



10 Unique Characteristics of 21st Century Skills

From futurist, trends and innovation expert Jim Carroll

Talent, not money, will be the new corporate battlefield

Skills are More Specialized.

Rapid knowledge growth means that it is increasingly difficult for people to keep on top of what they need to know. Knowledge niches are the reality for most professions and careers. As people specialize, simple supply/demand reduces skills availability, leading to skills inflation. It's going to cost more to get the right specialized skills

Skills are Disloyal.

In a recent Irish survey 36% indicated that on their very first day at a new job, they were already thinking about looking for another job! This type of thinking is not limited to the Irish. A massive philosophical shift towards a "job" and "career" is underway, leading to increasing difficulties in getting people with the right skills.

Skills are Degradable.

The half life of knowledge is decreasing at a furious rate. Most organizations are discovering that the skills they do have are becoming increasingly useless as knowledge obsolescence takes hold. Skills are ready to walk out the door as soon as they arrive—and if they hang around, their value decreases quickly!

Skills are Renewable.

People and companies can develop the ability to generate just-in-time-knowledge giving out-of-date skills new life. Both will have to learn how to adapt and evolve.

Skills are Complacent.

Some professions, and many staff in organizations, simply don't think about the reality of skills extinction as a real trend. They have no desire to upgrade, enhance, or change their capabilities. The lack of urgency leads to a sclerosis that impacts the overall ability of the organization to change, innovate and create.



Skills are Disposable.

In this high-velocity economy, the idea of a permanent skills base is a quaint concept from the 20th century. Companies clearly don't need staff anymore—they simply need the right skills at the right time for the right purpose.

Skills are More Accessible.

That's the good thing we've learned with globalization: with the depth of the emerging skills crisis, it doesn't really matter anymore where the skills are—as long as you can get them, that's all that counts!

Skills are Transferable.

Retirement and staff turnover can lead to valuable information walking out the door. Smart organizations recognize this and are spending big money to ensure that important knowledge is captured, retained and archived.

Skills are Experiential.

One of the most important assets that a company can invest in is “experiential capital”—that is, the cumulative knowledge the company has generated through innovation, risk, failure and success. Boost that skills capability and you've done something that flows onto the bottom line.

Skills are Generational.

Companies will be accessing needed skills from all generations: from bright, knowledge aggressive 15 year olds to active 80 year olds. We are going to have the longest life-span economy that has ever existed. Preparing for that shift both culturally and organizationally will give companies a strong plan for dealing with the skills challenges of the future.

Jim Carroll was recently named as a leading source for innovation and creativity insight by *Business Week*. An international futurist, trends & innovation expert, he has a client base that includes The Walt Disney Corporation, DaimlerChrysler, Caterpillar, Nestle, Motorola, Towers Perrin, the BBC, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, the Swiss Innovation Forum, Verizon, and the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association. He is a frequent keynote speaker at corporate meetings, conferences and conventions, inspiring people to adapt to the high-velocity economy.