National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

Believe in Your Students. Believe in Yourselves.

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASSOCIATION

Rural Pathways Project Institute #5:

Translating General Education to Meet Employer Needs



October 29, 2026

#2.10: Top 8 Supervisors of Front-Line Worker Jobs in the Region

Occupation (FLS = First Line Supervisors)	Median Salary	Jobs 2024	Jobs 2028	Openings 2024
51-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	$67,131	7,111	7,189	673
35-1012: First-Line Supervisors of Food Prep & Serving Workers	$39,687	5,050	5,327	774
41-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	$46,427	4,862	4,889	480
43-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Office & Admin Workers	$62,968	4,770	4,775	449
49-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	$76,858	3,122	3,244	260
47-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Construction & Extraction	$74,657	3,105	3,305	260
53-1047: First-Line Supervisors of Transport & Material Moving Workers	$59,334	2,565	2,687	267
37-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Housekeeping & Janitorial	$45,645	776	814	99

Notes:

1. Adjusted COL Index in the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance is 90.9

2. There are 19 First Line Supervisor SOC codes; these are the 8 with the greatest number of jobs in 2024 in the region

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#2.11: Wage Gains between Top 8 Supervisor Jobs and Top Front-Line Jobs

Occupation (FLS = First Line Supervisors)	Median Salary	*	SOC for Largest feeder Job	Feeder Job Med. Sala…	**	Gain
51-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	$67,131		51-9111: Packaging and Filling Machine Operators and Tenders	$44,297		$22,834
35-1012: First-Line Supervisors of Food Prep & Serving Workers	$39,687		35-2021: Food Preparation Workers	$32,843		$6,844
41-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	$46,427		41-2031: Retail Salespersons	$31,988		$14,439
43-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Office & Admin Workers	$62,968		43-6014: Secretaries & Administrative Assistants, General	$43,302		$19,666
49-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	$76,858		49-9071: Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	$47,363		$29,495
47-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Construction & Extraction	$74,657		47-2061: Construction Laborers	$48,167		$26,490
53-1047: First-Line Supervisors of Transport & Material Moving Workers	$59,334		53-7062: Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	$39,296		$20,038
37-1011: First-Line Supervisors of Housekeeping & Janitorial	$45,645		37-2011: Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	$34,664		$10,981

Notes:

