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SOFT SKILLS - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on 21st Century Education Policy emphasizes that, students need to gain a deeper conceptual understanding of the world through learning, rather than superficial facts and procedures for a successful life and work in the knowledge society. Greater adoption of technology will mean in-demand skills across jobs change over the next five years.

Critical thinking and problem-solving top the list of skills that employers believe will grow in prominence in the next five years. But newly emerging this year are skills in self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility.



Source: „Future job report”, World Economic Forum, October 2020.

Full report is available [HERE](#)

HARD SKILLS VS SOFT SKILLS

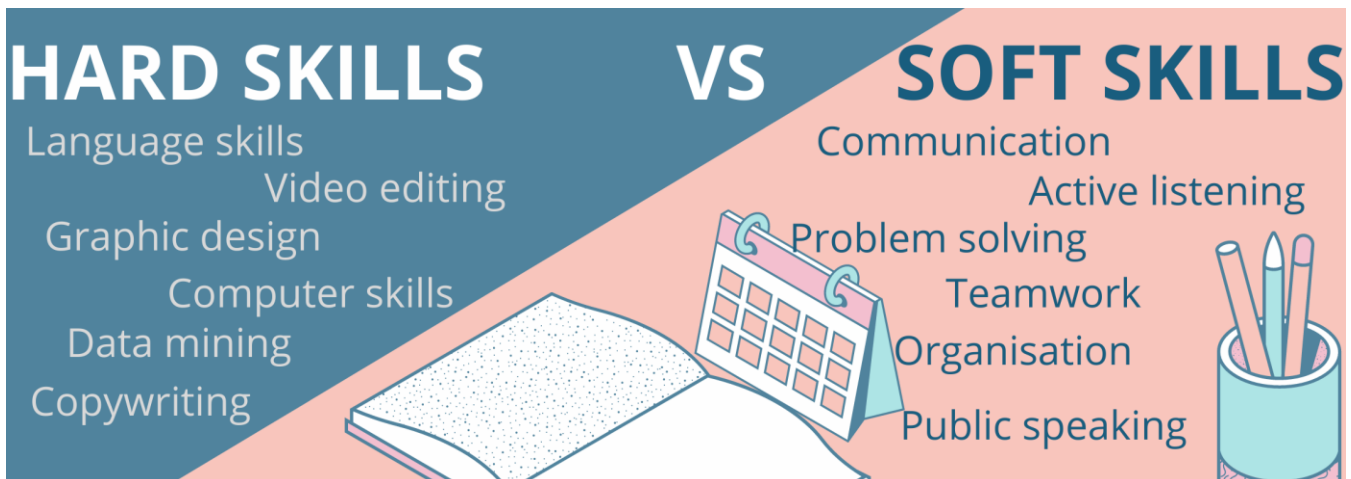


Skills are abilities and capacities to organize and execute processes and abilities of individuals to apply knowledge in a responsible and appropriate way to achieve a goal. Skills are a holistic part of the concept of competencies, which includes the mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that help to achieve set goals or demands (OECD Report, „Skills for 2030”, full report is available [HERE](#)).

„Hard Skills” are methods or knowledge that an individual acquires at school or at the workplace. Examples of "hard skills" include IT programming languages, the nurse's ability to inject, the teacher's ability to teach a 1st grade student to read etc.

Interdisciplinary skills, sometimes referred to as “soft skills”, are related to personality, human skills and work ethics. Most of these skills that an individual possesses are not taught directly but have been developed through life experiences both in the family, at school and through communication with friends as well.

In order to develop the abilities and skills needed in the future, an individual needs to have a good understanding of his or her personality, be aware of his or her strengths and weaknesses, and make a conscious decision about developing his or her skills and abilities.



More about differences between Soft skills and Hard skills available [HERE](#)
[Watch VIDEO HERE](#)



PERSONALITY

An individual whose actions are in harmony with his or her abilities, beliefs, values, and sense of identity or mission is generally considered to be efficient. An individual's I-concept or personal identity includes his/her differing roles, including personal traits and abilities. Identity is formed and developed as a person grows through the process of "observation and reflection". Belonging to different groups that are significant for him/her forms the individual's social identity.

A particular personality trait, ability or skill may manifest itself to a greater or lesser extent for each and every individual. For example, one person is more hardworking, while another less so. Some people manage to communicate easily and effortlessly, while others have certain difficulties. For some of us, solving math problems is difficult, at the same time someone else is able to solve them very easily.

If research were to be carried out requesting final grades students of a country to sing a popular folk song and their achievements (melodic accuracy and knowledge of the lyrics) were assessed, the results could most likely be illustrated as a "normal distribution" (refer fig. 1).

