations and manage their anxiety.

Learn from Experience
Welcome and apply feedback; resist defensiveness; and see "failure" as an opportunity for greater understanding; and cultivating optimism by consciously challenging negative self-talk.

Collaboration

Collaboration in the 21st century includes the capacity to work productively with different individuals and groups toward a common goal. Effective collaborators exhibit four core sub-competencies: strengthen relationships, incorporate diverse perspectives, use listening skills, and focus on solutions rather than problems.

Sub-competencies

Strengthen Relationships
Create networks through which they access and provide resources, information, and support.

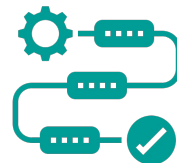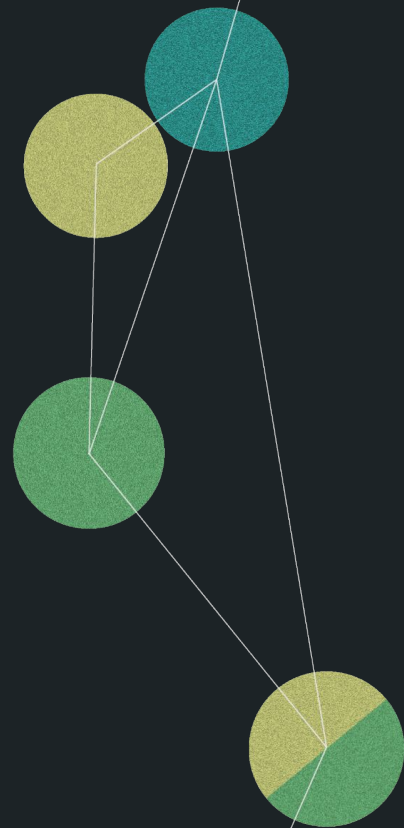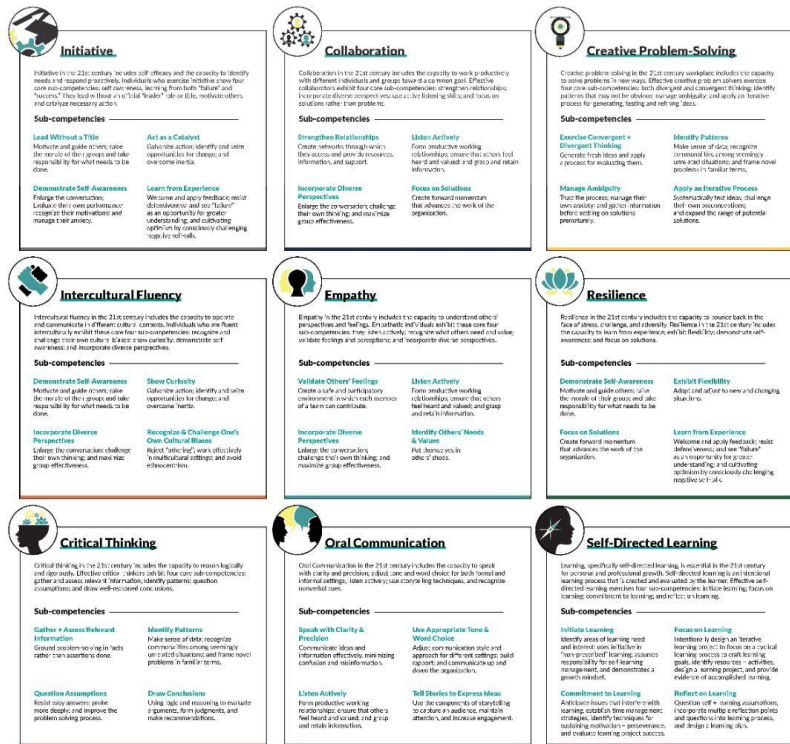**Listen Actively**
Form productive working relationships; ensure that others feel heard and valued; and grasp and retain information.

Incorporate Diverse Perspectives
Enlarge the conversation; challenge their own thinking; and maximize group effectiveness.

