

## Modern reality - soft skills

By Daina Škuškovnika

**Summary:** 1. Introduction – 2. The role of soft skills in modern society. – 3. The modern educator – student's personality development coach. – 4. Conclusions.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to provide an insight into recent research on the role of soft skills in modern society. Different approaches to defining soft and hard skills and its typology are considered. The article examines the experience of different countries and universities in developing soft skills in the learning process. It is emphasized that the development of successful soft skills requires strategic planning and interaction at five levels: national, institutional, curricula, extracurricular activities and the individual level. The second chapter of the article deals with teaching/learning methods used for teacher-student interaction. At the end of the article, the 5-step method proposed within the ERASMUS+ Strategic partnership project DISCOM is described, which can help students decide about the need to consciously improve certain aspects of their personality. This small-scale study was conducted using the analysis of scientific literature and the author's professional experience.

### 2. THE ROLE OF SOFT SKILLS IN MODERN SOCIETY

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on education policies for the 21st century emphasizes that in order to live and work in the knowledge society, students need to gain a deeper conceptual understanding of the world through learning, rather than superficial facts and procedures. The World Economic Forum (2020)<sup>1</sup> points out that greater robotization and the rapid introduction of new technologies over the next five years will mean a demand for new skills in the workplace. A study by McKinsey estimates that up to 30 percent of the hours worked globally could be automated by 2030. It is projected <sup>2</sup> that during the period 2015 – 2030 total spending on technology will increase by more than 50%. About half the spending would be on information technology services. This means that by 2030, this trend could create 20 to 50 million jobs worldwide. It is estimated,<sup>3</sup> that global consumption could grow by USD 23 trillion between 2015 and 2030, most of which will come from the fast-growing consumer economy. The impact of these new consumers will be felt not only in the countries where the income is

---

<sup>1</sup> The World Economic Forum (2020), These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/>

<sup>2</sup> Manyika J., Lund S., Chui M., Bughin J., Woetzel J., Batra P., Ko R. & Sanghvi S., (2017), *Jobs lost, jobs gained: What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills, and wages*. McKinsey Global Institute <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages#>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

generated, but also in the economies that export to these countries. The impact of income growth alone on consumer goods alone is projected to create 250 to 280 million new jobs, with an additional 50 to 85 million jobs resulting from higher health and education spending.

Employers talk about the lack of skills and competencies of college and university graduates necessary to optimise work performance: lack of skills to communicate, work in a team, solve problems and critically evaluate information. The majority of professions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will need knowledge and understanding of globalization and the ability to communicate with different cultures. To promote the enterprise's competitiveness employers<sup>4</sup> are in the search for candidates, who are fluent in English. The necessary 21<sup>st</sup> century skills include learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live.<sup>5</sup>

The new knowledge economy<sup>6</sup> resulting from technological development requires graduates in all disciplines with flexible thinking and transferable skill sets, who are able to innovate and adapt to a dynamic work environment. Consequently, universities need to develop the transferable general skills needed for graduates to advance their careers and foster economic innovation and social development.

## 2.1. Hard and soft skills

Skills are the ability and capacity to carry out processes and to be able to use one's knowledge in a responsible way to achieve a goal. Skills are part of a holistic concept of competency, involving the mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands.<sup>7</sup>

Hard skills are methods or knowledge that a person acquires at school or in the workplace. Soft skills are interpersonal characteristics, also known as human skills, and personal characteristics that a person possesses. Soft skills are related to personality, human skills and work ethics. The majority of soft skills an individual possesses are not taught directly but are developed through life experience both in the family, at school and in communication with friends. A study on the role of soft skills in the workplace conducted in 2010 (Klaus, 2010) found that 75% of long-term success at work depends on people skills, while only 25% depend on technical knowledge. Hard skills contribute only 15% to success, whereas 85% of success is related to soft skills.