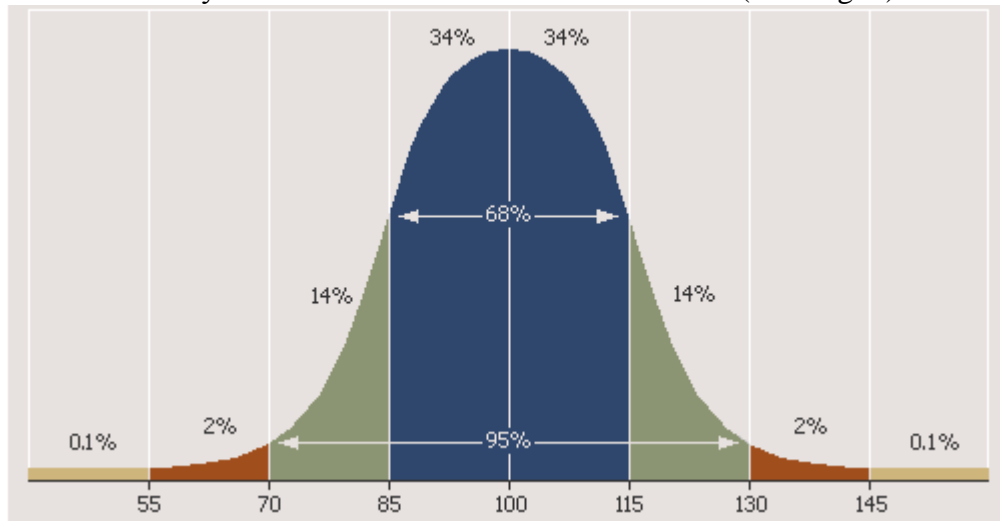
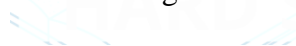


Figure 1: Distribution of assessment of a trait (ability, skill)

[Source](#)

Around 70% of respondents would show a more or less similar "normal" or average result. Around 15% would sing the song worse than other respondents as their ability to sign would be lower. This could have been influenced by a number of different factors - maybe some congenital language defects, poor musical ear or the inability to learn the lyrics. However, the fact that they are not able to sing the song as well as most students of their age does not mean that while assessing other skills for the same respondents they could not be on the other side of the distribution where the majority, those with the most pronounced skills, are in illustrated in the figure. In the case of the song there would also be around 15% of the respondents who would have higher skills in singing songs, respondents who most likely would have trained and developed their innate abilities and skills and were able to deliver a high quality performance.

Each individual – his or her abilities, skills and traits could possibly be described with thousands of features. Each person possesses a large set of characteristic features (around 15% of all features) that place the individual in the right side of the distribution illustrated in figure 1 – those skills or abilities that enable the individual to perform better, be more efficient, more talented and more ingenious than the rest.



VS SOFT SKILLS



Unfortunately, each individual is also characterized by around 15% of skills, abilities, traits that place the individual in the left side of the distribution - those skills or abilities that make the individual to perform poorer, less efficient and not as talented as the rest.

The remaining 70% of set of skills, abilities and traits of each and every individual position him/her at the centre of the distribution – “normal” set of skills similar to the skills of other individuals.

The works of Nobel laureates in Economics Daniel Kahneman and Richard Thaler are based on the dimension characterising personality thinking system.

According to this dimension, people of system 1 who make decisions automatically, quickly, without mental effort (or with minimal effort), without voluntary control and perception, easily change their minds. They have little idea what will happen in the future. Such people often need protection against those who exploit their weaknesses (do not read "small print" in contracts, easily succumb to basic advertising, etc.). In turn, people of the 2nd system are able to actively use rational thinking, pay attention to the mental activities related to effort. People make decisions consciously, plan their future, take responsibility for their decisions. Click [HERE](#) for further information.

Should one make decisions quickly and impulsively or think and consider everything? There is no one right answer to this question, both have their advantages and disadvantages. You can read more about this topic and the typical "mistakes of quick thinking" in Daniel Kahneman's book "*Thinking Fast and Slow*".

If a person consciously sets a goal to improve oneself, it is up to him/her to decide what to focus on - to identify and develop his/her talents or to train his/her not so well-developed skills and abilities.

PERSONALITY TYPES

A personality trait is a relatively stable way in which a person feels and expresses one's emotions, thinks and behaves. The uniqueness of each person is formed by a different combination of personality traits characteristic of each individual and their mutual interaction. Using the fact that different traits form the normal distribution described above, two-factor models are often used for easier visual perception, allowing differences in personalities to be demonstrated clearly. However, it is important to remember that the 2 traits that are considered in any particular model may not be the dominating ones in that particular personality, because, as already mentioned for around 70% of the people the relevant dimensions would not be expressed but would exist at the “normal” level.

