

# Laying the Tracks for Soft Skill Development at TransNamib



An analysis of TransNamib employee soft skills

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# Laying the Tracks for Soft Skill Development at TransNamib

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Namibia recently won its independence from South Africa in 1990. After a hundred years of oppressive occupation by Germany and South Africa, it finally achieved its freedom through fighting and diplomacy. The people who fought for Namibian independence are still alive today and have immense pride in their country. Despite being such a young nation, Namibia is trying to establish itself globally.

Currently Namibia has the potential to be a major gateway to trade for southern Africa. Its port, Walvis Bay, is in an optimal location on the Atlantic coast to access the rest of the world. TransNamib Holdings Limited, as the only train company in the southern continent that runs to Walvis Bay, has a significant opportunity to connect the rest of southern Africa to the Atlantic coast. TransNamib has the potential to have a strong economic influence on Namibia and propel the country into greater economic standing. TransNamib's rail operations sector is essential to fulfilling this goal.

The rail operations sector includes around 300 employees, and creates 90% of company revenue. Though this sector is the core of TransNamib's revenue, it could be improved through soft skill development. The rail operations sector is made up of general employees reporting to supervisors, who report to managers. These managers and supervisors hold key roles and are responsible for ensuring success. To effectively lead the sector's employees, managers and supervisors must have well developed soft skills.

Soft skills are interpersonal skills that often get overlooked in lieu of hard skills or technical skills. But according to a Harris Poll study on behalf of Careerbuilder, 77% of employers see soft skills as just as important as hard skills (Pylayev, 2016). For example, communication is vital to company performance because working together in a company means handling multiple personalities at the same time to achieve a common goal (Leung, 2014).

TransNamib Holding Limited, our project sponsor with Michael Feldmann as the liaison, gave us the task of analyzing current employee soft skills and providing recommendations for necessary improvements.

This project is ambiguous in nature, and therefore requires special consideration when devising an approach to completing the task. Two major unknown factors we must account for are employee receptiveness to our presence and the amount of time employees can afford to us.

The goal of this project is to offer recommendations on possible soft skill training techniques for the TransNamib rail operations sector's managers and supervisors by conducting a detailed analysis of current daily practices. To effectively complete this task, we have devised three approaches to account for the aforementioned challenges of this project. Once at the project site, the team will determine which method is most suitable for implementation. The first method is direct observation, and allows immediate implementation of soft skills analysis. The second method is more in depth and requires interviews with employees, allowing more employee feedback on soft skills. The final method, Instructional Rounds involves the employees directly whereby they observe and analyze the company's soft skills. This proposal builds a strong foundation for understanding the current status of TransNamib and will provide a rationale for using each method when analyzing the company's soft skills.

## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Soft skills, or interpersonal skills, are crucial to any company's success. This background examines the history of TransNamib and its company culture. In this chapter, the reader learns about possible methods to analyze employees and how to train soft skills.

### 2.1 TransNamib

#### 2.1.1 History of Namibian Rail Industry

The German colonists began constructing the Namibian railway system in 1884. By 1915 they constructed over 2700 km of rail lines. Following Germany's defeat in WWI and the League of Nation's decision to make Namibia a South African mandate, South Africa gained control of the Namibian Rail Lines and constructed an additional 418 km of rail lines. In 1985, Namibia obtained control of the railway system from South Africa and the Namibian Administration founded TransNamib Limited. TransNamib Limited controlled all sea, air, and rail transit in Namibia. In 1998, the Namibian administrators determined TransNamib Limited did not have the financial stability to run all air, sea, and rail transit. Thus, under the *National Transport Services Holding Company Act* TransNamib Limited became TransNamib Holding Limited. The *Act* restricted TransNamib Holding Limited to primarily rail transport rather than controlling all air, sea, and rail transport (Dierks, 2004).

TransNamib devotes the majority of its resources to freight transport. Bulk freight and containerized goods contribute 88% to the company's annual turnover. Bulk freight is the only service showing financial growth in the past two years. As shown in Figure 1, the rail lines are comprised of a single track which traverses the country.

# Railway network

Railway Network in Namibia: 2,687 km in length



Figure 1 Map of TransNamib Railroad Track

According to internal TransNamib reports, the track has severe degradation due to its age. The track degradation causes speed limitations on the trains, which contributed on average to 13% percent of late arrivals.

TransNamib is a parastatal company, which means the government is the only shareholder. Under the parastatal system, the Namibian government owns TransNamib, but



TransNamib operates as a private company controlling its own budget. TransNamib regularly requests more monetary support from the Namibian government. For example, TransNamib requires government subsidization to continue with passenger services.

### 2.1.2. TransNamib Future Goals

TransNamib has the opportunity to help further develop the lower African continent. Second to Asia, Africa is one of the fastest developing continents. A TransNamib business brochure says, “Every year [in Namibia], new mines are opening and major manufacturing companies require more enhanced distribution and logistics channels, which we are able to assist with” (Jarvis, 2015). The company can capitalize on this development and advance along with Namibia.

TransNamib can accomplish this due to their exclusive access to Walvis Bay, one of the most important ports on the western coast of Africa. South Africa, Namibia’s most important trading partner, relies on TransNamib to transport goods from Walvis Bay and from Namibian companies (Simonis Storm Securities, 2006). Currently, approximately 37% of all Namibian exports travel through Walvis Bay. TransNamib transports 12% of all Namibian exports via rail. The company transports imports such as equipment and resources for mining, to Namibian mines.

As Africa continues to develop, Walvis Bay will become increasingly more prominent (Jarvis, 2015). TransNamib is in a unique position of being a major factor in the advancement of the rest of the lower continent. Botswana and Namibia have already reached an agreement to create the Trans-Kalahari Railroad through Gobabis in Namibia which would link Botswana’s vast coal deposits to Walvis Bay (Feuilherade, 2014). Additionally, TransNamib looks to extend the railway to Katima Mulilo in the Caprivi Strip to access the copper belt of Zambia and Zimbabwe, connecting the landlocked countries of southern Africa with the coast and to trade with the rest of the world (Ash, 2015).

### 2.1.3 TransNamib’s Role in Mining Operations

Mining is the core of the Namibian economy. In 2013, mining exports generated approximately N\$21 billion (\$1.76 billion USD) which was nine percent of Namibia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Namibia Chamber of Mines, 2013). In 2012, 59.9% of all Namibian

exports were mined materials such as diamonds, Uranium, Zinc, and Copper. Namibia's railways travel from mining sites to Walvis Bay and to the northern and southern borders of Namibia for trade and export. TransNamib also transports mining supplies, such as sulfuric acid and coal, by rail from Walvis Bay to the mining sites.

In 2013, 33% of TransNamib's business was mining related (TransNamib, 2013). This was an increase from 23% in 2011 (TransNamib, 2011). If TransNamib capitalizes on this current uptick in mining, the increased revenue could send TransNamib into a "N\$ billion-turnover-per-annum company" (TransNamib Annual Report 2015/16). However, to capitalize on this increase, the Namibian government needs to invest substantially in TransNamib's resources and infrastructure.