1. Adjusted COL Index in the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance is 90.9

2. Occupations are based on Six-Digit SOC codes

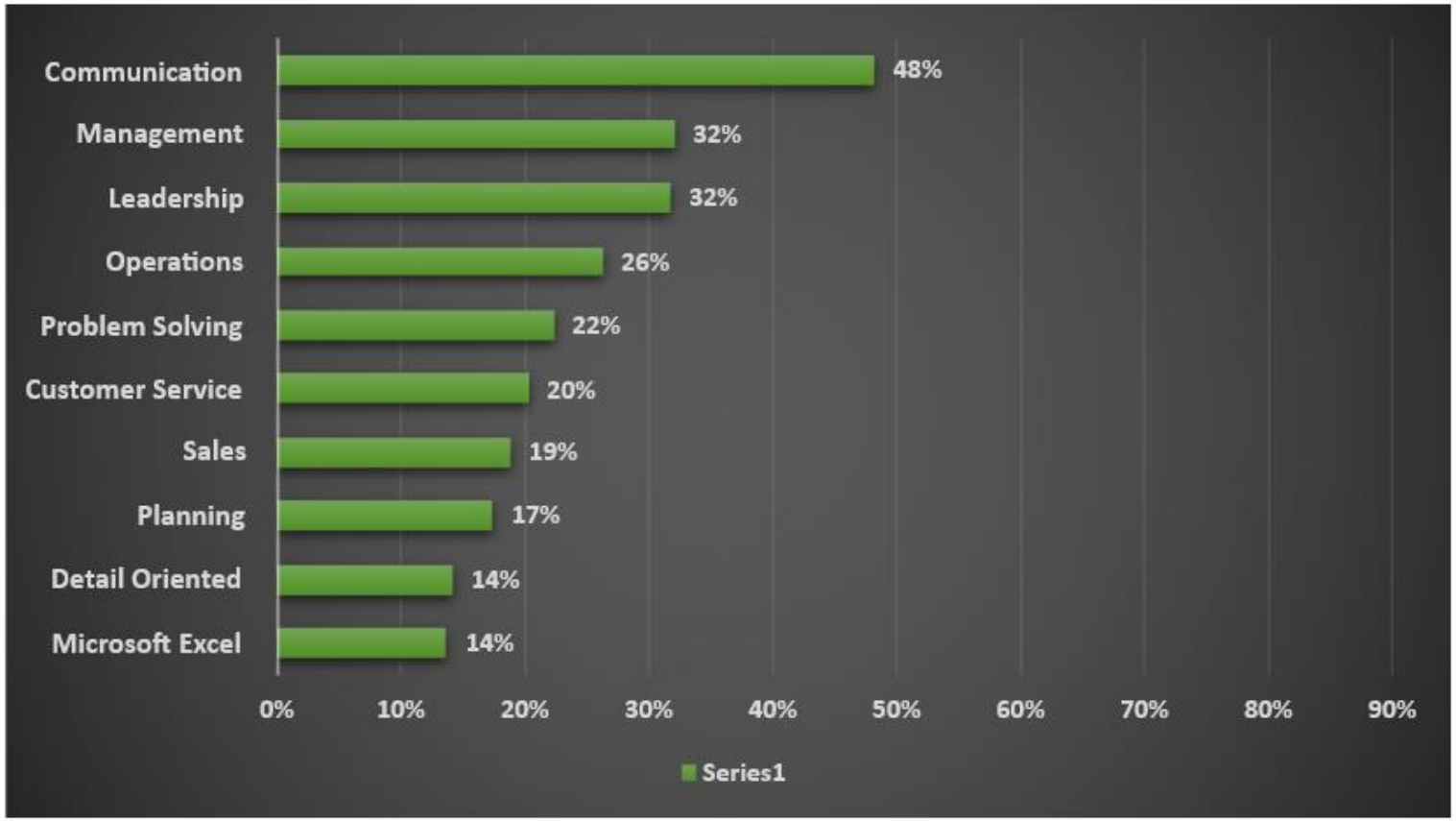
3. There are 19 First Line Supervisor SOC codes; these are the 8 with the greatest number of jobs in 2024 in the region

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3.3. Top Common Skills for Jobs Paying $46,000+ in Michigan: Front-Line Supervisors

Source: Lightcast™ for the State of Michigan

Data Extracted: 07/05/26



Notes:

1. These are the top common skills listed in job postings for the 19 SOC codes for Front-Line Supervisor positions
2. The 19 Front-Line Supervisor categories cover 193,000 jobs in Michigan, with 20,000 openings in the last year
3. The median salary across the Supervisor jobs is $59,000 ($64,000 if you remove Food Service)