---

<sup>4</sup> Zainuddin S.Z., Pillai S., Dumanig F.P. & Phillip A., (2019), *English language and graduate employability*. Education and Training 61(2) pp. 79-93; DOI: 10.1108/ET-06-2017-0089

<sup>5</sup> Zubaidah, S. (2016), *21st century skills: skills taught through learning (in Bahasa)*. Seminar Nasional Pendidikan, 2(2), pp. 1-17

<sup>6</sup> Bunney, D., Sharplin, E., & Howitt, C. (2015), *Generic skills for graduate accountants: The bigger picture, a social and economic imperative in the new knowledge economy*. Higher Education Research & Development, 34(2), 256-269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.956700>

<sup>7</sup> OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/skills/Skills\\_for\\_2030\\_concept\\_note.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/skills/Skills_for_2030_concept_note.pdf)

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Equivalent names for soft skills</i>
Australia	Generic graduate attributes, generic skills, key competencies, employability skills
UK	Key skills, core skills, life skills, key transferable skills, cross competencies
USA	Necessary skills, workplace know-how
New Zealand	Essential skills
Germany	Schlüsselkompetenzen (key competencies), Übergreifende kompetenzen (general competencies)
Denmark	Nøglekompetence (key competencies)
France	Compétences transversales (transversal competencies)
Spain	Competencias generales (general competencies)
Vietnam	Kỹ năng sống (life skills), kỹ năng mềm (soft skills)

Figure 1: Terms referring to soft skills in some countries<sup>8</sup>

Examining and comparing students' and employers' perceptions of the importance of soft skills in different European countries, it was found that 86% of respondents indicate that there has been an increased emphasis on soft skills over the last 5-10 years and that companies consider them more important than students' / graduates' academic knowledge. In addition, significant differences were found in the different levels of soft skills priorities.

Several studies indicate that despite the universal perception that soft skills are very much needed in modern society, soft skills terminology and measurement tools vary widely across organizations and academia, with no standard definitions or assessment methods. (refer figure 1). As can be seen from figure 1, the most widely used concepts are key competencies (Australia, Germany, Denmark) and life skills (UK, Vietnam). An analysis of German job advertisements revealed<sup>9</sup> that the most commonly used terms when looking for employees were working style, teamwork, communication skills and flexibility (Arbeitsweise, Teamfähigkeit, Kommunikationsfähigkeit and Flexibilität). Apart from the terms listed in figure 1, the following terms could also be found in literature: 21<sup>st</sup> century skills,<sup>10</sup> transferable skills,<sup>11</sup> future work skills,<sup>12</sup> Soft Skills for Talent,<sup>13</sup> Skills for Social Progress<sup>14</sup> etc., which could cause confusion – what exactly is being discussed, as well as confusion on what really should be understood by the use of one or the other term.

## 2.2. Soft skills typology

A diversity in soft skills typology could also be observed, which is often linked to changes in the labour market. In 2012, business executives emphasized the following skills

<sup>8</sup> Tran Le Huu Nghia, (2021), *Building Soft Skills for Employability. Challenges and Practices in Vietnam*. Routledge. ISBN 9781032089508

<sup>9</sup> Kozhanova, N. V. (2021), *Language peculiarities of "soft skills" in German electronic texts of vacancy advertisements*. Vestnik of North-Eastern Federal University Named After M.K. Ammosov. 82 (2), p39-46. DOI: 10.25587/p6523-9839-2389-x

<sup>10</sup> Ananiadou K. & Claro M., (2009), *21st Century Skills and Competences for New Millennium Learners in OECD Countries*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/19939019>

<sup>11</sup> Eportfolio (2011), <http://www.eportfolio.eu/organisations/rpic-vip>

<sup>12</sup> IFTF (2010), *The Future is a High Resolution Game: The 2010 Map of the Decade*. <https://www.iftf.org/our-work/global-landscape/ten-year-forecast/2010-ten-year-forecast/2010-map-of-the-decade/>

<sup>13</sup> Manpower Group (2014), <https://www.manpowergroup.com/wcm/>

<sup>14</sup> OECD (2015) *Skills for Social Progress*. <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-for-social-progress-9789264226159-en.htm>

as the most important<sup>15</sup>: integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork and work ethics. On the other hand graduates<sup>16</sup> in 2020 named flexibility and adaptation skills and communication skills as essential soft skills required for work. Summarizing the research results, Ibrahim et al.<sup>17</sup> point out that the most frequently mentioned areas of soft skills are: 1) communication, 2) critical thinking, creative thinking and problem solving, 3) moral and professional ethics 4) teamwork 5) leadership 6) entrepreneurship and 7) emotional intelligence.