#### 2.1.4 TransNamib Company Culture

TransNamib's culture is relaxed and friendly. Some of the employees have been working together for 35 years, and have extensive relationships with each other (M. Feldmann, personal interview, February 16, 2017). This creates a comfortable work environment in TransNamib, but it presents challenges too. After working with the company for five years, employees are usually promoted putting them in a position where the corporate culture expects them to oversee their peers. This can be challenging because it can be difficult to distinguish between friendships and working relationships.

At TransNamib, it is not unusual for meetings to start late (A. Burn, C. Scaperdas, & Y. Uyan, personal interview, February 3, 2017). As the only train company in Namibia, there is little competition which creates a lack of urgency in the company. Another factor contributing to this attitude is the constant support from the Namibian government resulting in little business incentive (M. Feldmann, personal interview, January 30, 2017).

TransNamib's method of communication is mainly informal. Word of mouth is the most common and easiest form of communication among general employees. In the mornings, some employees have a "Toolbox Chat," which is a casual talk before work about what they need to accomplish that day. Other types of communication include walkie-talkies and cell phones. The company's informal communication is quite effective as most employees do not have consistent access to email or computers throughout the day. At the senior levels of management, employees

use Whatsapp and email as formal forms of communication (M. Feldmann, personal interview, February 16, 2017).

TransNamib has a rigid set of procedures which are not conducive to change. The company laid off almost one thousand workers in the past five years because it could not adapt to a new economic climate (M. Feldmann, personal interview, January 30, 2017). Johan Piek, a consultant for TransNamib, said "Decisions were made after extensive, exhaustive discussions and often not implemented. Nobody was prepared to take the risk." (Ash, 2015). The quote speaks to TransNamib's resistance to change. Moreover, it implies that discussion alone is not enough to implement improvements.

#### 2.1.5 Operations Branch

TransNamib has two branches, Operations and Engineering. Michael Feldmann is currently the company executive in charge of the Operations branch. This branch focuses on four key functions: rail operations, road operations, service delivery, and passenger services. Operations is responsible for keeping these sectors aligned with TransNamib's business objectives and providing sufficient service to the company's customers.

The rail operations sector controls the rail line and trains. It is responsible for the train schedule and delivery service. This sector employs approximately three hundred people. In TransNamib's 2015-2016 annual report, TransNamib locomotives carry 1,654,777 tons of bulk freight, which accounts for 90% of the overall company revenue (Michael Feldmann, 2015/2016). Since most of TransNamib's profits stem from the rail operations sector, this sector is the most vital part of the company's success.

After moving freight by train, TransNamib's road operations sector can unload and deliver freight containers. This process is challenging, as the equipment needed to unload freight is in poor condition. These challenges slow down the delivery service significantly. In the 2015-2016 financial year, the road operations sector lost road contracts due to late and unreliable delivery services. Slow delivery hurts the revenue earned by road operations and makes the sector unsuccessful.

The service delivery sector of TransNamib offers ground delivery for packages. Michael Feldmann compared the Service Delivery sector's responsibilities to those of United Parcel Service (UPS). This sector focuses on the delivery of smaller items, not freight containers.

TransNamib's service delivery had an 83% success rate of delivering goods on time from April through June of 2015 (Michael Feldmann, 2015/2016). The sector's equipment and technology plays a role in the failure to deliver goods in sufficient time. TransNamib has made some improvements to equipment, but continuing improvements is necessary. The company has already lost service delivery contracts in South Africa and if the sector does not make improvements, service delivery may be removed altogether.

TransNamib offers passenger services by train. Ticket sales declined from 2014 to 2015 by 12% (Michael Feldmann, 2015/2016). Trains carrying passengers will also haul freight. These trains travel slowly due to the size of the railroad tracks and weight from freight. Still, the passenger services sector generates revenue for TransNamib, as Namibians use the train often during school holidays.

TransNamib's Operations Branch faces many challenges. Road operations and delivery services need the most improvements in order to become profitable sectors. The passenger services sector is currently generating revenue, but ticket sales have declined indicating this sector needs improvements as well. Rail operations is the heart of both the Operations Branch and TransNamib. Since this sector produces the majority of the company's revenue, TransNamib needs to sustain and improve it.

## **2.2 Rail Operations**

### 2.2.1 Rail Operations Systems

TransNamib has a rigid organizational structure that runs on procedures. The structure of TransNamib begins with its chief executive officer and his board of executives. Each member of the board of executives oversees a different branch of TransNamib. Within the branches, there are managers who oversee supervisors (Feldmann, 2017). The supervisors oversee a variety of different general employees. Figure 2 shows this organizational structure.



Figure 2 Employee Hierarchy Organization Structure

Figure 3 indicates that, within the rail operations of TransNamib the hierarchy of positions begins with the general manager of operations. The manager of train operations reports to the general manager and oversees five supervisors. Four of these supervisors are regional senior trains operating supervisors for the north, south, west, and Windhoek. The fifth position reporting to the manager of train operations is the senior trains operating controller.

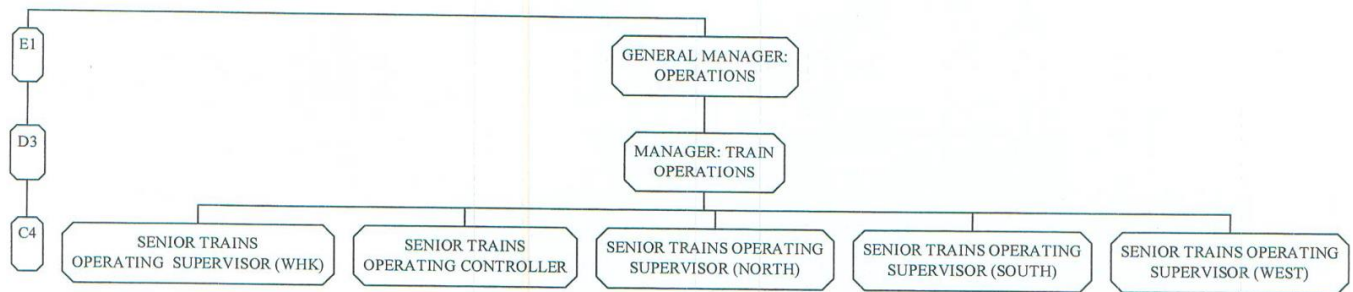


Figure 3 Rail Operations Managers and Supervisors (Feldmann, 2017)

The senior trains operating supervisors are responsible for all train related functions and oversee similar positions in each region. These positions include all employees who work with the trains and railroad. All train-operating inspector's report directly to their supervisor and oversee some other train related positions, such as the train drivers, shunters, and train planners. The supervisor of Walvis Bay gets direct reports from the train planner, drivers, and shunters. The senior trains operating controller oversees positions that do not physically work on trains.

