

# The (soft) revolution of soft skills

New remote customer relations skills:  
the current state of play

WHITE PAPER





# A (soft) revolution

The evidence is clear: “soft skills” are now outweighing technical or “hard skills”.

A recent study by the [World Economic Forum](#) highlights the shift in the established order of key skills. This is due to the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, Big Data, virtual reality and other technologies such as 5G. For organisations, this means unprecedented automation of work and increased productivity. This shift can also be explained by the economic, social and environmental context, which is characterised by complexity and uncertainty, and in which innovation is a key factor. In a world that is now commonly referred to as “VUCA”- volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous - these profound changes are having a particular impact on the customer experience sector, which is being rethought and is innovating.

Algorithm-driven contact centres, predictive maintenance, powerful collaborative tools... New technologies bring with them the promise of more attractive work, with productivity gains and more intelligent production lines, advanced data analysis and genuine economies of scale.

Remote customer relations teams are now supported by digital technology in carrying out complex or time-consuming tasks. Technical skills, which are gradually being provided by new technologies, are no longer enough to generate value. A new requirement is emerging: the development of cross-disciplinary skills, known as “socio-emotional” skills. Soft skills.

More specifically, for those involved in remote customer relations, what soft skills need to be cultivated in the face of this paradigm shift? In this white paper, BlueLink’s experts in talent scouting, training and from the Innovation Lab have carefully selected, sequenced and defined key soft skills in a new document detailing these trends, in order to better understand the (soft) revolution that is underway in soft skills.








# Report on new trends in customer relations skills





According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in hyper-connected environments, soft skills will play a major role in team coordination, decision-making, analysis and problem-solving. These are all human qualities that cannot be replaced by machines. They will therefore be fundamental to leveraging the full potential of new technologies and turning them into real assets for organisations. Ultimately, we will need human intelligence alongside artificial intelligence. They will complement each other.

While artificial intelligence is an ordered system, human intelligence is complex, multiform and capable of operating in a “VUCA” environment. Soft, flexible and cross-disciplinary skills are inherent to human intelligence and will be the keys to evolving in a changing context, making interactions richer and more subtle, and creating high-quality ties, “from human to human”.





**COGNITIVE  
INTELLIGENCE**

Ability to analyse and organise information, plan, imagine and learn.



**INTRAPERSONAL  
INTELLIGENCE**

Capacity for introspection leading to greater self-knowledge.



**INTERPERSONAL  
INTELLIGENCE**

Ability to understand and relate to others correctly and appropriately, with tact and discernment.



# Cognitive intelligence

Ability to analyse and organise information, plan, imagine and learn. The soft skills associated with what is known as “cognitive” intelligence enable you to gain perspective, make trade-offs and put results into perspective.

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*Our CRM\* platform features AI that sends us summaries of previous calls, enabling us to quickly assess the situation, make the best decision and personalise communication with each customer as closely as possible. In the past, we did all this manually and it was really time-consuming. We can now focus on each customer, their needs, their passion for music... It's so much more interesting!*

\*Customer Relationship Management

**Diane, BlueLink ambassador for an acoustic engineering brand**







## “ Expert opinion

*The world of customer relations is changing, and the key to this transformation is innovation. (Too) often studied through the prism of models, ecosystems, technical devices and tools, innovation is above all the result of a joint approach by men and women designed to bring about change.*

*There are two types of innovation: one which is described as “disruptive” or discontinuous and leads to the creation of new markets. The other is “incremental” and involves improving existing products or services, often through a process of continuous innovation. These two types of innovation require specific soft skills. They require human intelligence – inventiveness and ingenuity, together with a willingness to experiment.*

*The use of soft skills is crucial to the performance and transformation of an organisation. They help develop each individual’s ability to solve problems collectively. It is essential to value individual and collective intelligence: they complement each other when they come together. The path that innovation takes is never linear; it is built through a series of iterations that allow concepts, technologies and the points of view of those involved in implementing them to mature and evolve as a result of trial and error and interactions with all the stakeholders involved in this innovation.*

**Mélanie Noireaut, Innovation LAB Manager at BlueLink**



# Cognitive intelligence

## Logical thinking

Ability to reason and solve different types of logical tasks.

## Divergent thinking

Ability to generate new ideas or solutions from a single starting point, which may be information, an image, etc., using a multidirectional thinking process.

## Convergent thinking

Ability to combine several elements into a single concept, giving an overall view of a situation or problem, with the aim of obtaining a single solution.

## Rational thinking

An analytical and deductive way of thinking based on culturally transmitted rules of reasoning.



## Mental flexibility

Ability to change point of view and thought processes in order to explore new avenues.

## Analytical critical thinking

Ability to question and analyse data, distinguish between what is true and what is false, and make sound, reasoned judgements based on reliable data.

## Strategic thinking

Ability to look at the big picture and consider problems with a view to finding lasting solutions.

## Abstract and creative thinking

Ability to create and use concepts in reasoning and formulate general ideas.





# Intrapersonal intelligence

Capacity for introspection leading to greater self-knowledge. The soft skills associated with this form of intelligence enable us to overcome our internal resistance (fears, beliefs, biases, etc.), which may prevent us from achieving individual objectives or taking action in a given situation.

