



Market Milestone

How CrossKnowledge's CK CONNECT Solution Effectively Assesses and Trains People Skills: A Neuroscience Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Stakeholders:

Chief Learning Officers, Chief Human Resource Officers, Chief Compliance Officer, Learning and Development Directors and Managers, Compliance Directors and Managers, Corporate Trainers, Content and Learning Product Managers

Why It Matters:

People (aka soft) skills training is an important part of any organizations Learning & Development strategy. Unfortunately, most people skills training solutions are ineffective because they engage only the cognitive learning systems in the brain, instead of engaging cognitive, behavioral and emotional learning systems in the brain. Organizations and their employees need high-quality people skills training to face the challenges in the modern workplace.

Top Takeaway:

CrossKnowledge's CK CONNECT solution meets these challenges and addresses these needs by combining personality assessment with personalized people skills training for each employee, and a holistic view of team personality dynamics for managers. The content is designed and delivered in a way that effectively engages cognitive and emotional learning centers through scenario-based microlearning, and knowledge testing, and primes the learner for behavior change with exercises and action plans. CrossKnowledge's CK CONNECT Solution provides the competitive advantage that organizations need to attract, train, and retain the best talent.



THE NEED FOR HIGH-QUALITY PEOPLE SKILLS TRAINING IN THE MODERN WORKPLACE

[Research](#) suggests that 85% of job success comes from having strong people (aka soft) skills, with only 15% coming from technical skills and hard skills. With the rapid rate of change in the workplace associated with digital transformation, people skills are becoming even more important. Thus, effective people skills training is a must to keep organizations and their employees competitive.

Some individuals are strong in one aspect of people skills (e.g., active listening), but are challenged in another (e.g., resolving tension). Evaluating employees' people skill strengths and challenges through personality assessment, providing that information to employees, and using it to personalize people skills training programs is of value. This way employee's strengths can be highlighted, and their challenges can be targeted and remedied more quickly. This increases employee engagement in the learning process by recruiting emotional and motivational learning centers in the brain as they learn about themselves and see themselves in the training. Personality assessment is also valuable for managers because it allows them to obtain a holistic view of their team's personality dynamics, and to recommend personalized training on an employee-by-employee basis.

THE CHALLENGE OF PEOPLE SKILLS TRAINING: THE NEUROSCIENCE OF LEARNING

Given the importance of people skills to success, one would assume that large sums of money are being spent on effective people skills training. Large sums of money are being spent with over [\\$200 billion spent worldwide on people skills training](#). But only [1 in 4 Learning & Development professionals](#) are satisfied with their organizations people skills training solution. Thus although budgets are being devoted to people skills training, that training is generally ineffective. Interestingly, hard skills training is generally effective.

Why is this the case?

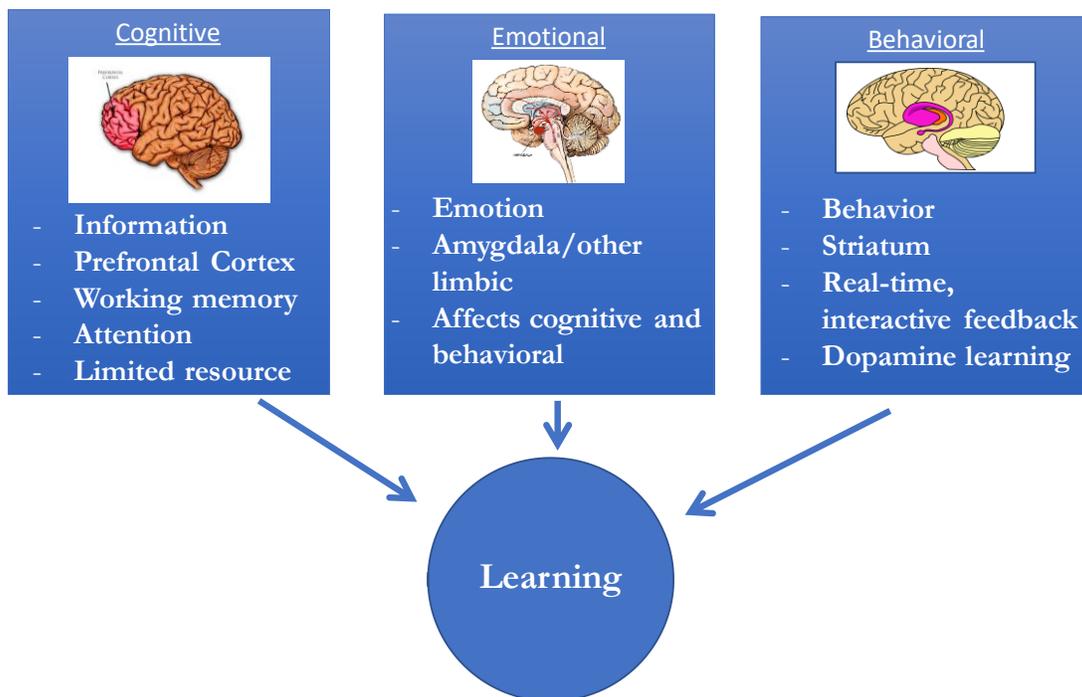
How can it be that people skills training is generally ineffective when hard skills training is not?