Two control clerks report to the trains operating controller. Control clerks typically do computer work and scheduling. The person in charge of creating the train schedule, train planner, also reports to the senior trains operating controller (Feldmann, 2017). Though the roles of senior trains operating supervisors and senior trains operating controller are quite different both have to keep the employees under them on track to ensure the trains are running efficiently.

The rail operations sector depends on all employees working together. The company employee structure tasks managers and supervisors with ensuring employee productivity. They can combine the work of different employees to keep TransNamib's trains running. For example, the senior trains operating controller sets the train schedule and reports it to the manager of train operation. Simultaneously, senior trains operating supervisors need to ensure train drivers know when they are supposed to leave so they do not crash into another train. Together every position makes the success of the rail operations sector.

### 2.2.3 Rail Operations Challenges

The rail operations sector is the most successful sector of TransNamib, but has the potential to improve. One area that could be improved is train arrivals, trains often arrive late and are behind schedule. Late arrivals are caused by a multitude of reasons, in October through December of 2016 the most common reasons for late arrivals were shunting, locomotives, and crosspoint, as shown in Figure 4.

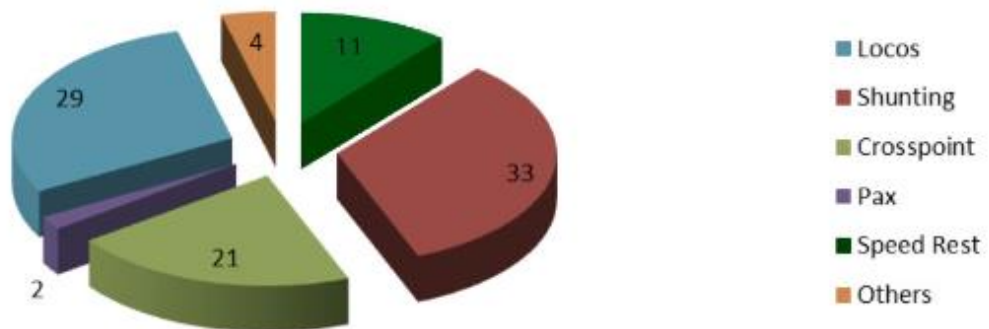


Figure 4 Reasons for Late Train Arrivals

Shunting is the process of taking a train from the main rail to a siding. This is necessary due to TransNamib only having one track for the entire country. Thus, in order for trains going different directions to cross paths, operators have to stop one train, and take it off the tracks until the other passes. It is time consuming to take one train off the track and put it back on. Additionally, if the other train is running late then the train being shunted has to wait and will be behind schedule as well.

Locomotive failure is not uncommon at TransNamib. During the second quarter of the 2016-2017 financial year TransNamib used on average 40 locomotives per day. Due to locomotive failures, TransNamib only used on average 36 locomotives per day during the third quarter of that year (Michael Feldmann, 2017). The unexpected shortage of trains meant the company could not transport as much freight or passengers during that quarter, resulting in less revenue than expected and more late trains.

Crosspoints are the point where two tracks form into one track, as seen in Figure 5.



Figure 5 A Crosspoint TransNamib Location

Locomotive failures often impact crosspoints. When a train fails on the track, other trains cannot pass through crosspoints. Another factor affecting crosspoints, causing late trains is speed restrictions. TransNamib's railroad track is too small for the locomotives made to haul large freight. The company still hauls the freight, but with smaller locomotives, so the trains must travel slowly. This impacts crosspoints because when speed restrictions delay one train it will also delay any train having to pass through the same crosspoint. The railroad track is small and is in poor condition causing more crosspoint issues.

Another key challenge for rail operation is overtime pay generation. The rail operations sector generates more overtime than any other sector. As stated above track conditions cause problems at crosspoints. Rail operations employees get paid to fix the crosspoints which causes a spike in overtime.

Current employee demographics are another challenge the rail operations sector is facing. In TransNamib's last three quarterly reports Michael Feldmann stated, "...some current key staff members are going to retire soon- this will continue for the next few years. The loss of knowledge and know-how could bring serious problems to the company..." (Feldmann, 2017). Hence, the sector must address the need to mentor younger workers to fill these positions.

Combating the challenges of the rail operations sector would be beneficial to TransNamib. Even with its many challenges the sector is the most successful, so addressing the rail operations issues takes priority over the other sectors of Operations.

## **2.3 Social Implications**

In 1884, Germany first colonized Namibia calling it German South-West Africa. After World War I concluded, the League of Nations forced Germany to relinquish control of its Asian and African colonies. The Allies entrusted the German and Turkish territories to the League of Nations. The League of Nations determined German South-West Africa was a class C mandate. This mandate instructed South Africa to oversee German South-West Africa. Namibians had no say in the proceedings as the League of Nations passed Namibia from oppressor to oppressor. Under South African rule, discontent, especially resulting from apartheid rules, in Namibia grew resulting in several battles between South Africa and Namibia's South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). In the 1990s after several tumultuous decades under South African rule, Namibia was able to become an independent country and transition into a democratic state.



The apartheid system was a South African form of segregation. While the majority of Namibia's population is black, white citizens held the majority of Namibia's wealth. Though the apartheid system no longer exists in Namibia, the distribution of wealth has not changed causing racial tension throughout the country.

One of the most notable sources of racial tension in Namibia is land ownership. White people own most of the farmland in Namibia and pay black farm workers like slaves. Workers will revert to poaching lions and leopards at times in order to provide for their families (Rust, 2016). Families of black farm hands have worked on these farms for generations and believe they have a right to the land. The Namibian government attempted to relieve some of the racial tension related to land ownership by buying select farms in Namibia from their owners and giving the farm to the workers. The owners had no choice but to give up their farm if the government chose to take it. This notion terrified owners, and left workers with mixed opinions. Some workers were excited to gain ownership of a farm, while others were afraid they would not be able to handle owning the farm or would not have the financial resources to survive hard years and eventually fail. This method of buying certain farms may have relieved some of the racial tension between farm owners and workers, but it did not overcome the racial tension of the entire country.

Racial prejudice and inequality still manifests in Namibian society today. Kaylan Reid is a New York born, African American woman who moved to Namibia to teach English in 2010. Three years after moving, she explains in an interview the racism she experiences in Namibia. Kaylan lives in a white dominated area. It is not uncommon for other shoppers to follow her in supermarkets or given odd looks by other shoppers because she is black. In addition, Kaylan's intelligence when speaking about topics such as politics often surprises white Namibians (Mattina, 2013). In Namibia, a form of white supremacy exists where whites believe they are better educated and more intelligent than Namibia's black population. These obvious forms of racism explain the racial tension between whites and blacks within Namibia. As time progresses the effects of apartheid rule becomes less relevant in Namibia, but the country still struggles to relieve all racial tension and prejudice.

## **2.4 Soft Skills**

Soft skills are in part defined as having emotional intelligence, but soft skills extend far beyond emotions (Soft Skills, 2017). Soft skills also encompass being able to effectively communicate and listen, having internal motivation, being able to adapt to change, being able to make decisions, being able to work effectively in a team, being able to think critically to solve problems, and having good time management capabilities (Soft Skills, 2017). In an interview, Michael Feldmann described a soft skill as being able to recognize an employee is having a bad day (M. Feldmann, personal interview, January 30, 2017). His explanation encompasses the personal skills needed in the development of soft skills.