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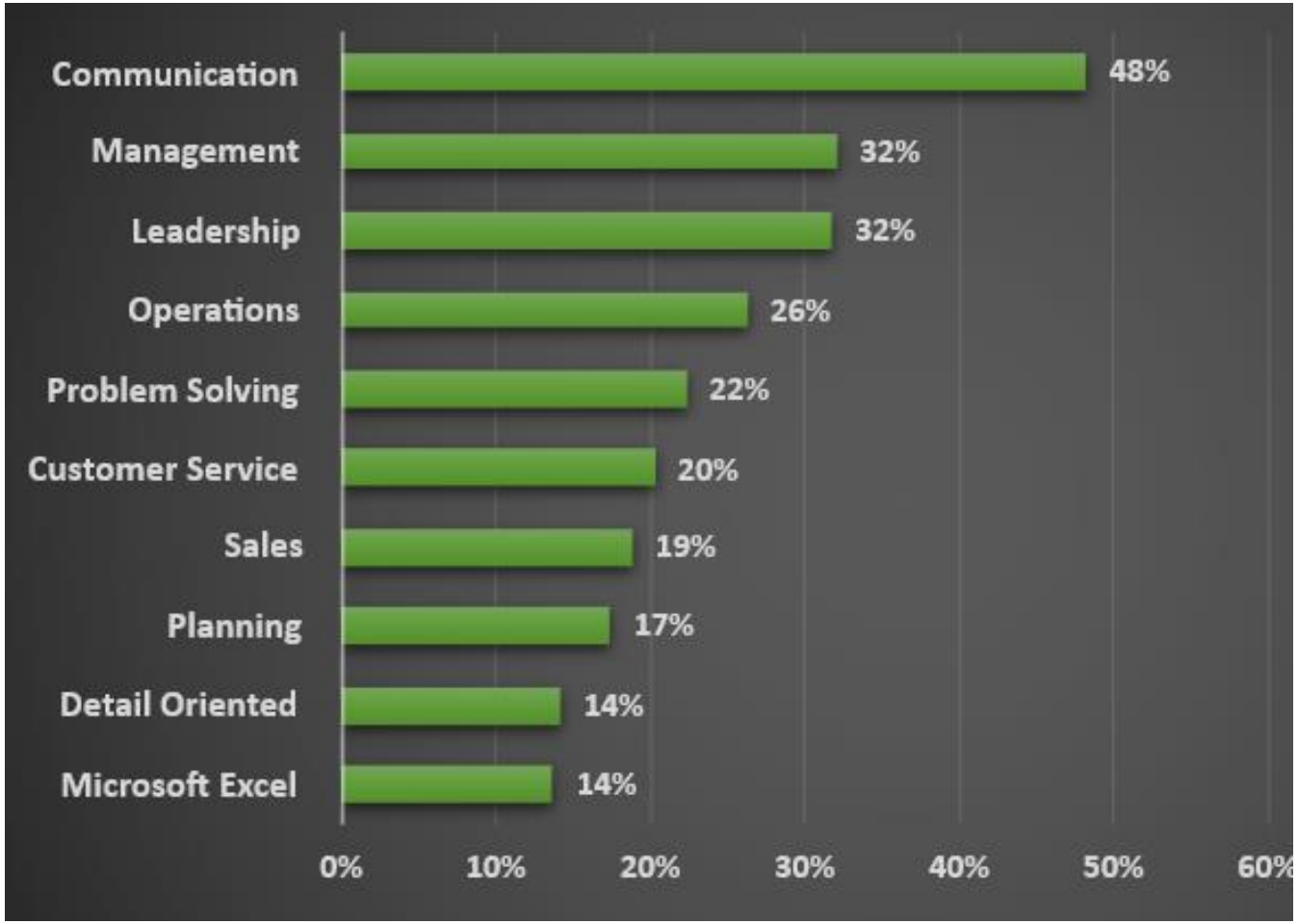
General Education Outcomes in Michigan

General education competency	Approx. frequency	Relative prevalence
Communication	~20/30	Very high
Critical thinking / problem solving	~17/30	Very high
Quantitative reasoning / mathematics	~12–13/30	High
Information literacy	~12–13/30	High
Cultural / social / civic / global awareness	~12/30	High
Scientific literacy / reasoning	~9–10/30	Moderate-high
Humanities / arts / human cultures	~8–10/30	Moderate
Lifelong learning / personal development	~6–7/30	Moderate
Professional / workforce readiness	~4–6/30	Emerging
Ethical reasoning	~3–4/30	Emerging
Integrated / applied learning	~2–3/30	Emerging
Creativity / intellectual curiosity	~2–3/30	Emerging

Top Skills : General Education Comparison

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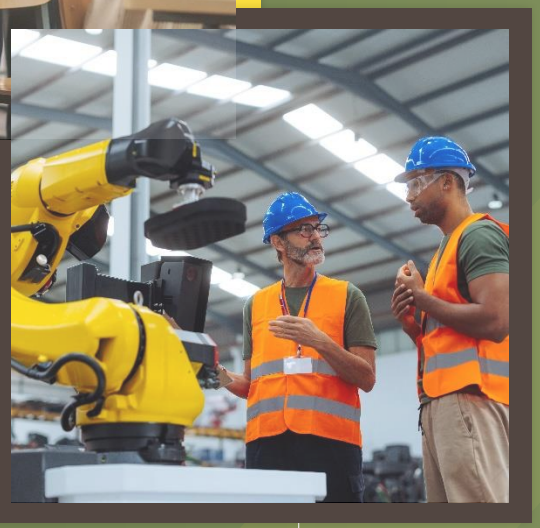
Top Skills in Supervisor Job Postings



