

2023

SoftTrainer

HR AND L&D LEADERS' CHALLENGES

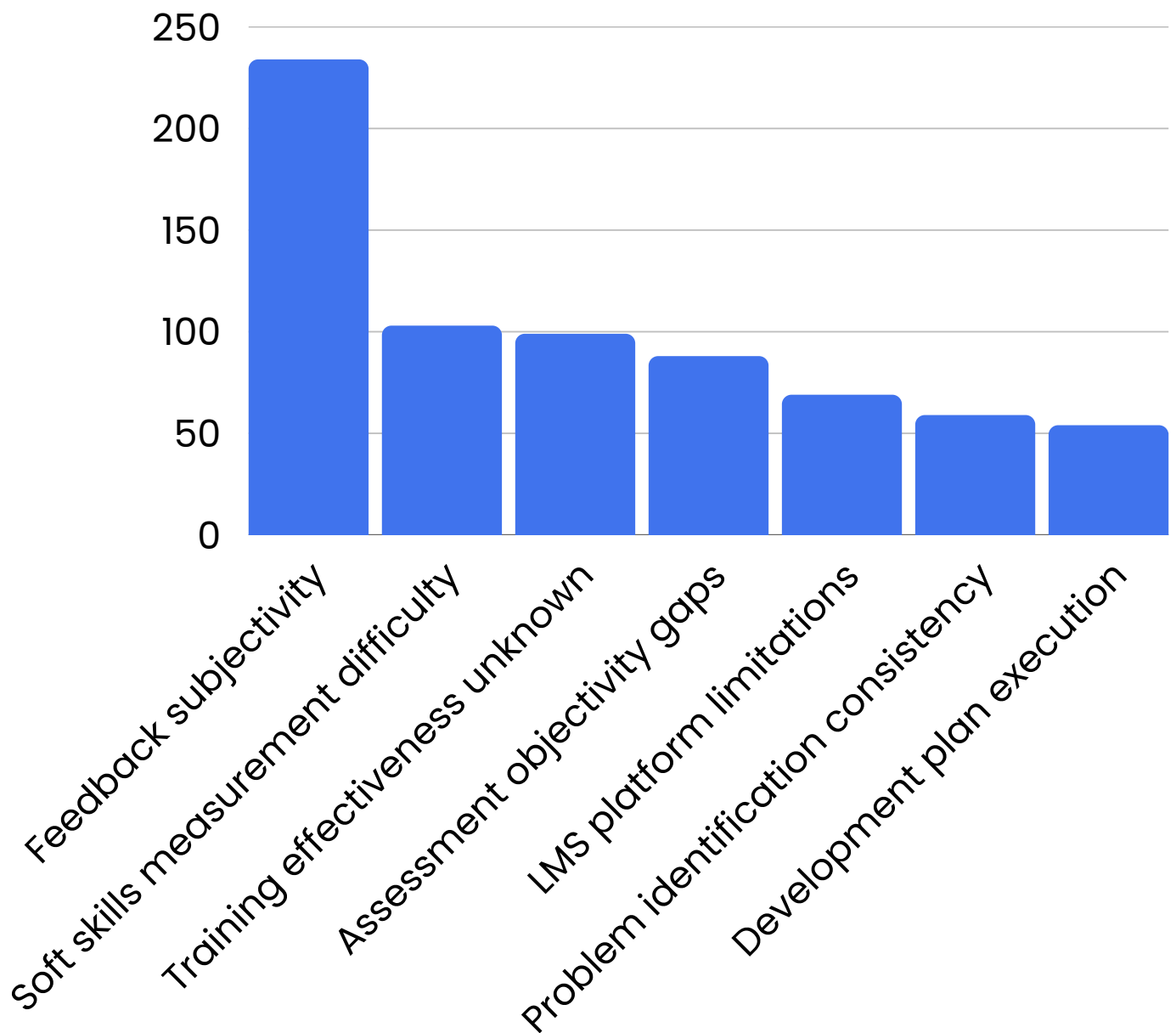
in Soft Skills Development & Assessment

Research Report Based on 130+ Interviews

Executive Summary

Based on **130+ interview files** with L&D professionals, HR specialists, and organizational leaders, this research documents the actual, repeatedly-mentioned challenges facing soft skills development and assessment in modern organizations.