<i>Practical and physical skills</i>	<i>Cognitive and meta-cognitive skills</i>	<i>Social and emotional skills</i>
are those required to use and manipulate materials, tools, equipment and artefacts to achieve particular outcomes, include using new information and communication technology devices.	a set of thinking strategies that enable the use of language, numbers, reasoning and acquired knowledge. They comprise verbal, nonverbal and higher-order thinking skills, include critical thinking, creative thinking, learning-to-learn and self-regulation; the ability to recognise one's knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.	a set of individual capacities that can be manifested in consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that enable people to develop themselves, cultivate their relationships at home, school, work and in the community, and exercise their civic responsibilities and include empathy, self-efficacy, responsibility and collaboration.

Figure 2: Three different types of skills<sup>18</sup>

The OECD Learning Compass 2030 distinguishes between three different types of skills (see Figure 2): Practical and physical skills, Cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, Social and emotional skills. Physical and practical skills are essential for students' overall functioning and well-being. Components of cognitive skills<sup>19</sup> are interwoven with social and emotional skills so closely that it is difficult to tease apart and attribute the acquisition of these skills to one category or another. For instance, critical thinking involves questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions. This definition encompasses components of metacognition, social and emotional skills (reflection and evaluation within a cultural context), and even attitudes and values (moral judgement and integration with one's own goals and values), depending on the context. Critical thinking skills are also significantly affected by both traditional school experiences and by life experiences outside the classroom.

<sup>15</sup> Robles, M. M. (2012), Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*. 75 (4), p453-465

<sup>16</sup> Handayani, A. & Wienanda, W. K. (2020), *International mobility programs to improve soft skills of Vocational College students and alumni*. Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn) 14(3), pp. 377-384 ISSN: 2089-9823 DOI: 10.11591/edulearn.v14i3.14538

<sup>17</sup> Ibrahim, R., Boerhannoeddin, A. & Bakare, K. K., (2017), *The effect of soft skills and training methodology on employee performance*. European Journal of Training and Development. V41(4), p388-406: DOI:10.1108/EJTD-08-2016-0066

<sup>18</sup> OECD (2018), *The OECD Learning Compass 2030*. <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/>

<sup>19</sup> OECD (2016), *Preliminary reflections and research on knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for 2030*. <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/about/documents/PRELIMINARY-REFLECTIONS-AND-RESEARCH-ON-KNOWLEDGE-SKILLS-ATTITUDES-AND-VALUES-NECESSARY-FOR-2030.pdf>

While cognitive skills have also long been considered the most important determinants of success in employment, recent studies show<sup>20</sup> that social and emotional skills also directly affect occupational status and income. In fact, social and emotional skills can be equally – and in some cases even more – important as cognitive skills in determining future employment.

### 2.3. Soft skills development opportunities in tertiary education

According to The OECD Learning Compass 2030 the future conceptual learning system will enable students to implement transformative competencies to help them be competent and, if necessary, flexible and ready for change. The vast majority of business leaders<sup>21</sup> (94%) now expect employees to pick up new skills on the job. Respondents to the Future of Jobs Survey estimate that around 40% of workers will require reskilling of six months or less, but that number is higher for those in the consumer industry and in the health and healthcare industry. Training will be delivered internally, according to 39% of employers. But, as Professor Schwab noted, this will be supplemented by online learning platforms (16% of training) and external consultants (11% of training).

Understanding the nature of skills<sup>22</sup> is essential for the successful implementation of these skills in the context of higher education. Bunney et al.<sup>23</sup> point out that the issue of general skills of university students needs to be addressed from a systemic perspective, across national and disciplinary boundaries. Based on the analysis of research and theories related to the implementation of education policy in different countries around the world, four levels for the implementation of conceptual foundations of soft skills in higher education institutions can be distinguished<sup>24</sup>:

- 1) National level: implementation of soft skills in the general context
- 2) Institutional level: Specific mechanisms and strategies for soft skills policy implementation
- 3) Curricula level: setting goals for soft skills development and defining the dynamics of soft skills development
- 4) Extracurricular level: extracurricular programs to develop soft skills.