General education competency
Communication
Critical thinking / problem solving
Quantitative reasoning / mathematics
Information literacy
Cultural / social / civic / global awareness
Scientific literacy / reasoning
Humanities / arts / human cultures
Lifelong learning / personal development
Professional / workforce readiness
Ethical reasoning
Integrated / applied learning
Creativity / intellectual curiosity







From Learning Outcomes to Workforce Signals

What Michigan Employers Said About Durable Skills

A Puzzle Worth Solving

Employers consistently report that employees need stronger communication, teamwork, professionalism, adaptability, and leadership skills

Yet...these same competencies appear in nearly every Michigan community college's general education outcomes.

How can both statements be true?

About the Interviews

Eight interviews with 15 people

Organizations represented: America Succeeds, Business Leaders for Michigan, International Union of Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers, Michigan Manufacturers Association, Small Business Association of Michigan, Talent First, and two medium-sized employers

Key question: What do employers mean when they say employees need stronger durable skills?

The purpose was to understand employer perspectives—not to evaluate colleges.

Before we talk about the what we heard

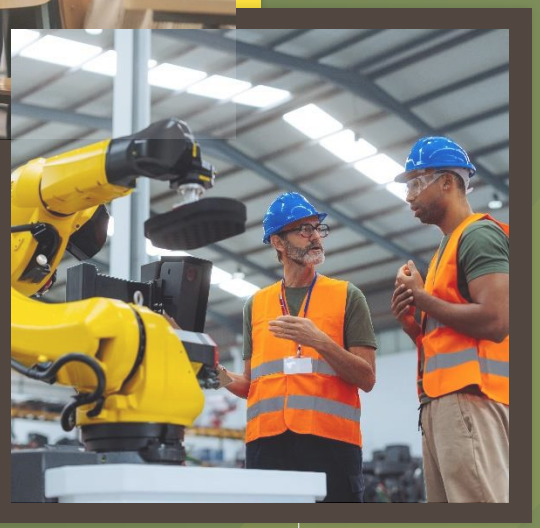
The interviews did **not** suggest that community colleges are teaching the wrong skills.

They suggested something much more interesting.

The issue isn't **what** colleges teach but **how intentionally students develop those skills—and how convincingly graduates can demonstrate them to employers.**







What we discovered from the interviews

Discovery 1: Durable Skills Are No Longer Peripheral

Key Insight

Across every interview, **employers described durable skills as essential workforce competencies**. Although technical requirements vary considerably across occupations, **interviewees consistently viewed communication, problem-solving, adaptability, professionalism, and collaboration as universal expectations**.

Consensus Level: ★★★★★

Evidence

"Everybody who's ever been hired has been hired because of a combination of technical skills and durable skills."

Technical skills vary. These [durable] skills don't."

"Communication shows up in every industry."

Discovery 1: Durable Skills Are No Longer Peripheral

Interpretation

› Durable skills are no longer viewed as complementary to technical expertise;

› They are increasingly understood as **foundational competencies that enable employees to apply technical knowledge effectively**.

› Technical skills differ across occupations, but **durable skills are key across jobs, industries, and career stages.**

› For community colleges, this distinction is important. Institutions already identify many of these competencies within general education and program outcomes.

› The interviews raised questions about **how intentionally these skills are developed and how convincingly graduates can demonstrate them**.

› Perhaps most importantly, no interviewee suggested that durable skills were becoming less important because of advances in artificial intelligence or automation.

› If anything, employers argued the opposite: **uniquely human capabilities are becoming increasingly valuable as routine technical tasks become easier to automate**.