## **2.5 Analyzing Employees**

When trying to improve an organization, one effective analytical approach is Instructional Rounds. Instructional Rounds are a systematic data collection and analysis technique used to gain a better understanding of a problem in order to discover potential solutions (Tietel, 2009). Instructional Rounds consist of four main stages, data collection, data review, team discussions, and improvement (Tietel, 2009). This process incorporates many different viewpoints, which allows for better discussion, and more continuity between different levels of a company (Tietel, 2009). It is also effective because it allows employees to step out of their usual work environment, and view it from a new perspective. This can be informative to an employee and has the potential to improve their work ethic dramatically (Tietel, 2009). Additionally, Instructional Rounds are effective because company employees can conduct them internally, which prevents bias and improves communication.

### 2.5.1 Data Collection

The first stage of Instructional Rounds is data collection via observation. Ideally, participants construct three or four observation teams. Each team consists of two to five people with different backgrounds and relations to the company (Tietel, 2009). Each team of observers will observe a set of meetings, departments, or processes to observe (Tietel, 2009). The team of observers spends fifteen minutes at each assigned site watching and interacting with employees (Tietel, 2009). Teammates individually record their own qualitative and quantitative, unbiased observations. It is essential that observers remain objective at all times during this stage (Tietel,

2009). For example, if an observation team was observing a meeting, someone may record, “five out of ten people are using their cellphone while someone is talking.” An observer should not record, “five out of ten people are bored of the discussion and not listening.” This observation is not objective because it includes a conclusion which may not be true (Tietel, 2009). This concept is also important any time an observer interacts with the observee.

In observing people, one on one interactions are usually better than interactions that occur during focus groups, where the observer might gather information from several different people at the same time (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017). When observers interact with one person at a time, they are able to get opinions and information untainted by a group dynamic. In a group, it is not uncommon for one person to offer an opinion and for the rest to agree, hence the importance of one on one interactions (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017).

#### 2.5.2 Data Review and Team Discussions

Data review is the next stage of Instructional Rounds and is a process done individually (Tietel, 2009). During this time, each observer reviews their data to identify the five to ten most significant observations (Tietel, 2009). Participants will record significant observations and use them during the next stage of Instructional Rounds. In stage three, team discussions, teams from stage one reconvene and each member shares significant observations. During this sharing process, teams work to create groups of similar key observations (Tietel, 2009). The team then forms categories or trends based on observation groupings. Some trends may revolve around interactions between individuals, employee mannerisms, or meeting norms. Teams then start to make conclusions about what each trend means in attempts to summarize their findings into one overarching statement that encompasses the trends and what they mean (Tietel, 2009). These conclusions will play a key role in stage four of Instructional Rounds.

#### 2.5.3 Improvement

In the improvements stage, all teams conclude their discussions and form one large group (Tietel, 2009). Each team makes a short presentation to the group and discusses the trends they found. Once completed, all participants take part in an open discussion in regards to each trend. During this time, all individuals have an equal opportunity to add their input (Tietel, 2009). The

goal of this discussion is to recognize prominent trends, determine the root cause of each trend, outline a vision for what improvements would look like, and create a plan to either improve any issues that arise, or continue processes that are effective (Tietel, 2009). Once the group adequately discusses each trend, and creates a plan for improvement, the process of Instructional Rounds is complete.

## **2.6 Employee Training**

### 2.6.1 Soft Skill Employee Training Studies

Soft skills are not intuitive; people must learn, develop and practice them (Ansel, 2016). Employers should strive to allocate 24 hours a year to soft skill training (Ansel, 2016). Gopa Nayak, conducted a study with engineering students from India to look into the effectiveness of training soft skills. He had one group go through four weeks of soft skill training classes, and one control group who received, “delayed treatment of the same program” (Nayak, 2014). Both groups took a pre and post experimental test worth ten points (Nayak, 2014). In a post-trial survey, when comparing the pre and post test scores, the group that went through soft skill training had a mean score average increase of 2.5 points, where the control group only had an increase of about 1.25 points (Nayak, 2014). Qualitatively, when answering open ended questions about how to utilize soft skills, the engineers who went through extended training more explicitly explained how to implement soft skills, providing detailed examples of improvements they can make in their own life (Nayak, 2014).

Another study proving soft skill training effectiveness is from Sage Analysts who conducted an experiment where they examined the effectiveness of face-to-face teaching vs online teaching. In the study, the examiners provided two groups with similar teaching lessons, one through online teaching and one through face-to-face classes. The examiners then administered each group a pre- and post-test to assess soft skill understanding. These investigators found that “face-to-face trainees were significantly more driven to take the course to improve their communication skills compared to online trainees” (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016). This means willingness to learn is directly correlated to behavior change (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016). When investigators compared the pre- and post-test scores for students who went through online training, and those who went through face-to-face training, they found, “face-to-face

trainees reported higher mean score improvement compared to online trainees” (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016).

### 2.6.2 Soft Skill Training Techniques

A simple soft skills workshop once a year is not sufficient to effectively improve individual and overall company soft skills. People must learn soft skills in a manner similar to how an athlete develops a physical skill (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017). For example, a basketball player learns a technique by breaking it down into individual steps. A player will train the skill by themselves before moving on to practicing it with their team in a non-game situation. As they improve, the athlete uses the skill in continually higher stake environments until they can use it fluently in any situation. The key to successful practice is that the teacher must provide a reasonable practice field where it is acceptable to make mistakes (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017). Practice fields are anywhere the employee practicing the soft skill feels comfortable (Taylor, 2015). They may be found in physical places, relationships, or even events.

### 2.6.3 Checking for Employee Training Effectiveness

Time is valuable to a company when it comes to training employees. Every person is different, so it is important to understand how each trainee learns in order to optimize the training time. One way is to follow the People Styles Model Training. “The model categorizes two dimensions of behavior (assertiveness and responsiveness) into four different people styles: *driver*, *expressive*, *amiable*, and *analytical*” (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016). The model suggests that that every employee has some of each trait, and each trait is valuable (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016). Understanding which trait an employee possesses enables more positive and effective communication between the instructor and the student. Once an instructor chooses a style of teaching, it is important to continually assess its effectiveness.

One way to ensure effectiveness is the Model of Training Evaluation and Criteria. This model suggests an instructor should consider four topics during training: reactions, learning, behavior, and results. Evaluating reactions consists of review of trainee satisfaction. Studying learning determines what the student has understood and absorbed. Assessing behavior establishes changes in job-related activities. Auditing results provides a strong understanding of

how employee improvements are bettering the team or company as a whole (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016). If training strategies are not working, it is important to study the processes and the trainee. If the process does not align with the employees' learning style, there will never be positive results (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016).