To address this question, we must examine the psychology and neuroscience of learning (Ashby & Maddox, 2011; Maddox & Ashby, 2004). The brain is comprised of at least three learning systems: the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional learning systems (see schematic below). The cognitive skills learning system is the primary system in the brain for learning fact-based knowledge and information (the "what"). The cognitive system relies on the prefrontal cortex, and is limited by working memory and attentional processes. It requires focused attention and mental repetition.

The behavioral skills learning system in the brain has evolved to learn behavior-based skills (the "how"). The behavioral system links environmental contexts with actions and behaviors, and does not rely on working memory and



attention. Behavioral skill learning is mediated by the striatum and involves gradual, incremental dopamine-mediated changes in behavior. Processing in this system is optimized when behavior is interactive and is followed in real-time (literally within milliseconds) by corrective feedback. Behaviors that are rewarded lead to dopamine release into the striatum that incrementally increases the likelihood of eliciting that behavior again in the same context. Behaviors that are punished do not lead to dopamine release into the striatum thus incrementally decreasing the likelihood of eliciting that behavior again in the same context.



More than anything, it is the emotional learning system in the brain that facilitates an understanding of our and others' behaviors and builds the interpersonal understanding, awareness, and sensitivity that are at the heart of people skills (the "feel"). Whereas one can know the characteristics of effective communication leader and can even have a strong behavioral repertoire, it is the emotional signature that drives genuine communication. If one can "walk a mile in someone else's shoes" and gain that vicarious understanding, awareness and sensitivity of another, they can build people skills. The critical brain regions are the amygdala and other limbic structures. The detailed processing characteristics of this system are less well understood but emotional learning strongly influences the cognitive and behavioral systems (Maddox & Markman, 2010).

Hard skills are about gaining knowledge and understanding. Hard skills training solutions are generally effective if they use content that is constructed and delivered in a way that engages the cognitive skills learning system in the brain without exceeding working memory and attentional capacity. For example, content delivered in brief bursts called microlearning is effective.



On the other hand, people skills training solutions are *ineffective* if they target only cognitive learning centers in the brain. People skills rely on obtaining cognitive knowledge, an emotional understanding of oneself and others, and a behavioral repertoire. People skills are about what we do, how we do it, and our intent. People skills training must be constructed and delivered in a way that engages cognitive, emotional and behavioral learning systems in the brain.

CROSSKNOWLEDGE'S CK CONNECT SOLUTION: OVERVIEW

CrossKnowledge just launched its new CK CONNECT learning solution. CK CONNECT combines a personality assessment with personalized people skills training for each employee. It offers managers a holistic view of their team, and the ability to recommend courses based on the employee's strengths and challenges. This is innovative, adds value for the employee and their organization, and is rare in L&D. CrossKnowledge's CK CONNECT solution provides organizations and their employees with the competitive advantage needed to succeed in this age of rapid change and digital transformation.