Focus on Solutions
Create forward momentum that advances the work of the organization.

Creative Problem-Solving

Creative problem-solving in the 21st century workplace includes the capacity to solve problems in new ways. Effective creative problem-solvers exercise four core sub-competencies: both divergent and convergent thinking; identify patterns that may not be obvious; manage ambiguity; and apply an iterative process for generating, testing and refining ideas.

Sub-competencies

Exercise Convergent + Divergent Thinking
Generate fresh ideas and apply a process for evaluating them.

Identify Patterns
Make sense of data; recognize commonalities; ensure accuracy; unrelated situations; and frame novel problems in familiar terms.

Manage Ambiguity
Trust the process; manage their own anxiety; and gather information before settling on solutions prematurely.

Apply an Iterative Process
Systematically test ideas; challenge their own assumptions; and expand the range of potential solutions.

Intercultural Fluency

Intercultural fluency in the 21st century includes the capacity to operate and communicate in different cultural contexts. Individuals who are fluent interculturally exhibit these core four sub-competencies: recognize and challenge their own cultural biases; exercise curiosity; demonstrate self-awareness and incorporate diverse perspectives.

Sub-competencies

Demonstrate Self-Awareness
Motivate and guide action; raise the morale of their groups and take responsibility for what needs to be done.

Show Curiosity
Galvanize action; identify and seize opportunities for change; and overcome inertia.

Incorporate Diverse Perspectives
Enlarge the conversation; challenge their own thinking; and maximize group effectiveness.

Recognize & Challenge One's Own Cultural Biases
Reject "othering"; work effectively in multicultural settings; and avoid ethnocentrism.

Empathy

Empathy in the 21st century includes the capacity to understand others' perspectives and feelings. Empathetic individuals exhibit these core four sub-competencies: they listen actively; recognize what others need and value; validate feelings and perceptions; and incorporate diverse perspectives.

Sub-competencies

Validate Others' Feelings
Create a safe and participatory environment in which each member of a team can contribute.

Listen Actively
Form productive working relationships; ensure that others feel heard and valued; and grasp and retain information.

Incorporate Diverse Perspectives
Enlarge the conversation; challenge their own thinking; and maximize group effectiveness.

Identify Others' Needs & Values
Put themselves in other's shoes.

Resilience

Resilience in the 21st century includes the capacity to bounce back in the face of stress, challenge, and adversity. Resilience in the 21st century includes the capacity to learn from experience; exhibit flexibility; demonstrate self-awareness; and focus on solutions.

Sub-competencies

Demonstrate Self-Awareness
Motivate and guide action; raise the morale of their groups and take responsibility for what needs to be done.

Exhibit Flexibility
Adapt and adjust to new and changing situations.

Focus on Solutions
Create forward momentum that advances the work of the organization.

Learn from Experience
Welcome and apply feedback; resist defensiveness; and see "failure" as an opportunity for greater understanding; and cultivating optimism by consciously challenging negative self-talk.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking in the 21st century includes the capacity to reason logically and rigorously. Effective critical thinkers exhibit four core sub-competencies: gather and assess relevant information, identify patterns, question assumptions, and draw well-reasoned conclusions.

Sub-competencies

Gather + Assess Relevant Information
Ground problem-solving in facts rather than assertions done.

Identify Patterns
Make sense of data; recognize commonalities among seemingly unrelated situations and frame novel problems in familiar terms.

Question Assumptions
Resist easy answers; probe more deeply; and improve the problem solving process.

Draw Conclusions
Using logic and reasoning to evaluate arguments, form judgments, and make recommendations.

Oral Communication

Oral Communication in the 21st century includes the capacity to speak with clarity and precision; adjust tone and word choice for both formal and informal settings; listen actively; use storytelling techniques, and recognize nonverbal cues.

Sub-competencies

Speak with Clarity & Precision
Communicate ideas and information effectively, minimizing confusion and misinformation.

Use Appropriate Tone & Word Choice
Adjust communication style and approach for different settings; build rapport; and communicate up and down the organization.