## **2.7 Summary**

TransNamib's history is rooted in colonization and apartheid, but this history does not define what the company has become. It is the only railroad company in Namibia and is one of the main transport systems for cargo. TransNamib now exists as a symbol of promise for Namibia and the rest of the southern African continent (Jarvis, 2015). This is due to its access to the Walvis Bay port, which acts as a gateway to trade with the rest of the world. TransNamib has several challenges to overcome before it can propel the country forward. These challenges are due to a lack in adequately developed soft skills, or interpersonal skills.

It is a common misconception that soft skills are untrainable. Our project focuses on analyzing the status of employee soft skills at TransNamib through data collection and analysis to generate a training plan to teach these skills. One method of collecting and analyzing data is Instructional Rounds. Instructional Rounds are based on collaboration. They bring employees and experts of different backgrounds together to complete four stages: data collection, data review, and data analysis and solution generation. The product of Instructional Rounds is a clear vision for future goals and how to obtain them, devised from within the company. Although Instructional Rounds is often effective, it is not the only form of data collection and analysis. Depending on a company's culture, Instructional Rounds may not be feasible. With regards to TransNamib, it may be true that employees do not have the ability to take time off work to conduct Rounds. In the next chapter, we will discuss three options for data collection and analysis at TransNamib.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The goal of this project is to offer recommendations on possible soft skill training techniques for the TransNamib rail operations sector's managers and supervisors by conducting a detailed analysis of current daily practices.

A major challenge our team faces lies in the uncertainty of the project. There are two factors of TransNamib employee reactions we must account for in this chapter. The first factor is how employees will react to our presence, as we are young Americans students with drastically different backgrounds and little experience consulting. This could present discomfort for all parties involved, resulting in employees being less willing to collaborate with us. Even with positive relationships with employees, another uncertainty is how much time employees can allocate to assisting us. To best prepare for these unknown circumstances, this proposal presents three possible approaches to our methodology:

1. Direct observation and analysis
2. Stakeholder identification and oral history interviews
3. Instructional Rounds.

Upon arrival at TransNamib, the team will discuss each approach amongst each other and the sponsor liaison, Michael Feldmann, and determine the best plan to effectively accomplish our goal. This chapter will explain each approach in detail, outlining each process and their advantages and disadvantages. The final section will explain our process for reviewing data collected from each approach to determine and present recommendations for soft skill improvement at TransNamib.

Table 1 provides a timeline for accomplishing this project.

	Prep Time	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Choose Methods									
Collect & Analyze Data									
Formulate Recommendations									
Compare Recommendations									
Finalize Deliverables									
Final Presentation									

Table 1 TransNamib Project Schedule

**3.1 Direct Observation**

The first method to consider is a general observation of TransNamib’s employees and practices. According to the project liaison, this would be sufficient because any shortcomings in soft skills will be obvious to the observer.

An advantage of this method is that the research can start immediately upon arrival at TransNamib. Additionally, it requires minimal company involvement, putting fewer restraints on applying this method. Although it is easier for our team to observe the company with fewer restrictions, this method accounts for little employee input. Combined with our team’s youth and inexperience, this technique presents difficulties in recommending a soft skills training plan to which TransNamib would be receptive.



### 3.1.1 Collect Data

Direct observations facilitate the understanding of strengths and weaknesses in employee soft skills. Company culture is also important to this project because it describes the overall environment of a company, which can affect and be affected by soft skills. The components of company culture pertaining to this project can be seen in Figure 6.

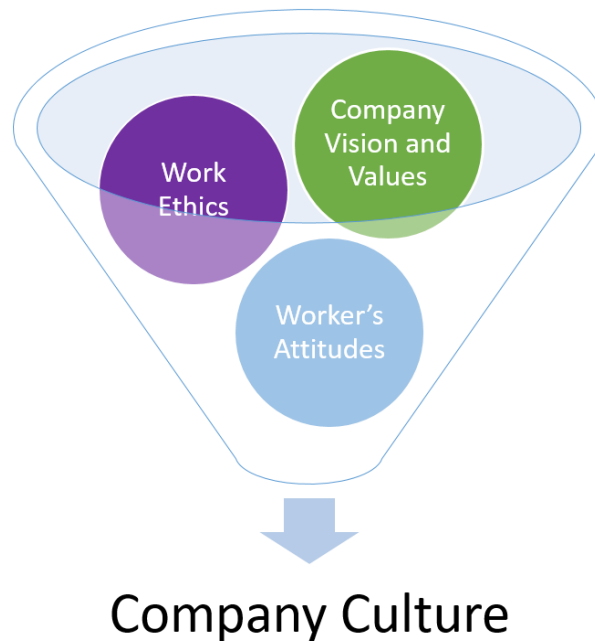


Figure 6 Aspects of Company Culture

In order to effectively collect data, we will need to know when meetings are, the areas to which we have access, and what company norms exist. It is paramount we stay objective, humble, and aware of our surroundings. First, we will engage with the employees to create positive relationships and understand the company culture of TransNamib. Our team will show interest in employees' and their work by asking questions such as:

- How long have you worked here?
- What do you do on a daily basis?
- Who is your boss?
- How do you communicate with other employees?
  - Do you get information from your boss? Coworkers?
  - Is information posted somewhere?

After forming working relationships with the TransNamib employees, in groups of two we will shadow employees for a day. Shadowing employees enables researchers to observe employee interactions first-hand. These observations will provide insight into the employee’s normal use of soft skills and their effectiveness. Our team will use the form found in Appendix A to document our observations. Our team will record:

- interactions the employee has that day,
- who was a part of the interaction
- what happened during each interaction,

We hope to shadow 15 employees ranging from managers to general employees, in order to collect ample data.

### 3.1.2 Analyze Data

After collecting sufficient observational data, the project team will separate and categorize observations based on similarities between interactions. Each category of similar observations will create a better understanding of which employee soft skills need improvement. For example, a completed category grouping is depicted in Table 2.

<b>Category: Personal Relationships</b>
<p><b>Observation 1: Employee 1 asks employee 2 about family’s well being by name</b>  <b>Employee 2 responds and reciprocates</b></p> <p><b>Observation 2: Employee 3 asks employee 4 “what is wrong, you seem to be working slower than usual.”</b></p>
<b>Conclusion: Employees are caring and friendly toward one another</b>

Table 2 Interactions Category Example

### **3.2 Stakeholder Analysis**

Stakeholders play a crucial role in our project. A stakeholder is someone who is invested in the project and will be affected by the project outcomes. They have significantly more insight into TransNamib and its culture than we could accrue in eight weeks. Additionally, stakeholders have experienced TransNamib’s training practices and soft skill capabilities. The stakeholders

offer different views and opinions on needed improvements. With an objected perspective, our team can identify the commonalities between stakeholders' opinions. By using this approach, unlike direct observation, employees will provide the data. The team will then analyze the data and make recommendations based on the information disclosed. This results in the need for proving our credibility and gaining trust so our recommendations are taken seriously.