Discovery 2: **Employers Are Looking for Trustworthy Signals**

Key Insight

Employers emphasized that the challenge is not simply whether graduates possess durable skills, but whether those skills can be recognized and trusted during hiring. They **questioned whether traditional credentials reliably demonstrate competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and professionalism**. Rather than calling for more credentials, employers expressed **a need for credible evidence—through authentic experiences, observable performance, and meaningful assessment**—that gives them confidence graduates are prepared to succeed in the workplace.

Consensus Level: ★★★★★

Evidence

“It [the credential] is valuable to the extent people believe in it.”

"Show me they [employees/graduates] can actually do it.”

"We need something employers can trust."

Discovery 2: Employers Are Looking for Trustworthy Signals

Interpretation

› One of the most consistent themes across the interviews was not durable skills themselves, but employer confidence in the evidence used to demonstrate them.

› **Interviewees repeatedly questioned whether existing credentials reliably communicate workplace readiness**.

› Rather than requesting additional certificates, **employers described a need for trusted signals** that graduates can communicate effectively, collaborate productively, solve problems, and adapt to changing workplace conditions.

› This distinction has significant implications for colleges. **The value of any future credential will depend less on the credential itself than on the credibility of the evidence behind it**.

› Interviewees consistently indicated that **observable behaviors, authentic performance, and employer validation carry substantially more weight than completion of coursework alone**.

Discovery 3: Durable Skills Developed through Intentional, Authentic Learning Experiences

Key Insight

Participants consistently **described durable skills as capabilities that develop through repeated practice, authentic workplace experiences, coaching, feedback, and reflection**. Simply placing students into situations that require teamwork, communication, or problem-solving was viewed as insufficient. Instead, interviewees **emphasized that these skills become stronger when students practice them intentionally, receive meaningful feedback, and have opportunities to reflect on their performance over time**.

Consensus Level: ★★★★★

Evidence

"The closer you can get to an authentic experience, the better."

"People need reps."

"It doesn't happen by osmosis."

Discovery 3: Durable Skills Developed through Intentional, Authentic Learning Experiences

Interpretation

- The interviews consistently challenged an assumption that durable skills naturally develop whenever students participate in collaborative projects, presentations, internships, or work-based learning.
- I**nterviewees described durable skill development as an intentional educational process** in which authentic experiences are combined with coaching, structured feedback, repeated practice, and opportunities for reflection.

- For colleges, this distinction shifts attention away from simply asking whether students encounter durable skills and toward asking how intentionally those experiences are designed. Many programs already include internships, clinical experiences, laboratories, team projects, and community engagement.
- The interviews suggest that these **experiences become significantly more powerful when educators explicitly identify the durable skills students are expected to develop, provide formative feedback, encourage reflection, and create opportunities for students to demonstrate growth**.

- Perhaps the most important implication is that colleges may not need dramatically different curricula to strengthen durable skills. Instead, **they may be able to build on existing educational practices by making durable skill development more explicit, intentional, and visible**.

Discovery 4: Durable Skills Drive Career Advancement and Organizational Success

Key Insight

The interviews consistently **distinguished between getting hired and succeeding over time.** Technical skills were generally viewed as essential for obtaining employment, but **durable skills were described as the competencies that determine advancement, leadership effectiveness, collaboration, and long-term organizational success**. Interviewees repeatedly noted that durable skill gaps become most visible when employees transition into supervisory roles.

Consensus Level: ★★★★☆

Evidence

"The gaps really show up when people become supervisors."

"We often promote the best technician and then discover leadership requires a completely different skill set."

"Technical expertise gets people in the door. Communication and leadership determine whether they advance."

Discovery 4: Durable Skills Drive Career Advancement and Organizational Success

Interpretation

› The interviews suggest that community colleges should think about durable skills not only as competencies that support initial employment, but also as capabilities that sustain long-term career growth.

› **Employers consistently described communication, leadership, adaptability, and judgment as differentiators for employees moving into supervisory and management roles**.

› This finding also challenges a common assumption that durable skills are primarily entry-level employability traits.

› **Instead, interviewees described them as increasingly important throughout an individual's career.** For educators, this broadens the purpose of durable skill development from preparing students for their first job to preparing them for lifelong professional growth.