It is also necessary to emphasize a 5<sup>th</sup> level for the implementation of the conceptual basis of soft skills in everyday life - the conscious decision of each individual to take responsibility for the development of their skills. The acquisition of soft skills<sup>25</sup> is positively influenced by students' educational / professional experience, students' preparedness to

---

<sup>20</sup> OECD (n.d), Social and Emotional Skills: Well-being connectedness and success, [https://www.oecd.org/education/school/UPDATED%20Social%20and%20Emotional%20Skills%20-%20Well-being,%20connectedness%20and%20success.pdf%20\(website\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/school/UPDATED%20Social%20and%20Emotional%20Skills%20-%20Well-being,%20connectedness%20and%20success.pdf%20(website).pdf)

<sup>21</sup> The World Economic Forum (2020), *These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them.*

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/>

<sup>22</sup> Stewart, C., Marciniak, S., Lawrence, D. & Joyner-McGraw, L. (2020), *Thinkubator Approach to Solving the Soft Skills Gap*. American Journal of Management. 20 (2), pp78-89.

<sup>23</sup> Bunney, D., Sharplin, E., & Howitt, C. (2015). *Generic skills for graduate accountants: The bigger picture, a social and economic imperative in the new knowledge economy*. Higher Education Research & Development, 34(2), 256-269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.956700>

<sup>24</sup> Tran Le Huu Nghia (2021), *Building Soft Skills for Employability*. Challenges and Practices in Vietnam. Routledge. ISBN 9781032089508

<sup>25</sup> ElShaabany, M. M. (2021), *Does Accounting and Finance Courses Enable Soft Skill Learning? A Mediation Study*. World Journal of Education, 11(1) p42-50.



acquire the course and the desire to improve not only their academic and professional, but also personal skills.

Policies and programs to measure and improve socio-emotional skills vary considerably from country to country. The OECD report<sup>26</sup> provides an analytical synthesis of the importance of socio-emotional skills and proposes strategies to enhance them. It analyses the impact of skills on various indicators of individual well-being and social progress, covering as diverse aspects of our lives as education, labour market outcomes, health, family life, civic participation and life satisfaction. The report emphasizes that policy makers, schools and families facilitate the development of socio-emotional skills through intervention programs, teaching/learning and parenting practices.

Many projects are currently being implemented at the EU level with the aim of promoting the development of modern work skills of students and graduates, to educate and train flexible future specialists, who are ready to meet the changes. An example is the ERASMUS + Strategic Partnership project DISCOM,<sup>27</sup> under which this book was written. The development and implementation of the project is being carried out by 6 partner universities. This project focuses on soft skills such as: cooperation in a team, setting goals, time management, multicultural communication and conflict management.

The development of several soft skills takes place most naturally in a real communication process in communication with strangers using foreign language knowledge to learn or provide the necessary information. Determining the advantages of international mobility programs in the development of soft skills<sup>28</sup>, it has been found that particularly high development rates are observed in the development of language and communication and interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, cultural awareness and adaptability and openness.

The significance of tertiary education systems is the major concern in meeting the countries' economic and social requirements that are rising globally.<sup>29</sup> Given that most of the accreditation criteria for educational institutions are related to general competencies, it may be necessary to improve the accreditation processes in order to keep pace with the changing requirements of the labour market. Higher education institutions develop their own development strategies based on international standards and national education strategies.<sup>30</sup> Based on them, specialists in each specific professional field develop concepts that are the basis for the content of specific courses. For example a study by M.M. ElShaabany<sup>31</sup> confirms that students studying accounting and finance are interested in learning soft skills in addition to professional courses. 81% of the respondents<sup>32</sup> (accounting and finance students) recognize that group work and other communication skills acquired

---

<sup>26</sup> OECD (2015), *Skills for Social Progress*. <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-for-social-progress-9789264226159-en.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP «Development of Interdisciplinary skills for cooperation and conflict management»

<sup>28</sup> Handayani, A. & Wienanda, W.K. (2020), *International Mobility Programs to Improve Soft Skills of Vocational College Students and Alumni*. Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn), 14(3), p377-384

<sup>29</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2005), <https://www.oecd.org/about/34711139.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Mutalemwa, D. U. & Harold M.N., (2020), *Soft Skills as a Problem and a Purpose for Tanzanian Industry: Views of Graduates*. Economic Insights - Trends & Challenges. 4, p45-64.