In order to have successful stakeholder interviews, TransNamib employees must be cooperative. Stakeholder interviews will be critical to assessing the current situation within the company. These interviews can be short and flexible to accommodate the stakeholder's schedule. Through an oral history approach the interviewee will have more control over the interview.

### 3.2.1 Identify Stakeholders

The first step to complete stakeholder interviews is to identify the stakeholders. As they will have different opinions on what a successful project entails, final recommendations must appeal to the various stakeholders in TransNamib. We have already begun the identification process and plan to finalize our list of key stakeholders within the first week at TransNamib.

The first stakeholder identified was Michael Feldmann. In an interview Mr. Feldmann identified additional stakeholders. Upon arriving at TransNamib the team would like to interview Hippy Tjivikua, Gabes Nghipukuula, and Reggie du Toit. Mr. Tjivikua is the CEO of TransNamib so we may not have the opportunity to interview him, but Gabes Nghipukuula and Reggie du Toit both work in the Windhoek office as Chief Training Officer and Manager of Train Operations respectively. Each stakeholder has specific individual responsibilities at TransNamib. We expect Mr. Nghipukuula and Mr. du Toit to direct us to other stakeholders of our project. Identifying stakeholders through this networking strategy is depicted in Figure 7.

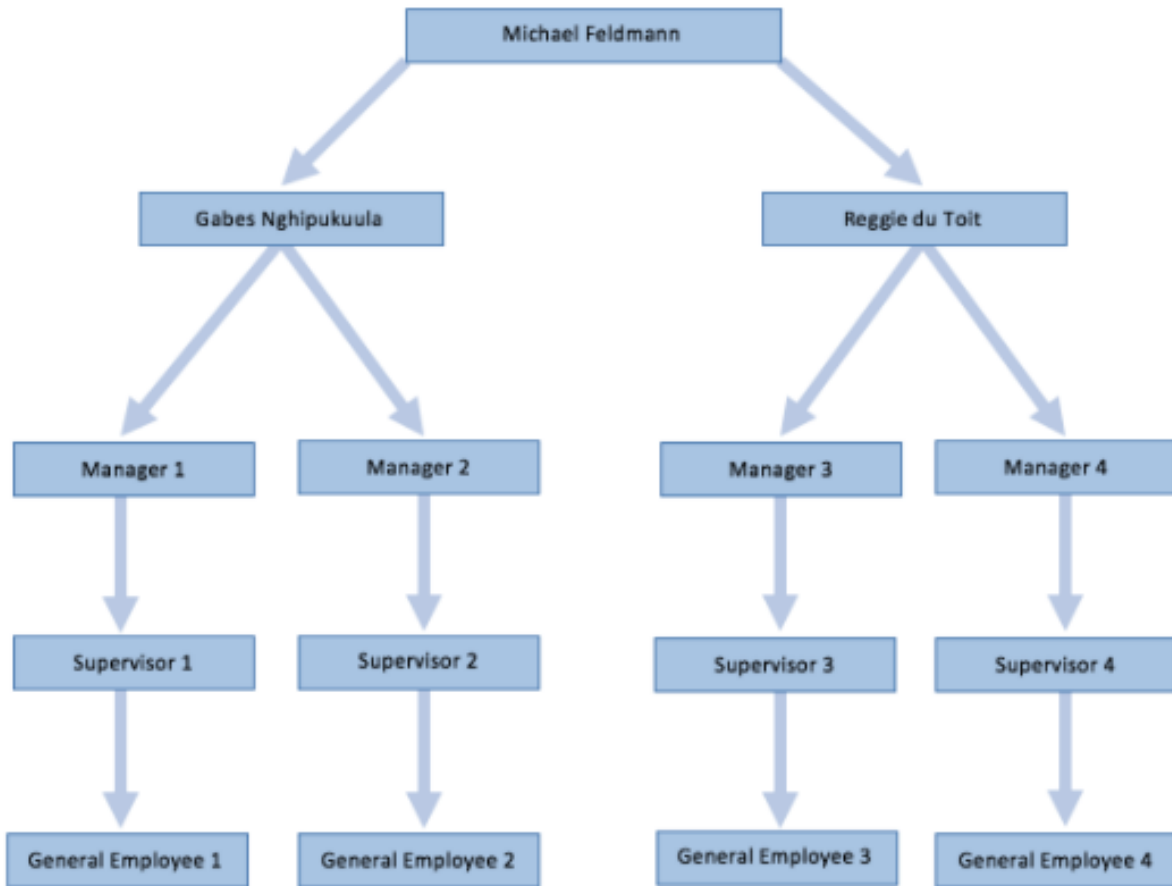


Figure 7 Stakeholder Networking Pattern

The team will consider all levels of employees while identifying stakeholders because each has a distinct view of the company. An ideal sample size is five percent of the rail operations sector, approximately 15 people (R. Kinicki, personal interview, February 15, 2017). When choosing stakeholders to interview, we will diversify our sample by considering all ages, races, genders, and positions.

### 3.2.2 Stakeholders' Views of TransNamib

The entire team will conduct initial interviews to get acclimated to the company culture. Once a larger list of interviewees is generated, team will interview stakeholders in pairs to complete them efficiently. One interviewer will facilitate while the other takes notes. To code

data more effectively, the interview team will request permission to record the interview. In order to preserve credibility, we will be sure to:

- assure the interviewee that information shared will be kept confidential
- not ask biased questions
- not ask questions that could be seen as an attack
- not ask leading questions.

We are unsure how stakeholders will react to formal interviews. To make the interviewees more comfortable, interviews will begin with an oral history approach. The oral history approach focuses on the interviewee and seeks information related to the following topics:

- How the employee learned about soft skills
  - Was it within TransNamib?
- What are the important skills and abilities needed for their job
  - How do soft skills correspond with these skills?
- Does the culture TransNamib promote/hinder soft skill development
  - What about the culture promotes/hinders soft skill development?
- What strategies do the employees think will help them improve their soft skills
- Do the employees feel TransNamib is successfully managed?
  - What is good/bad about the management?
  - Do these strengths and weaknesses relate to soft skills?
- How would the employee improve soft skills at TransNamib
- How is the communication at TransNamib
  - Are there many misunderstandings between managers and employees?

The interviewee will do the majority of the talking while the interviewer will guide the discussion. The oral history approach allows interviewees to tell their own story rather than respond to a series of questions. This technique gives the interviewee a sense of control. The interview team will use prompts to direct the interview to preserve the flow of conversation. Our team may use the following prompts to achieve this,

- Where did you grow up?
- What did your parents do?
- What was your first job?

- What was the most important thing you learned at that job?
- What kinds of challenges have you faced at your previous jobs?
- Why did you chose to work at TransNamib?
  - What was your first role?
  - What do you enjoy most about working at TransNamib?
  - Have you faced many challenges while working here?
  - What kind of training or mentoring have you had here?
    - What strategies worked best?
  - What kind of Soft Skills do you find yourself needing in your role here?
  - Does TransNamib offer opportunities to improve your soft skills?