Listen Actively
Form productive working relationships; ensure that others feel heard and valued; and grasp and retain information.

Tell Stories to Express Ideas
Use the components of storytelling to capture an audience, maintain attention, and increase engagement.

Self-Directed Learning

Learning, specifically self-directed learning, is essential in the 21st century for personal and professional growth. Self-directed learning is an iterative learning process that is created and executed by the learner. Effective self-directed learning exercises four sub-competencies: initiate learning; focus on learning; commitment to learning; and reflect on learning.

Sub-competencies

Initiate Learning
Identify areas of learning need and interest; uses initiative in "entrepreneurial" learning; assumes responsibility for self-learning management, and demonstrates a growth mindset.

Focus on Learning
Intentionally design an iterative learning project; focus on a cyclical learning process to craft learning goals; identify resources + activities; design a learning project; and provide evidence of accomplished learning.

Commitment to Learning
Anticipate issues that interfere with learning; establish time management strategies; identify techniques for sustaining motivation + perseverance, and evaluate learning project success.

Reflect on Learning
Question self + naming assumptions, incorporate multiple reflection points and questions into learning process, and design a learning plan.

To validate a skill, you must first define it.

DO THIS: Define a skill, along with what it looks like in practice

Commonly found in:
- Competency frameworks
- Skills taxonomies
- Content standards

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Durable Skill : Strengthen Relationships

Definition : Creates networks through which they access and provide resources, information, and support.

"Look Fors"
1. *Establishes a personal connection in conversation with others*
2. *Explores opportunities to gain and provide resources, information, or support with others.*
3. *Demonstrates accountability by following through on action items*
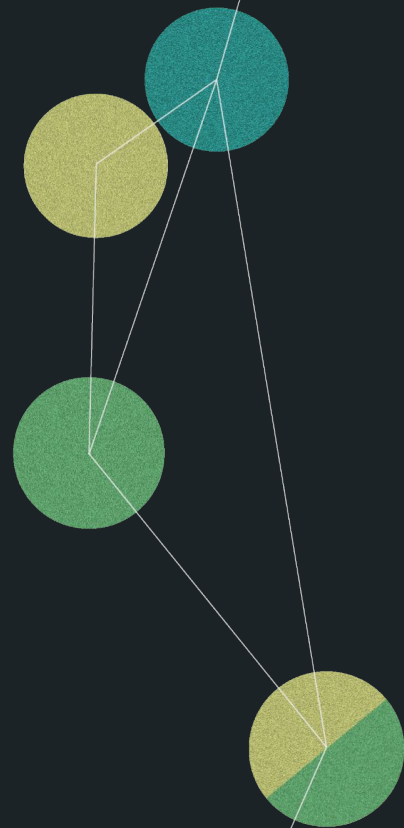4. *Demonstrates accountability by owning personal mistakes*
5. *Demonstrates respect for other person(s)*

1 **Definition:** Sticky Questions

https://tinyurl.com/RONDurableSkillsQ1

What challenges do you experience when it comes to defining Durable Skills?

Method

Method

DO THIS: **Identify the method by which the skill will be validated**

| METHOD | = | EVIDENCE | + | EVALUATION |

Common methods:
- Assessment
- Interview
- Performance Evaluation

Credible **data or documentation** reflecting a person's skills, gathered from reliable, trustworthy sources.

The process of **analyzing evidence of someone's skills** to see if it meets a certain standard or expectation.

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Method: Example

| METHOD | = | EVIDENCE | + | EVALUATION |

Name: Alex Hutchinson
Age: 47
Location: Rural Michigan

Job Role:
Customer Service Representative at a small clothing store, which is part of a national chain.

Durable Skill : Strengthen Relationships

Evidence : Customer, Colleague, and Supervisor Feedback

Evaluation :
- Gather feedback
- Synthesis with AI-support: Seek out trends and keywords related to success criteria

Method: Sticky Questions

| METHOD | = | EVIDENCE | + | EVALUATION |

Name: Alex Hutchinson
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https://tinyurl.com/RONDurableSkillsQ1

Let's talk about trust.
What influenced your ratings?