Different personality profiles are associated with different people skill strengths and challenges, and it is important for employees to understand this about themselves. Personality assessment provides guidance on what people skills training modules would be advantageous for each learner. Making the personality assessment available to the learner draws them into the learning environment, helps them see themselves in the learning and engages emotional and motivational learning centers in the brain that facilitate learning. Learners have a stake in the process because they understand that their personality is associated with strengths, but also challenges that can be overcome. Taken together, this increases employee engagement in the learning process.

Personality assessment is also valuable for managers because it allows them to obtain a holistic view of their team's personality dynamics. They can recommend courses based on the strengths and challenges of the employee and the team. Knowledge of each employee's personality profile also facilitates talent discussions between a manager and an employee. When the manager focuses on scientifically grounded strengths and challenges, as opposed to subjective evaluations, employee's motivation to learn will increase and they will be highly motivated to engage with the learning content and to access the courses because they want to continue to build upon their strengths, and address their challenges. This is a win for employees, managers, and the organization as a whole.

CROSSKNOWLEDGE'S CK CONNECT SOLUTION: PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

From a psychological and neuroscience of learning perspective, one of the most innovative components of CrossKnowledge's CK CONNECT solution is the integration of personality assessment with L&D. As soon as the learner logs onto the system they are presented with a screen that states "Learn about yourself". They are told that they will complete a 10-minute questionnaire where they select their preference between two opposing statements using a sliding scale. Critically, they are informed that there is no right or wrong preference. Once the assessment is complete, the learner is provided with a number of details regarding their personality profile. First, they are provided with a



description of their personality type relative to four binary valued personality dimensions (Extraversion-Intraversion, Sensing-Intuition, Thinking-Feeling, and Judging-Perceiving). For example, an ISFJ would get their energy from within (introverted), would be practical and think of the past and present (sensing), would make decisions based on values and sentiment (feeling), and would want structure in their planning (judging). On the other hand, an ENTP would get their energy from others (extraverted), would be innovative and thinking of the future (intuition), would make decisions objectively and based on facts (thinking), and would want openness and flexibility (perceiving). Although each learner is assigned a four-letter profile, they can vary in their strength along each dimension and that is provided to the learner. For example, two learners may be extraverts, but one could be more extreme than the other. They are also given a detailed description of their personality profile including blind spots that they may have, and ways in which they may be misunderstood by others.

Next, the learner is provided with a series of recommendations for people skills training with each training module defined as a strength or a challenge. The value of gaining insight on one's personality profile and linking that directly to people skills strengths and challenges cannot be overemphasized. The tagging of each training module as a "challenge" or a "strength" draws the learner into the learning scenario and provides them with some expectation regarding the difficulty of the material for them.

Another innovative component of the CK CONNECT offering is the ability for learners to gain insights about the team through one-on-one comparisons with other team members. For example, a learner can compare their active listening ability or level of empathy with that of another team member. This increases one's understanding of team dynamics and where each person fits in, and promotes team collaboration and cohesiveness. The amount of information that one can obtain is enormous, yet the display is interactive, easy to use, and very informative. This provides a solid foundation for the learner's upcoming people skills training.

As mentioned earlier, personality assessment is also valuable for managers because it allows them to obtain a holistic view of their team's personality dynamics, and to recommend courses based on the strengths and challenges of the employee and the team. This information can be used to objectively ground talent discussions between a manager and an employee, and will increase the motivation of employees to engage with the learning content and to access the courses because they want to continue to build upon their strengths, and address their challenges.

CROSSKNOWLEDGE'S CK CONNECT SOLUTION: PEOPLE SKILLS TRAINING

In writing this report, I completed five people skills training modules: Reducing Tension, Assertiveness, Active Listening, Influence with Formal Authority, and Collaborative Decision Making. From a psychological and neuroscience of learning perspective there is much to like about the content, learning design and delivery. All of the training modules are characterized by a mix of initial description, what the topic means for the learner's personality profile, initial testing, training, and hands on exercises. Content includes a mix of short (microlearning) editorials, short and longer (macrolearning) videos and interviews with experts. Critically, the content also relies heavily on [scenario-based](#)



[microlearning](#). This is not a traditional people skills training solution that engages only cognitive learning systems in the brain, and is ineffective. On the contrary, CK CONNECT effectively engages, cognitive, emotional and behavioral learning systems in the brain in the interest of training people skills in employees.