If the stakeholder is not available for face to face interaction, we will send an email questionnaire such as the one in Appendix B. However, this is not ideal because it will be more difficult to establish a relationship and credibility.

During the interview process it is important to be active listeners. This means paying attention to our body language, such as smiling and nodding, as well as using verbal encouragement. If the interviewee makes a general statement the interviewer can ask them to elaborate. It will be critical for the interviewer to be flexible. The team will inquire about promising topics during the interview.

### 3.2.3 Analyze Interview Responses

After completing all stakeholder interviews we will follow four steps

1. Transcribe any recordings
2. Combine transcribed and written notes
3. Code data
4. Identify themes

Interview partners will combine notes after each interview. The partners will transcribe any recorded interview, and combine these notes with handwritten notes taken during non-recorded interviews. Once there is a complete set of notes from each interview, the team will transfer all notes into a Google Drive document. In the online document we can use the word find function to review repeated information. This will condense our notes.

To identifying common themes among interviews the team will use coding. Coding is an analytical process to transform qualitative data, the interview results, into quantitative data. During the coding process, we will review the data from our interviews until specific themes become evident. While coding, we assign each theme a short phrase or word known as a code. It will be necessary for us to define the codes so they are consistent across our various interviews. An example code is communication. If an interviewee expresses that they are unsure of when to complete tasks the team would most likely code this as communication. In a separate word document, we will list the codes. In addition, the list will include interviewee comments pertaining to the code. The list will allow the team to easily analyze and reorganize the data.

### **3.3 Instructional Rounds**

Differing backgrounds require our team to incorporate TransNamib employees as much as possible when developing our recommendations. Instructional Rounds is an effective way to incorporate employees. It allows the employees to take control of the observational method. An advantage of this internal observation system is that the employees recognize their strengths and weaknesses. In eight weeks, it would be difficult to fully grasp TransNamib's company culture. Recommendations will come from the data gathered and analyzed by employees. A byproduct of Instructional Rounds is a practice field for employees to improve their soft skills. The process is sustainable and has the potential to internally motivate.

Our team cannot know how much time employees can devote to this method. Employees will need to allocate time to both learning and performing Instructional Rounds. In an interview, Michael Feldmann explained that getting approval for employees' participation will take several weeks' notice. This presents a hindrance to using Instructional Rounds as a sole method of data collection, as the method depends on employee involvement.

#### 3.3.1 Training Employees

Prior to starting any stages of Instructional Rounds, we will need to identify a team of employees willing participate and eager to learn about Instructional Rounds. Ideally, Michael can provide five to ten employees as a trial group for Instructional Rounds. The level of success of this group will determine whether or not we continue the process. To gain interest, the team will

emphasize that these employees will be directly involved in making a change. Once a trial group is established, we can begin the formal process of Instructional Rounds.

The schedule of the day would be as follows:

9 AM - 9:15 AM - Introduction/IceBreaker  
9:15 AM - 10 AM - Teaching Instructional Rounds  
10AM - 11AM - Observation  
11AM - 11:30AM - Data Review  
11:30 AM - 12 PM - Lunch  
12 PM - 12:45 PM - Team Discussion  
12:45 PM - 1:30 PM – Improvements

When Teaching Instructional Rounds, the team will use the PowerPoint outlined in Appendix

C. This method will be used as a visual aid while we explain the following topics:

- What to look for during observation
- How to record data
- How to remain objective
- How to observe peers.

Proper instruction is important because without a fundamental understanding of the process, participants cannot collect data properly. This time will also be used to explain why this process is successful, and how it can make a difference.

### 3.3.2 Conducting Stage 1: Observations

During observation, we will create four observation teams consisting of one member from our project team, and two employees. Dividing up our project team will ensure proper techniques are used, and it will be less overwhelming for the employees. Table 3 presents a possible team makeup and schedule.



Observation Teams	10 - 10:15	10:15 - 10:30	10:30 - 10:45	10:45 - 11
Amelia + 2 employees	Meeting	Shop Floor	Offices	Hallway interactions
John + 2 Employees	Shop Floor	Offices	Hallway Interactions	Meetings
Jenna + 2 Employees	Offices	Hallway Interactions	Meetings	Shop Floor
Ryan + 2 Employees	Hallway Interactions	Meetings	Shop Floor	Offices

Table 3 Instructional Rounds Team Schedule

Each team will spend 15 minutes observing each location, focusing on,

- Interactions between employees
- Soft skills/communication
- Successful processes
- Employee mannerisms.

Observers must remember to be objective while recording data. This data should be specific and descriptive, as exemplified in Figure 8.

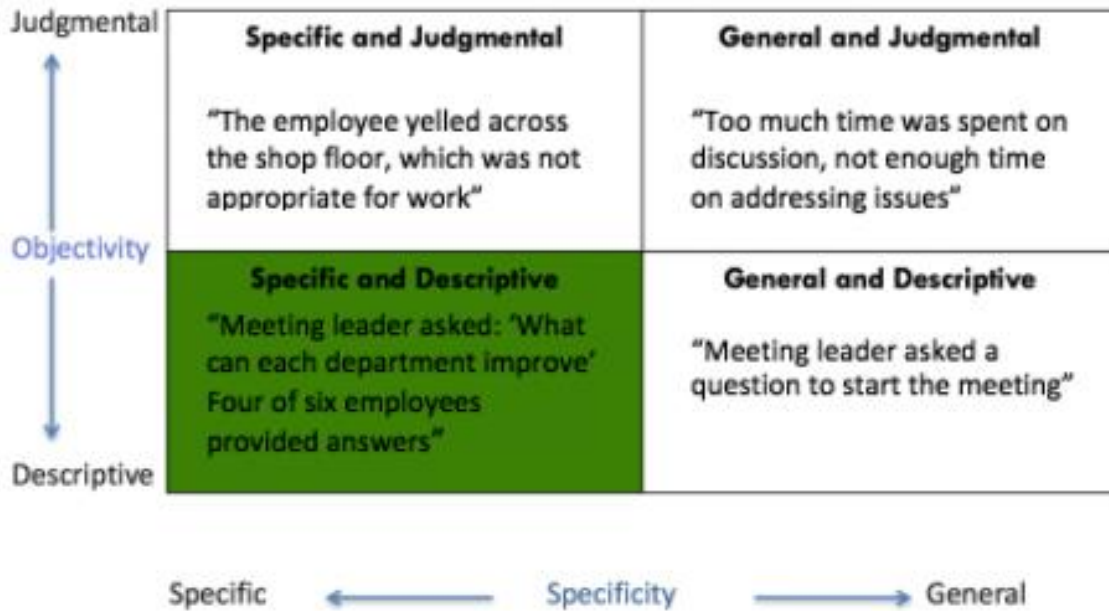


Figure 8 Objectivity and Specificity Matrix

Once teams complete their observations, the next stage of Instructional Rounds will begin.