The most popular is Hans Eysenck's two-factor personality model, which considers two dimensions of personality: extraversion-introversion and neuroticism - emotional stability. Click [HERE](#) for further information.

Extremely extroverted people are characterized by sociability, openness, loudness, impulsivity, carelessness, activity, vigour, insistence, domination, search for impressions, while pronounced introverts are characterized by shyness, silence, sociability, emotional reservedness, restraint in contact, avoidance of impulsive actions and risk and a preference for a well-organized life.

People with high neuroticism are characterized by nervousness, anxiety, sense of guilt, low self-esteem, irrationality, gloomy mood, emotional instability, shyness, frequent mood swings, tendency to become sad, upset, and emotionally sensitive. Emotionally stable people are characterized by calmness, pronounced stress tolerance, resilience, maturity and a good ability to adapt.



The four personality types identified by Eysenck are similar to the temperament types already put forward by Hippocrates. High neuroticism and high extraversion correspond to the choleric temperament type. High neuroticism and low extraversion correspond to the melancholic type. Low neuroticism, high extraversion is characteristic of the sanguine type, and low neuroticism, low extraversion is characteristic of the phlegmatic temperament type.

Eysenck's two-dimensional personality model can be used to gain insight into one's personality, but both Eysenck and other researchers have acknowledged that in order to more precisely analyse personality, it is necessary to supplement the model with other factors.

For example, the developers of the fairly widely used [MBTI or Myers-Briggs type indicator](#) have based the instrument on Karl Gustav Jung's findings and name four basic personality factors or dichotomies: orientation of consciousness (extraversion or oriented towards the external or introversion or oriented towards oneself), type of information selection (empirical or based on your worldview), the way decisions are made (rational or emotional), and the planning of activities (planning or guided by circumstances).

[Cattell's model of 16 personality factors](#), according to which the features that can be used to describe a personality are as follows: closedness-openness, low intelligence-high intelligence, emotional instability-emotional resilience, deference-assertiveness, carelessness-responsibility, dishonesty- high morale, insecurity-courage, cruelty-softness, suspicion-trust, dreaminess-practicality, naivety-reasonable calculation, tendency to guilt-self-confidence, frigidity-plasticity, dependence on group independence, low behavioural self-control - high behavioural self-control, tension-release.

One of the most recognized theories of modern personality traits is the [Big Five model developed by Costa & McCrae](#), which describes personality in five dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Each of these features has six sub-factors. Neuroticism is characterized by nervousness, insecurity, self-doubt, emotionality, anxiety, self-pity and sadness. Extraversion is characterized by self-confidence, activeness, sociability, communicativeness, and relationship orientation. Agreeableness is characterized by sincerity, kindness, helpfulness, willingness to help and cooperate, ability to forgive. Conscientiousness is characterized by discipline, organization, responsibility, diligence, perseverance, purposefulness. Openness to experience is characterized by imagination, creativity, wide interests, and curiosity.

HOW TO IDENTIFY THE NEED FOR CHANGE?

To make a decision about the need for change, the model developed by Professor Bill Burnett - *5 steps to designing the life you want* would be useful.

Watch Bill Burnet's TEDx speech [VIDEO](#).

The same person may behave very differently in different circumstances, even the most in-depth research of personality does not allow us to predict a person's actions in a real situation with 100% certainty. However, in order to understand oneself, make the most conscious decisions about one's own improvement, changes in one's life, such research could be useful.

