Do Employers Need the Skills They Want? Evidence from Technical Work

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Abstract:

Changes in the modern workplace, brought about by technology and management innovations and by increased global competition, raise many concerns about the adequacy of workforce skills. In the U.S. and elsewhere, these concerns have led to new ideas about skills, in particular the need for "generic skills" like problem-solving, teamwork, and communications. Many employers and policymakers in the U.S. believe that these skills are necessary for work across most jobs and support school reforms to teach them. This article presents empirical evidence from a study in technical work which challenges conventional wisdom about skills and skill requirements and has broad implications for school reform.