

# Nothing Soft About Soft Skills: Empowering Future Talent



Figure 1: RCD staff with the Soft Skills Workshop attendees at the SAMRC Medicina Campus

There’s nothing “soft” about the skills that drive collaboration, leadership, and resilience—the very skills that help one navigate complex working relationships or communicate their research ideas or findings with passion and clarity. “Soft skills” are the backbone of effective teamwork, leadership, and innovation – a reality the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) brought to life through a dynamic Soft Skills Workshop held on 13–14 May 2025 at its Medicina Campus Conference Centre in Cape Town.

Jointly hosted by the SAMRC’s Research Capacity Development (RCD) division and the Biomedical Research and Innovation Platform (BRIP), the two-day workshop brought together 37 master’s and doctoral students to strengthen their non-technical skills essential for research excellence and workplace success. This interactive workshop was facilitated by Dr Abeda Dawood and Dr Lindokuhle Ndlandla, who led participants through a series of engaging sessions covering self-awareness, communication, leadership, time management, resilience, emotional intelligence, and basic financial literacy. The sessions offered practical and hands-on experiences through role-playing scenarios, group discussions, and peer feedback sessions that simulated real-life challenges one might face in the workplace. Participants were also encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and actively apply new concepts throughout the training.

“Soft skills are the foundation of professional success. They shape how we lead, collaborate, and navigate challenges—and are just as critical as technical knowledge,” said Dr Dawood. By integrating soft skills training into its capacity development initiatives,

SAMRC is helping to prepare the next generation of scientists not just to succeed—but to lead, Dr Ndlandla added.

Participants rated the workshop highly, with an average score of 8 out of 10, citing its relevance, engaging facilitation, and the safe, supportive learning environment. Many found the sessions on growth mindset, financial literacy, conflict resolution, and public speaking especially useful. Participants also showed a strong interest in continued mentorship, follow-up workshops, and more in-depth sessions on topics like mental health, career planning, personal financial planning and leadership. “This experience was not just about learning soft skills—it was about reshaping how we see ourselves as researchers, leaders, and change agents,” said one participant.

This workshop will be offered as part of the personal development skills training offered at the Centre for Advanced Training and Innovative Research (CATIR) in Pretoria, the new training facility to develop the next generation of South African scientists. This highlights that as the demand for well-rounded, emotionally intelligent professionals grows, the message is clear: there is nothing soft about soft skills. These skills not only enhance individual career trajectories but also help build a workforce that is more adaptable and resilient.