Discovery 5: Community Colleges Have a Unique Opportunity

Key Insight

The interviews consistently **expressed optimism about the role community colleges can play in strengthening durable skills.** Rather than suggesting colleges should replace technical education, interviewees emphasized **the opportunity to make durable skill development more intentional, more visible, and more closely connected to authentic workplace experiences**.

Consensus Level: ★★★★☆

Evidence

"Community colleges are uniquely positioned to lead this work."

"Don't build another certificate. Build something employers trust."

"Make these skills explicit instead of assuming students pick them up."

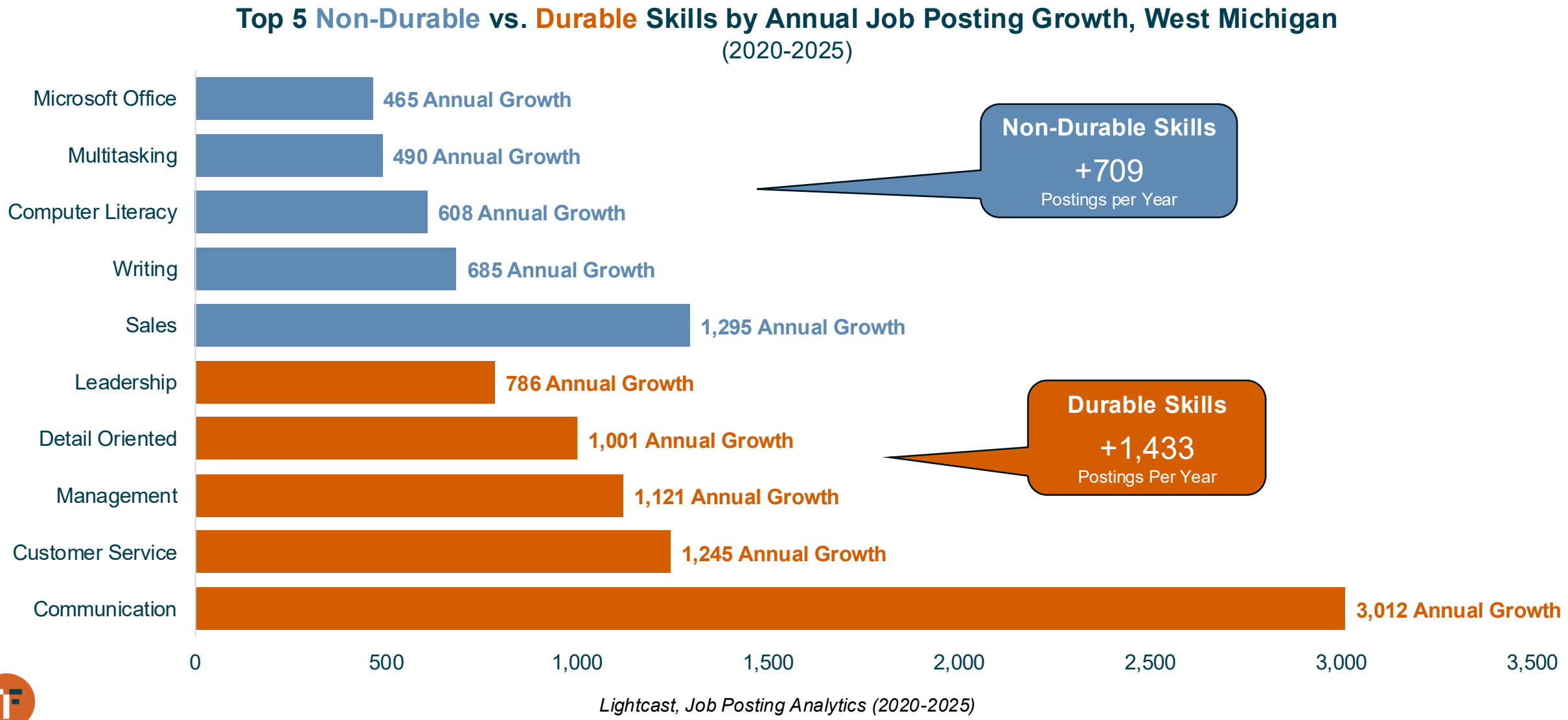
Discovery 5: Community Colleges Have a Unique Opportunity

Interpretation

- **The interviews suggest that community colleges possess many of the conditions necessary to become trusted developers of durable skills**.
- Their close relationships with regional employers, emphasis on applied learning, and experience with workforce education create opportunities to intentionally integrate durable skill development throughout the student experience.