### 3.3.3 Conducting Stage 2: Data Review

To begin the next stage one member of our project team will provide a brief description of how to properly review data. Those involved will individually read through their notes, looking for observations that are relatable and significant to soft skills. One way to separate these observations is to record each on sticky notes. This method is beneficial during team discussions as it allows observations to be visually grouped together. Our project team will decide the best approach when we can better grasp what resources are available at TransNamib.

### 3.3.4 Conducting Stage 3: Team Discussion

Each member will bring their significant observations back to their team. Then each team member will get the opportunity to discuss their observation and why they felt it was important. Any similar observations should be grouped together. Table 4 is an example of how to group similar observations.

<b>Group: Manager and Employee Interactions</b>
<p>Observer 1: “Manager asked employee ‘is the project on time,’ employee said ‘no,’ manager explained what the employee should do.</p> <p>Observer 2: “Manager and employee had a discussion. Manager spoke for 3 minutes, employee spoke for 3 minutes. neither person was interrupted</p>

Table 4 Example of Team Discussion Outcome

Once the team has grouped the data, they will analyze it to identify trends in each group of data. Using the example above, a completed trend could be “Managers effectively communicate with the employees they oversee.” Teams will compare data trends, in an effort to summarize the findings into one overarching theme. For example, if all data trends revolved around positive manager and employee interactions, a final summary may be that, “Communication training for managers is effective.” Each team will bring their conclusions and list of trends to the final stage of Instructional Rounds.

### 3.3.5 Conducting Stage 4: Improvements

During improvements, each team presents their conclusions to the whole group. Once each team has discussed their findings, participants will have an open discussion. The goal of this discussion is to establish a vision. Next, the group will create a plan for how to most effectively achieve this vision. During this process, involving employees with different backgrounds is extremely valuable as they will best understand what improvements are feasible.

### **3.4 Formulate and Make Recommendations**

Due to the unique nature of TransNamib, it is likely that our team will use a hybrid of all three proposed methods. Although each method has a different approach to collecting data, all three will provide areas for soft skill improvements. We will formulate recommendations for soft skill improvement based on current TransNamib training and our research in soft skills. We will rank each recommendation based on the following criteria

- Cost Effectiveness

- Ease of Implementation
- Company's Receptiveness
- Employee Support
- Company Cultural Implications
- Risk Analysis.

We chose these criteria based on our current knowledge of TransNamib's culture and ability to change. Once our project team has ranked the recommendations, we will choose the top two and present them to employees before providing final recommendations to TransNamib. These employees will be people with the ability to understand the impacts a change would have on TransNamib.

#### 3.4.1 Rank and Compare Recommendations

When we compare each recommendation, we will use a number ranking system. We will give each criteria a score between one and ten. A score of one indicates the criteria category is not fulfilled by the recommendation. A score of ten indicates the criteria category is completely fulfilled by the recommendation. We will then find the sum of each recommendation's scores, and the two recommendations with the highest score will be selected for further review.

Our project team selected each of the criteria keeping TransNamib's company culture and resources in mind. Cost effectiveness is crucial for any proposed recommendation for TransNamib. At this time TransNamib lacks monetary resources to implement costly recommendations. Our team must consider the ease of implementation for each recommendation as well. TransNamib is structured in a way that will not allow the company to use extensive amounts of time or manpower for implementation. Additionally, our team must consider both the company's receptiveness to the recommendation along with general employee's support. Both are crucial because upper management cannot implement a company-wide change without employee support. Finally, our team must analyze the risk of each recommendation. If a recommendation fails, we need to be sure it will not drastically set back the company. Table 5 displays how our team will rank each recommendation.

Solution	Cost Effective	Time to Implement	Ease of implementation	Level of Disruption	Effects on Culture	Company Support	Total
1	4	6	5	1	2	4	22
2	10	10	10	10	10	9	59
3	3	3	3	3	2	1	15
4	4	1	2	3	1	1	12
5	1	1	2	1	1	2	8

Table 5 Example Recommendations Ranking

In our second to last week at TransNamib, we will confer with the select few employees to solicit their input on our final recommendation. Once we reach a consensus, our team will construct a final proposal outlining our recommendations for soft skills improvement at TransNamib.

### 3.5 Conclusions

The main goal of this project is to analyze the soft skills of TransNamib employees in the rail operations sector to provide recommendations for improving manager and supervisor training. While completing this project the team will use the methodology and research above to meet the expectations of TransNamib.

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**APPENDIX A:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interacted With

Observation:

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interacted With

Observation:

-----

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interacted With

Observation:

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B:

Hello,

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the United States. We would like your permission to ask questions as part of an interview/survey for our research project. The purpose of our research is to provide an analysis of TransNamib's soft skills and recommend how to help strengthen soft skill practices in TransNamib. TransNamib will review and publish our analysis in our research paper. From this interview/survey, we hope to learn your opinions on TransNamib's soft skills. We will not publish any information with your name or any personal identifying factors.

1. How long have you been working at TransNamib?
2. What is your job description?
3. What do you like about TransNamib?
4. What do you think TransNamib does well?
5. What do you think TransNamib can improve upon?
6. What kind of training have you experienced at TransNamib?
7. Have you ever taken a course in soft skills or personal interactions?
8. Has TransNamib ever offered you a course in soft skills or personal interactions?

Thank you for your time and help.

Sincerely,  
John Frigo, Amelia Mattesen, Ryan Rigney, and Jenna Shea

## APPENDIX C

### Instructional Rounds to Analyze Soft Skills

John Frigo  
Amelia Melleson  
Ryan Rigney  
Jenna Shea

#### Welcome

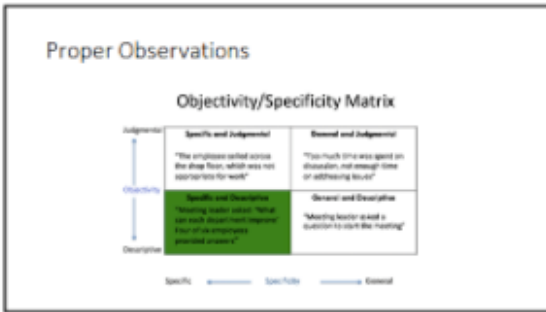
- Introductions
- What we are doing here

#### What are Soft Skills?



#### Instructional Rounds Mission

- What is it?
- Why is it effective?
- Why are we using it?



### Data Review

- Identify significant observations
- Look for things that are important/relevant to soft skills

### Team discussions

- Share findings
- Group the data
- Find trends
- Look to summarize the trends
- Find the roots of the problem

### Improvements

- Present team findings
- Create a vision
- Create a plan to achieve the vision



### Observe

- What will we be looking for?
- How long will we observe for?
- How will we record data?

## Lets get started

- Organization of teams

Department	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Marketing	Marketing	Marketing	Marketing	Marketing
Sales	Sales	Sales	Sales	Sales
Finance	Finance	Finance	Finance	Finance
Operations	Operations	Operations	Operations	Operations
HR	HR	HR	HR	HR
Legal	Legal	Legal	Legal	Legal
IT	IT	IT	IT	IT