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*Sometimes, in my day-to-day work as an ambassador for a major wine and spirits company, my mind goes into “autopilot” because the process is ingrained in me! At such times, I practise mindfulness: it allows me to concentrate in the present, with my client, and to turn each interaction into a project, my project, that I’m determined to see through to a successful conclusion. It’s a real exercise for the mind, which makes me feel better and perform better!*

**Julien, BlueLink ambassador for a wine and spirits company**







## “ Expert opinion

*For decades, technical skills were the cornerstone of recruitment in our sector, but this was also the established order more widely. They took precedence over so-called “soft” skills because companies operated in relatively stable, standardised and predictable environments, where technology evolved progressively, but at a less frenetic pace than today, and where technical skills were a real factor in competitiveness. The lightning speed of technological change means that technical skills are rapidly becoming **obsolete**. The period during which a particular technical skill is valid is becoming shorter and shorter. When it comes to customer relations, the time has come to **hire hearts rather than brains**.*

*Emotional quotients rather than intellectual quotients. Personalities rather than diplomas. This is a major challenge, since it involves successfully identifying, assessing and listing each individual's cross-disciplinary skills, finding a way of matching supply and demand within the company in a flexible and responsive way, and reinventing the way the company is structured. Assessing and developing these soft skills is not, by its very nature, as easy as for technical skills, but this paradigm shift is very positive because it is an opportunity for us to reconnect with the very essence of our profession: **care**.*

**Fadila Mirghani, BlueLink talent detection & recruitment manager**





# Self-awareness skills

## Self-reflection

Ability to recognise and understand one's own emotions, behaviours, preferences and values and to understand their impact.

## Emotional self-regulation

Ability to pay attention to and modify one's own emotional reactions, feelings or intense moods.

## Self-confidence

Belief in one's own abilities and the ability to act on doubts with a realistic vision.

## Mindfulness

An attitude of attention, attentive presence and vigilant awareness.





# Training and motivation skills

## Self-motivation

An attitude of determination and intrinsic perseverance.

## Self-discipline

Ability to discipline oneself by creating new habits or actions with a view to improving oneself and achieving set objectives.

## Self-education

Active learning method, acquiring new knowledge by oneself.

## Surpassing oneself

The willingness to use mental strength to overcome one's own cultural and educational limitations in order to achieve excellence.

## Time management

Ability to plan and organise the time needed to complete a task or project.

## Concentration

Ability to overcome distractions and focus all mental activity on a single objective.



# Flexible thinking skills

## Adaptability

Ability to accept and adopt evolutions or changes quickly.

## Resilience

Ability to overcome or resist unpleasant or even traumatic shocks in order to regain equilibrium.

## Questioning

A form of cognitive re-evaluation designed to question the legitimacy of a person or the validity of an idea.

## Perseverance

Ability to remain firm and constant in a feeling, a way of being or acting, a resolution.





# Interpersonal intelligence

The ability to understand and relate to others correctly and appropriately, with tact and discernment. Ability to detect other people's intentions without their necessarily being expressed clearly and to provide effective solutions.

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*Understanding what's at stake when faced with a conflict with a customer, not interpreting but acknowledging your emotional state, getting out of the “win-lose” situation via the fundamentals of non-violent communication: the training modules I've been able to take recently have afforded me real insights into how to better handle contentious situations with a customer.*

*There can be many reasons for dissatisfaction, and the various levers for defusing a conflict are all different, depending on the circumstances. For example, in the case of a late delivery, the responsibility does not lie directly with the brand, but it is absolutely essential to acknowledge how the customer feels. How they feel is neither right nor wrong – it is simply how they feel and this emotion must be acknowledged before looking for a solution. A listening attitude will foster understanding.*

**Ciara, BlueLink ambassador for a fashion house**





## “ Expert opinion

*According to the OECD, over a period of 30 years, the lifespan of a technical skill has dropped from 30 to 2 years. This particularly rapid obsolescence makes training a strategic issue for organisations, which must also reinvent themselves in order to become more desirable and respond to the changing uses and expectations of customer relations teams. Training pathways can no longer be top-down: they have to be inspiring and exciting! The advent of AI, far from being a threat, is an opportunity for people to spend more time on developing human skills. The very things that AI cannot reproduce.*

*Understanding and mastering AI while developing our soft skills is essential if we are to coexist with new technologies and harness their potential. Soft skills are rooted in very personal aspects, which makes them difficult to access through conventional learning methods. To overcome this, it is necessary to create a secure and stimulating environment. Etymologically, the word “competence” comes from the Latin “competere” meaning to meet, coincide, agree...*

*While competence is characterised by a combination of individual resources, it is also contextual: we are not inherently competent, we are competent in a given context. That’s why the company must be a place of alignment and meaning. A learning environment where soft skills can be cultivated. Exemplarity, inspiration and peer-to-peer sharing are marvellous levers for learning.*

**Linda Ganassali, Head of the BlueLink Academy**





# Conflict management skills

## Understanding conflict escalation

Ability to understand the process of escalating pressure tactics that increase antagonism and conflict.