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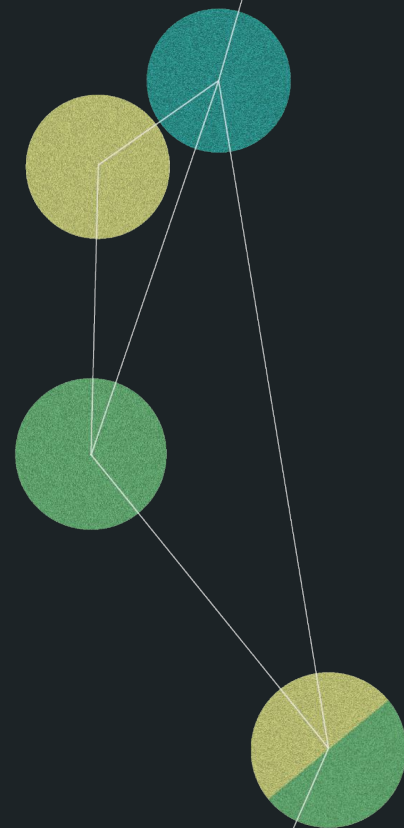
Level

DO THIS: Identify the level at which the skill must be demonstrated

PROFICIENCY LEVELING

Defining a **standard progression** of skill development across a set of proficiency levels

(Ex: Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced)

CAREER LADDERING

Aligning skill development to a **structured hierarchy of job levels** that employees can follow to advance

(i.e Entry-level, Mid-level, Senior-level)

CAREER PROGRESSION

A matrixed approach to leveling in which skill development **expands outward** as one's work increases in **autonomy**, **influence**, and **complexity** over time

Level: Career Progression Example
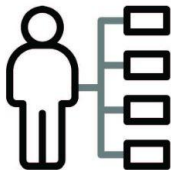
Level 1 - Support

Workers at the **Support** level:

+ Perform structured and routine tasks within defined guidelines, achieving milestones set by supervisors.

+ Exercise limited discretion in their work, addressing familiar issues and informally supporting their peers.

+ Solve common problems with established methods and readily available resources.
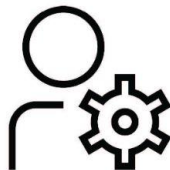
Level 2- Act

Workers at the **Act** level:

+ Independently apply their skills to manage and prioritize a diverse array of tasks.

+ Develop and optimize their personal workflows and make strategic suggestions for process improvements when applicable, potentially overseeing peers in structured contexts.

+ Are responsible for a broad array of tasks and use established methods to address complex and non-routine challenges.
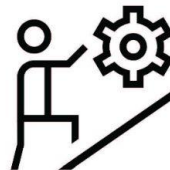
Level 3 - Enable

Workers at the **Enable** level:

+ Apply strategic organizational rules to lead and direct projects.

+ Are accountable for significant decisions that shape team and/or organizational policies and contribute to established objectives.

+ Manage complex work and use innovative approaches, operating under minimal supervision and demonstrating leadership in dynamic and challenging environments.

Level 4 - Propel

Workers at the **Propel** level:

+ Manage and lead through strategic leadership and high-level decision-making.

+ Steer the organization toward long-term success through formal and informal supervision and mentorship.

+ Apply innovative practices using their intuitive judgment to navigate unfamiliar, complex, or challenging situations with a clear vision for future changes.

Level: Career Progression Example

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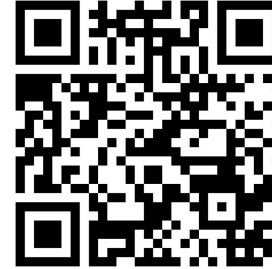
Level				
	1 Support	2 Act	3 Enable	4 Propel

Durable Skill : Strengthen Relationships

Level : 1 - Support
[low autonomy, influence, complexity]

Rationale for Level:
- Alex excels in a structured environment
- Completes tasks and meets milestones set by his supervisor
- Alex assists peers and ensures customer satisfaction by addressing familiar issues