The training incorporates repeated links back to the learner's personality profile with descriptions of how the topic is a strength or a challenge. These personalized tips draw the learner into the learning situation and engaged emotional and motivational learning centers in the brain. The Active Listening course provides an excellent example. The course starts with an example of a situation in which active listening might be lacking, and then active listening is defined. This is followed by information about how the learner's personality is associated with active listening as a strength or challenge. The learner then answers some questions about active listening, and is provided with immediate corrective feedback. Then exercises are introduced with a facilitator, more personalized tips are provided, and the learner then generates an action plan. Taken together, this approach engages cognitive learning centers in the brain with testing and spaced training. Testing and spaced training enhance learning and long-term retention (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006a, 2006b) and can provide insights on what specific topics should be retrained in the future. This "training for retention" approach facilitates the transfer of information from short-term memory in the prefrontal cortex to long-term memory in the hippocampus and medial temporal lobe structures.

Simultaneously, the extensive use of scenario-based storytelling, combined with the frequent references back to the learner, engages emotional centers in the brain. This not only helps learners see themselves in the training, but it allows them to see multiple different perspectives, and to "walk a mile in someone else's shoes". There are also a number of exercises incorporated to build the people skills behavioral repertoire that is necessary in the modern workplace. One example is the "Communicate Your Needs" module in the Collaborative Decision-Making Training. The module begins with a 1-minute scenario-based storytelling animated video on how to communicate your needs. It then describes the strengths and challenges for the learner's personality type. Finally, the learner completes exercises and is tested in the Try It Out phase.

CONCLUSION, OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION

People skills training is an important part of any organizations Learning & Development strategy. Unfortunately, too many people skills training solutions are ineffective. This follows because they do not effectively engage cognitive, behavioral and emotional learning systems in the brain. Organizations and their employees need high-quality people skills training to face the challenges in the modern workplace.

From a psychological and neuroscience of learning perspective, CrossKnowledge's CK CONNECT solution meets these challenges and addresses these needs by combining personality assessment with personalized people skills training for each employee, and a holistic view of team personality dynamics for managers. The content is constructed and delivered using a mixture of microlearning and macrolearning, and scenario-based storytelling with video or animation. The use of spaced practice, evaluation, and commentary on how the particular learning task relates to the learner's people skill profile effectively engages cognitive centers in the brain for fast initial learning and long-term retention. This combined with the extensive use of scenario-based storytelling through video and animation engages emotion



learning centers in the brain, and primes the learner for the behavior change. This helps build the behavioral repertoire associated with strong people skills.

CrossKnowledge's CK CONNECT Solution provides the competitive advantage that organizations need to attract, train and retain the best talent. If you are like so many organizations struggling to evaluate and train people skills, consider CrossKnowledge's CK CONNECT Solution. You won't be disappointed, and neither will your employees. CrossKnowledge's team clearly put significant time and effort into constructing the CK CONNECT Solution, and that time and effort will pay off for your organization and employees.

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ABOUT AMALGAM INSIGHTS

AMALGAM INSIGHTS

Is a leading research and advisory firm focused on the enterprise need to perpetually reimagining the path for increasing tech-driven value. Our focus is on the financial, DevOps, training, and data science tools that multiply the value of enterprise technology.

Tactically, AI focuses on the following practices that augment and increase the value of technology:

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- ◆ Enterprise Performance Management
- ◆ DevOps, Serverless, Containerization, and Blockchain
- ◆ Open Source Development
- ◆ Enterprise Talent Management, Training and Learning Development
- ◆ Data Science and Machine Learning

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Prior to Amalgam Insights, Todd:

- Established himself as a leader in the field of human learning, memory, and performance in a 25-year career as an academic and researcher.
- Was awarded over \$10 million in federal research funds for his own human learning and performance laboratory.
- Published over 200 peer-reviewed research reports and was cited over 10,000 times by fellow researchers.

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