The interviews reveal consistent, universal patterns: while organizations globally recognize soft skills as critical, they struggle with the **same problems** regardless of industry or company size.



1. Soft Skills Feedback is Subjective & Biased

What Organizations Struggle With

Feedback from managers is inherently subjective. Even with structured processes, personal bias significantly impacts how soft skills are assessed.

What Respondents Are Saying



"Soft skills are such a subjective thing, it's very hard to assess them objectively. When it comes to hard skills, it's easier."



"If there's evidence of something, then it's a bit easier. From customer feedback and so on. But if there's not, it becomes such a thing, it's very subjective."

The Real Problem

- ✓ Manager feedback is inconsistent
- ✓ Different managers have different standards
- ✓ Evidence-based feedback is rare for soft skills
- ✓ Personal bias goes unchecked
- ✓ Employees often disagree with assessment results

2. Assessment ROI is Unknown

What Organizations Struggle With

Organizations spend significant budget on training but cannot measure whether it actually changes behavior or improves performance.

What Respondents Are Saying

"It looks so nice on paper, but counting it is not so easy. And most trainings are almost impossible to count. We try to track something, look at behavior, look at business impact, but in this case it was hard to trace."

"We spend money to subscribe to systems, to generate content, to get the SME expertise, why isn't it translating into actual performance?"

The Real Problem

- ✓ Training completion ≠ behavior change
- ✓ Engagement metrics don't show real impact
- ✓ No clear way to measure business results from training
- ✓ Long-term results are hard to track
- ✓ Budget decisions are made without ROI clarity

3. Feedback Frequency is Too Low for Behavior Change

What Organizations Struggle With

Even when feedback is given, it comes too infrequently (often twice yearly) to reinforce new behaviors. By the time someone learns about their performance gap, months have passed.

What Respondents Are Saying

"When you try to put in behavior changes into people... the feedback is very slow. You may change your behavior in meetings. Feedback is twice a year, so it may be six months, it may be a year before anybody is feeding back that behavior has changed."

"Feedback is twice a year... The behavior change has been noted, and there's been an impact... but the lag is long. Anything that enables feedback to come back quicker is really good."

Why This Matters

- ✓ Behavior change requires regular reinforcement
- ✓ Annual/semi-annual feedback is insufficient
- ✓ The longer the feedback delay, the less impact it has
- ✓ Employees lose connection between action and feedback
- ✓ New behaviors don't stick without frequent reinforcement

4. LMS Platforms Are Inflexible & Problematic

What Organizations Struggle With

Organizations invest in LMS systems expecting centralization and tracking, but encounter:

- Inflexibility in course design
- Integration issues with HR systems
- Limited interactivity options
- Poor user experience
- Bugs and technical issues

Common LMS Problems Mentioned

- ✓ Integration problems with existing HR systems
- ✓ Inflexibility in content delivery
- ✓ High bugs and technical issues
- ✓ Limited customization options
- ✓ Not designed specifically for soft skills
- ✓ High cost
- ✓ Difficult to use, requires significant IT support

What Respondents Are Saying

"The LMS we bought isn't very flexible. So there are a lot of bugs and a lot of nuances. We didn't buy a separate one."

"This LMS entered as part of the package to automate HR functions. So accordingly, this LMS is part of that package. It's inflexible."

"We had to centralize training because we were putting external webinars on various platforms. Not everyone had access. Everyone should have access in one place."

5. Completion Rates Drop for Field/Mobile Workforces

What Organizations Struggle With

Training platforms assume employees work at desks with regular access. Field-based, mobile, or distributed teams have low completion rates because they cannot easily access systems.

What Respondents Are Saying



"Another issue is the completion rates. The progress sometimes is really slow, especially for client acquisition partners. They're always on the field looking for clients... it's not all of them that will have the time to sit down and access. But if it's on their phone, they could just open something while waiting for a client and practice."