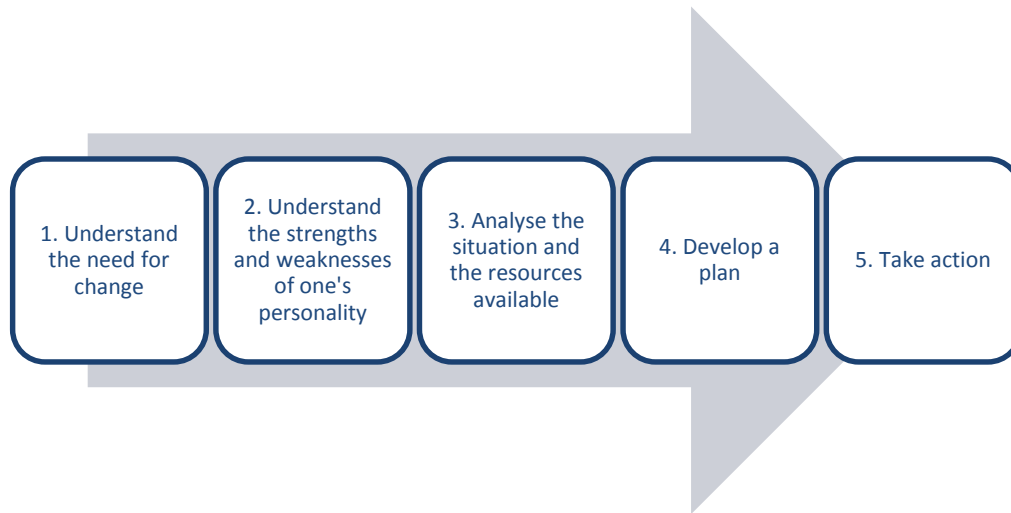


VS

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We offer a 5-step method that can help you decide on the need to consciously improve certain aspects of your personality.



Step 1. Understand the need for change.

The person realizes the need for change both by receiving external encouragements (feedback from friends, parents, teachers, direct managers), by being aware of his / her insufficient ability to do something, and by feeling stressed about how to succeed in realizing an idea.

Step 2. Understand the strengths and weaknesses of one's personality.

Many personality research tests are currently available online, along with the interpretation of test results. Each individual can use it as an insight into their personality. However, it should be remembered that professional personality research tools are the work tools of certified psychologists.

On this [website](#) you will find a summary of personality theories and research.

On this [website](#) you can learn more about personality tests used in psychology.

You can get additional information and identify the strengths and weaknesses of your personality online using these links:

Tests for identifying your temperament:

<https://www.temperamentquiz.com/>

<https://www.strategicaction.com.au/keirse-temperament-sorter-questionnaire>

JUNG'S PERSONALITY TEST:

<https://www.123test.com/jung-personality-test/>

DISC personality test:

<https://www.123test.com/disc-personality-test/>

Cattell's 16 personality factors test:

<https://psycho-tests.com/test/cattell-16pf>

Big Five personality test:

<https://www.123test.com/personality-test/>

Step 3. Analyse the situation and resources available.

Using the [logical levels model](#) developed by Robert Dilts, it is possible to better understand the different levels at which we experience our world. The [logical level model](#) is easy to use for



understanding and being aware of the need for change in order to decide on the goal that a person wants to achieve and in order to choose specific actions.

When analysing resources, it is also necessary to think about whether it would be possible to use a conversation with a counsellor, personal development specialist, psychologist as a resource. Perhaps a conversation with someone who has already dealt with a similar situation or is currently dealing with it would be useful.

Step 4. Develop a plan.

Research shows that people who consciously set goals value their happiness higher when they achieve them than those who have also achieved the same goal, but this has not happened as a result of a conscious decision. It is important to consciously set short term and long term goals, to create a conscious plan. It must be remembered that goals must be specific, measurable and achievable.

Step 5. Take action.

In order to stimulate the introduction of new habits and ensure the continuation of new activities in the long run, the plan must provide for "small milestones", at which a person awards himself a small "prize" (which, of course, will be completely individual). In order to make it easier to start the implementation of the plan, it is recommended to take at least a small step in its implementation at the moment of accepting the plan (if you decide to start going to the swimming pool, then you should call immediately and arrange the clothes that you need to take to the pool. If you have decided to develop your communication skills under the guidance of a specific consultant, then you should find the consultant's contacts and write a message immediately).

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES?

The need for a paradigm shift in education is a global issue. If in the past good education was considered as *knowing a lot*, then today the goal of education is to *understand the essence and be able to apply the knowledge*. The knowledge base should not be divided according to the principle of separate subjects and courses, but should be oriented towards *transversal* or interdisciplinary skills. The student must be able to apply knowledge, skills and express attitudes in a complex way, solving problems in changing real life situations (*Education 2030*).

To a certain extent, a modern teacher becomes a student's personal development coach, helping the student not only to acquire certain knowledge, but also promoting the student's desire to be aware of how to learn what he/she would put into practice, what soft skills are needed to make it more effective.

While defining the goal and task of a specific study course, it is necessary to include the conscious development of the student's soft skills as an important task.

When creating the traditional feedback on what has been learned and understood in the lesson, it is necessary to encourage students to analyse issues such as:

- What soft skills are needed to apply what was acquired into practice?
- How do I assess my own personal level of these necessary soft skills at present?
- What can I do to raise the level of these soft skills?

When analysing group work on any specific phenomenon that is being learned, during the feedback it is necessary to encourage students to assess their soft skills, which were necessary to complete the specific learning task.



In order to promote students' conscious desire to develop soft skills, it would be useful to narrate the experiences of people who have been able to effectively implement the relevant professional or academic knowledge using their soft skills.