- Perhaps the most significant implication is that the opportunity extends beyond creating a new credential.
- **Interviewees consistently pointed toward a more comprehensive approach in which durable skills are explicitly taught, practiced in authentic settings, reinforced through feedback and reflection, assessed using meaningful evidence, and validated through employer partnerships**.
- In this model, a credential becomes the visible outcome of a broader educational process rather than the process itself.

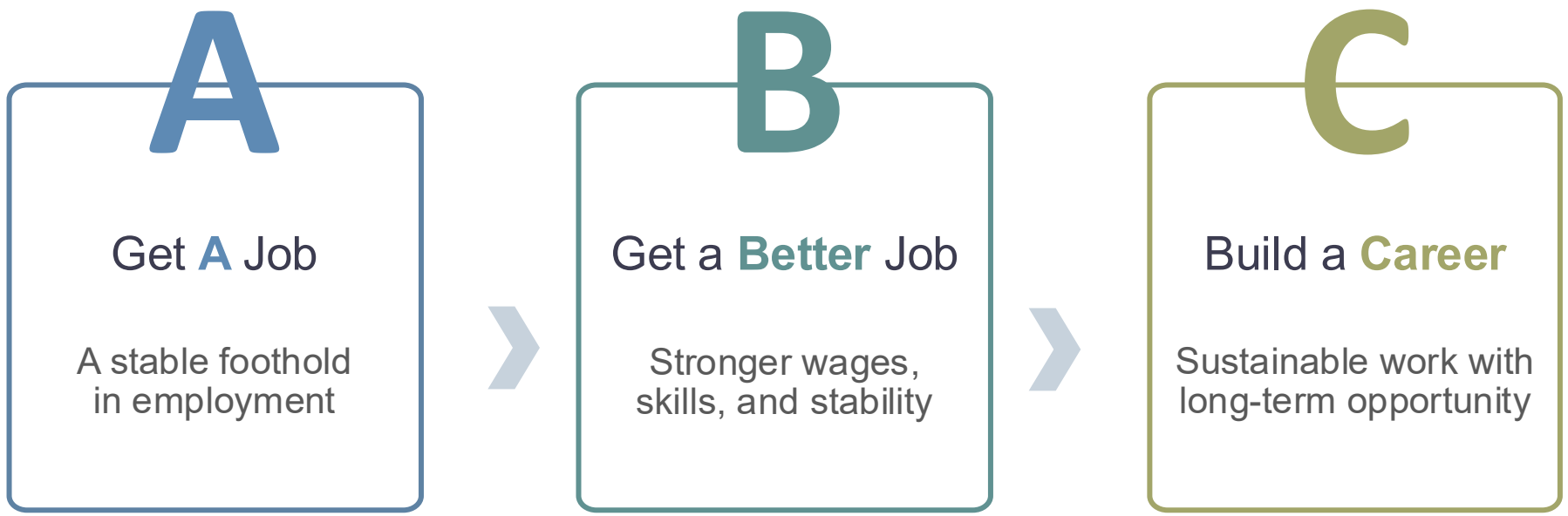
Demand for Durable Human Skills Is Rising



Lightcast, Job Posting Analytics (2020-2025)

Defining Success Through the ABCs

The ABCs of Employment



***Access** point to the workforce*

***Building** skills and stability*

***Careers** that support families*

More people working • More workers advancing • More skilled talent for employers.

Questions Worth Asking

Where are durable skills intentionally taught?

Where are they intentionally practiced?

Where are they intentionally assessed?

Where do students receive feedback?

What evidence leaves with graduates?

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