## Use of de-escalating language

Ability to gradually reduce the threat and tension in the interaction.

## Ability to apologise effectively

Ability to defuse a conflict and modify the negative impact of a misunderstanding or tensions.





# Interpersonal skills

## Authenticity

Ability to be sincere and credible in order to gain the trust and respect of others.

## Attentive and active listening

Ability to grasp every detail of a message (written or spoken), whether explicit or implicit.

## Humour

Ability to bring out the pleasant or unusual aspects of a situation to make people smile, laugh or be entertained.

## Benevolence / friendliness

A favourable attitude towards others, inclining towards understanding and indulgence in a non-self-motivated way.

## Empathy

The tendency to identify with the feelings of others.

## Situational awareness

Ability to understand all aspects of a situation and all its complexity, to adapt to it and respond appropriately.



# Communication skills



## **Oral communication / eloquence**

Ability to express oneself well, to reach and persuade others through language.

## **Effective written communication**

Ability to write concisely, clearly and concretely.

## **Persuasion and argumentation skills**

Ability to justify and demonstrate an idea with a view to convincing people and validating a statement.

## **Paralinguistic communication**

Ability to adapt one's tone of voice and control one's posture during interaction.



# Collaboration skills

## Assertiveness

Ability to express oneself and defend one's point of view or opinion without infringing on that of others.

## Open-mindedness

An attitude that shows tolerance of, interest in and understanding of ideas that differ in part or in whole from one's own.

## Curiosity

Willingness to learn and explore the unknown, to improve and develop one's own understanding and knowledge.

## Flexibility

Ability to change tasks or mental strategies and switch from one cognitive operation to another.

## Humility and respect

Modest character, awareness of one's own inadequacies, acceptance of advice and ability to show consideration for others.

## Creativity

Willingness to imagine and create something new and original.

## Appreciation, positivity

Ability to present and consider something in a positive, constructive light.

## Patience

Ability to persevere calmly, without becoming irritated or bored.





## **Critical thinking**

Tendency to examine the logical value of an assertion or the authenticity of a statement.

## **Conflict management**

Ability to settle disagreements or manage disputes.

## **Problem solving**

Ability to identify, describe and find the causes of a problem and seek solutions.

## **Leadership**

Ability to guide, influence and inspire a group of individuals to achieve a shared ambition.







## Intercultural skills

### Openness to diversity (cultural, generational, neurodiversity, etc.)

A highly tolerant attitude, without prejudice or preconceptions, accepting and respecting different visions and realities.

### Hospitality

Ability to welcome, to open oneself up to others.



# Soft skills named “desire”: a new narrative for customer relations centres

Worry, anger, annoyance, apprehension, joy, sadness, astonishment, admiration, irony, sarcasm... Emotions are influenced by many factors, including mood, temperament, personality, disposition, motivation and culture. They are many and complex. In the same vein, feelings (desire, enthusiasm, passion, detestation, etc.) are the result of underlying emotions and are usually long-term. Respond insightfully to the variety, subtlety and ambiguity of these human states requires human intelligence.

Human intelligence, with its uniqueness, authenticity, nuances, understanding of history and experience, is all about life. It is the invisible key (or secret ingredient) that makes the customer experience. This is where the key skills in customer relations come into their own: they can be hybridised using digital technology. Innovation is not an end in itself, but a means of enhancing the quality of links. Human to human.

As well as technological change, the world of remote customer relations is facing the challenge of having to respond to increasingly connected, over-informed and autonomous audiences, accustomed to self-care. Today, they no longer want to hear a rigid, even scripted discourse that leaves little room for exchange. Soft skills are essential if you are to excel and make a difference, by bringing a more human dimension to the relationship.

The objective? To make each interaction a unique and memorable experience and to generate commitment, dreams and desirability.

Starting from this premise, automation and digitalisation are obviously not everything in a customer service department. As brand ambassadors, customer relations teams are the guarantors of a differentiating human experience, conveying value and... desire.

Freed from tedious tasks, they can (re)connect with their vocation, sharpen their customer focus and create a sense of pleasure in the interaction. These are all soft skills that are proving to be real enhancers of the taste for service and offer a new desirability to professions that are unfortunately still sometimes overused. This is the (soft) revolution: it opens up a new field of possibilities. It's a new story for the people who make the connections, create the emotions and add to the soul of remote customer relations.





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**People may forget what you told them, but they never forget  
how you made them feel.**

Maya Angelou, American novelist, 1928-2014



# About us

BlueLink is an international group specialising in customer relations.

As a strategic partner, it offers brands tailor-made contact-centre solutions and supports them in their customer experience and digital transformation strategy. Thanks to its department of consultants and trainers, the group strives to develop the talents and expertise of customer relations teams by cultivating know-how and interpersonal skills.

Created by Air France to manage its loyalty programme, the BlueLink group has developed in an entrepreneurial spirit while staying true to its DNA of excellence. The group has extended its expertise to all areas of customer relations, serving other prestigious brands such as Moncler, Clarins, Devialet, American Express and La Fondation Louis Vuitton.



# BLUeLink

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