	Name: Alex Hutchinson **Age:** 47 **Location:** Rural Michigan **Job Role:** Customer Service Representative at a small clothing store, which is part of a national chain.			
Level	1 Support	2 Act	3 Enable	4 Propel
Rationale for Level	Alex excels in a structured environment, efficiently completing tasks and meeting milestones set by his supervisor to support smooth store operations. Known for his approachable demeanor and problem-solving skills, Alex assists peers and ensures customer satisfaction by addressing familiar issues effectively.			

https://tinyurl.com/RONDurableSkillsQ1

What makes leveling skills difficult?
What challenges do you experience?

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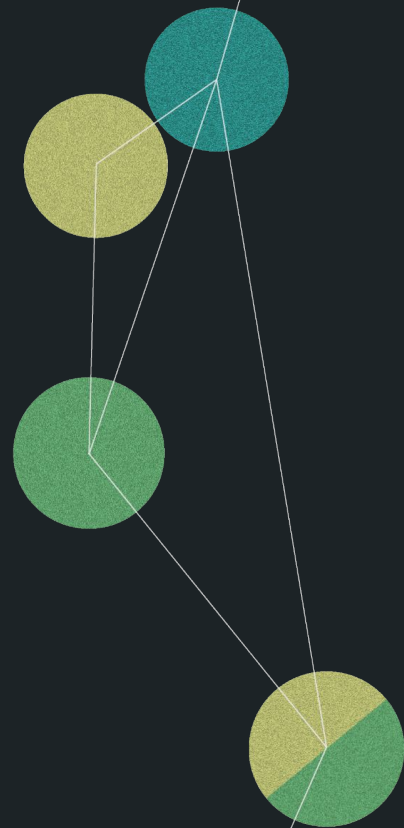
Context

4 Context

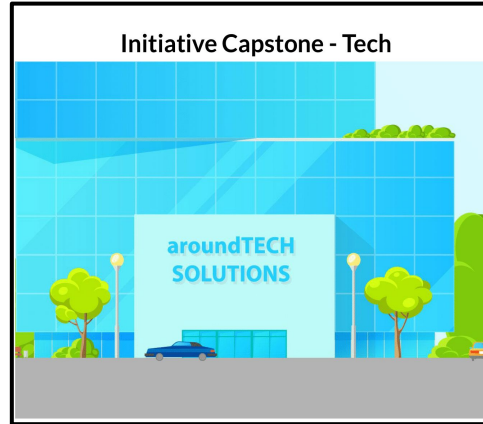**DO THIS:** **Identify the context in which the skill must be demonstrated**

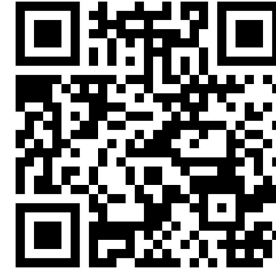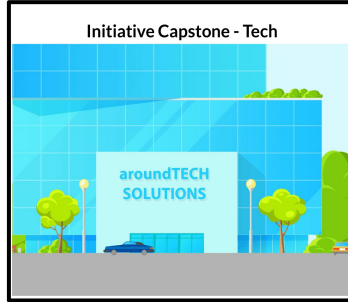**Employers**: *"Context matters!"*

Consider articulating:
- Industry
- Organization type + size
- Job role
- Location (if relevant)

Context: Example

Initiative Capstone - Construction

Initiative Capstone - Tech

Initiative Capstone - Manufacturing

Initiative Capstone - Healthcare

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Context: Sticky Questions

Initiative Capstone - Construction

Initiative Capstone - Tech

Initiative Capstone - Manufacturing

Initiative Capstone - Healthcare

https://tinyurl.com/RONDurableSkillsQ1

What influenced your rating?

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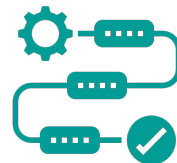# **Validating Durable Skills:** A Four-Part Framework

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4 **CONTEXT**

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Reflections | Q+A

Thank You!

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