

SkillBridge: A Pilot Report on Career Transitions for Public Sector Aspirants

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AT A GLANCE

We piloted SkillBridge, an online soft-skills and career-readiness program for public sector exam aspirants exploring private-sector careers. Among the 28 aspirants who completed training, ambitions around further exam attempts cooled while job-search activity rose sharply, with most participants applying more broadly and landing interviews.

Every year, millions of young people across India spend years preparing for public sector competitive exams, such as the UPSC and state PSCs. With selection rates exceptionally low, those who do not secure a position often struggle to translate their intense study into a resume, a professional network, or a clear career alternative. For many, particularly first-generation graduates, this transition into the private sector can be daunting and isolating.

To address this gap, we designed and piloted the **SkillBridge** program—a targeted online training program for public sector aspirants interested in private sector careers. Implemented in partnership with ETASHA Society, an established skilling NGO, the program focused on soft skills, career navigation, and workplace readiness that exam preparation alone does not teach. Between March and June 2026, 28 aspirants completed the training and baseline and follow-up surveys. This report outlines the program’s design and key lessons from this experience.

Participant Profiles

SkillBridge targeted college graduates who had prepared for or taken public sector exams, relying on organic networks of aspirants, students, and young professionals, Telegram/WhatsApp groups, and word-of-mouth outreach. Out of 256 initial sign-ups, 40 participants enrolled in the program and 28 successfully completed the training.

Among those who completed the training, the average age was 26 years. Women made up 32% of the group. While all participants had a bachelor’s degree, a further 46% held a master’s degree. Despite their high educational attainment, labor market attachment lagged: a quarter had never worked for pay, only 11% were employed full-time at entry, and those out of work faced an average 1-year gap since their last role. Instead, participants had dedicated significant time to the public sector, averaging 9 exam attempts over 3.4 years.

Program Curriculum and Delivery

The program ran for 4 weeks for a total of 72 hours, covering five key areas:

01

Identity & Direction

Reframing exam preparation as valuable experience rather than wasted time, while building clear career goals and confidence.

03

Emotional Intelligence & Workplace Conduct

Active listening, self-control, empathy, handling conflict, and managing workplace relationships with bosses and peers.

02

Communication Skills

Practice in structured speaking under pressure, workplace writing, storytelling, and presentation skills.

04

Workplace Readiness

Time management, problem-solving, professional etiquette, and setting realistic expectations about corporate pay and work culture.

05

Job Search & Career Decisions

Hands-on job search tools (CVs, networking, interview practice) alongside research on exam outcomes to help candidates evaluate future exam attempts realistically.

The curriculum was based on three core ideas: CBT, to surface and challenge limiting beliefs (e.g., “I have nothing to put on a CV”); behavioral science, to close the intention-action gap by ending each lesson with a specific action plan; and adult learning to introduce topics when participants were emotionally ready for them.

What Participants Learned

Across focus groups conducted during and after the program, participants pointed to four key lessons:

01

Reframing Exam Years

Learning to position years of intense study as relevant, professional experience rather than lost time.

02

Rebuilding Confidence

Recovering from exam setbacks and speaking up: several self-described introverts said they finally felt comfortable initiating their job search.

03

Finding Community

Breaking the isolation of long exam cycles by connecting with a peer group that truly understood their shared journey.

04

Applying Practical Tools

Gaining frameworks they could use immediately, such as structured approaches to presentation delivery and workplace conflict resolution.

A follow-up survey conducted 1-3 months post-completion with all 28 candidates showed lasting behavioral shifts. Ambitions around competitive exams cooled, with participants reducing planned future attempts by an average of 1 exam. Instead, 79% searched for non-public sector jobs, adopting different search strategies: 77% proactively reached out to contacts for leads, 73% applied more broadly, and 64% actively prepared for interviews. These efforts yielded results:

73%

INTERVIEWED FOR A ROLE

68%

RECEIVED A JOB OFFER

39%

MOVED INTO PAID WORK

While admittedly non-causal, these early outcomes point to promising real-world progress for candidates navigating the transition.

Looking Ahead

This pilot demonstrated that a short, focused program can meaningfully shift both the practical skills and confidence of exam aspirants transitioning to the private sector. Building on these initial results, we are now looking to scale SkillBridge—improving future iterations by introducing outside professionals for career exposure and evaluating impacts across larger candidate pools using a randomized controlled trial.

Get in Touch

Interested in partnering or learning more? Reach out to us and visit our website: <https://www.skillbridge-p2p-soft.com/>

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