"We have field teams that are always on-site... they don't have time to sit at a computer and take courses. Mobile access would help, but most systems don't support it well."

The Real Problem

- ✓ Field-based roles have <50% completion rates
- ✓ Mobile access is needed but not typically provided
- ✓ Micro-learning (5-10 min sessions) works better for these groups

6. Training Doesn't Change Real-World Behavior

What Organizations Struggle With

Training happens in controlled environments. Employees learn concepts but don't apply them in actual work situations.

What Respondents Are Saying

"We just sent them the playbook, did a couple of trainings, and unrealistically expect them to speak the way we want. So it doesn't happen at all."

"When you send playbook training about how to communicate... people know it in theory. But when they're actually talking to customers, they don't follow it. The gap between learning and doing is huge."

"You can describe it perfectly in training. But when people are actually working under pressure... they revert to their old habits."

Why Training Fails

- ✓ No real-world practice environment
- ✓ Training is one-time, not reinforced
- ✓ No measurement of actual application
- ✓ Pressure/stress causes people to revert to old behaviors
- ✓ No feedback loop showing whether behavior actually changed

7. Quality Control of Soft Skills is Manual & Expensive

What Organizations Struggle With

Organizations with communication-heavy roles (customer support, sales) need to verify that employees follow company standards. Currently done manually:

- Listening to call recordings
- Using scorecards
- Time-consuming review process
- Manager assessment (subjective)

What Respondents Are Saying

"Right now we listen to call recordings manually. We have a person who listens to calls, and she has a scorecard where she rates them, then it's discussed with their managers. That's how we do it."

"We need to verify that our customer support team follows the playbook. Currently, we manually listen to calls... it's expensive and time-consuming."

The Problem

- ✓ Manual review is expensive (requires dedicated staff)
- ✓ Highly inconsistent (different reviewers apply standards differently)
- ✓ Not scalable (as team grows, review capacity doesn't keep up)
- ✓ Doesn't measure behavior gaps, just spot-checks performance

8. Development Plans Are Vague & Unmeasured

What Organizations Struggle With

Even when soft skills gaps are identified, development plans are often vague:

- "Improve communication" - without specific steps
- "Work on leadership" - without resources
- No clear learning path
- No way to track progress
- No measurement of improvement

Common LMS Problems Mentioned

- ✓ Gaps are identified but solutions aren't specific
- ✓ No clear learning resources provided
- ✓ No tracking of progress
- ✓ No accountability for completing plans
- ✓ Same gaps appear year after year

What Respondents Are Saying

"Last year, development plans for soft skills were more like 'you need to improve at giving feedback,' but without clear instructions like 'read these three books, take this course, practice here.'"

"We have competency gaps identified, but we don't have clear learning resources or paths to develop them."

"We put people through training and say 'now work on this,' but there's no structure. No wonder they don't improve."

What Actually Worked (From Case Studies)

When organizations DID find success, it was because they:

1. Created Structured Feedback Frameworks

Used templates (like "Radical Candor") to make feedback more consistent

2. Focused on Specific Skills

Picked ONE skill per quarter instead of trying to improve everything

3. Built Custom Content

Took time to understand their culture and built training specific to their context (not generic)

4. Provided Real Practice Environments

Simulations, role-plays, real scenarios where people could practice safely

5. Measured Consistently

Tracked same metrics over time (completion rates, behavior changes, business outcomes)

6. Integrated with Business Goals

Tied L&D to quarterly business objectives

What Did NOT Work

- ✓ One-off external trainers
- ✓ Generic, off-the-shelf training
- ✓ Training without measurement
- ✓ Feedback alone (without development path)

Sound familiar?



Ruslan Kovalenko, CEO @ SoftTrainer

Let's talk about how we can **effectively assess and train your talent.**

We do **both, or just assessment, or training**, depending on what you need. Everything is tailored for your needs.

What you get:

- Bias-free behavioral assessments that actually measure soft skills
- AI role-play where people practice in realistic scenarios
- Clear ROI data showing before/after improvement

Book a 30-minute call with us
[here](#)