<sup>31</sup> ElShaabany, M. M. (2021), *Does Accounting and Finance Courses Enable Soft Skill Learning? A Mediation Study*. World Journal of Education, 11(1) p42-50. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v11n1p42>

<sup>32</sup> ElShaabany, M. M. & Ahmad, M.U. (2020), *An EFA based stakeholder's perspective on Accounting and Finance courses*. Journal of Xidian University, 14(4), 1510-1524. <https://doi.org/10.37896/jxu14.4/174>

together with professional knowledge help them in their work. Graduates attributed<sup>33</sup> a higher level of importance to the following macro-areas of skills: task orientation, motivation, self-awareness, valorisation, and interpersonal relationships. In turn the MarLEM<sup>34</sup> project implementers<sup>35</sup> point out that in addition to professional knowledge, a great deal of attention is paid to the development of people skills in student training, which includes creativity and innovation; personal and team leadership; critical thinking and problem solving; decision making; intercultural communication and negotiation. In order to educate and train university graduates to meet modern requirements and be competitive in the labour market, it is necessary to purposefully integrate the process of hard and soft skills development during studies, using integrative and innovative teaching methods.

### 3. THE MODERN EDUCATOR –STUDENT’S PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT COACH

The need for a paradigm shift in education is a global reality. If in the past good education was treated as knowing a lot, then today the goal of education is to understand the essence and be able to use knowledge.<sup>36</sup> The knowledge base should not be divided according to the principle of separate subjects and courses, but should be oriented towards interdisciplinary or transversal skills. The student must be able to use knowledge, skills and express attitudes in a complex way, solving problems in changing real life situations.

#### 3.1. Teaching/learning methods for soft skills development

To a certain extent, the modern educator 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 the acquired will be put into practice, what soft skills are needed to make it more effective. Already while defining the goal and tasks of a particular study course, it is necessary to include the conscious development of the student's soft skills as an essential task and encourage students to evaluate their skills. Training students to become successful professionals requires the faculty to use a myriad of approaches.

Active learning is widely used in the development of soft skills, which requires students to engage and collaborate to create their own experience in the classroom; understand the problem, analyse it, discuss and based on the acquired knowledge, develop solutions that would be presented to the teacher and other students. Structured team activities<sup>37</sup> focused on solving realistic problems develop students' soft skills. Group discussions<sup>38</sup> are a robust way to teach not only communication skills to the students but also non-verbal communication, difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness, how

---

<sup>33</sup> Dolce V., Emanuel F., Cisi M., & Ghislieri C., (2019), *The soft skills of accounting graduates: perceptions versus expectations*. Accounting Education, DOI: 10.1080/09639284.2019.1697937

<sup>34</sup> Maritime Logistics Engineering and Management aims to develop a joint Master's program in Maritime Logistics Engineering and Management and to promote cooperation between Industry and Academia

<sup>35</sup> Geada Borda de Água, P. M., Dias da Silva, F. A., de Jesus Carrasqueira, M. & Manuel Modas Daniel, J. (2020), *Future of maritime education and training: blending hard and soft skills*. Scientific Journal of Maritime Research. 34(2), p345-353

<sup>36</sup> Right to education (2021), *Education 2030*. <https://www.right-to-education.org/issue-page/education-2030>

<sup>37</sup> Martin, T. N., (2019), *Review of Student Soft Skills Development Using the 5Ws/H Approach Resulting in a Realistic, Experiential, Applied, Active Learning and Teaching Pedagogical Classroom*. Journal of Behavioral & Applied Management. 19 (1), p41-57., Database: Academic Search Ultimate

<sup>38</sup> Sharma, S. & Shekhawat, S. (2020), *Learning Soft Skills Through Group Discussion*. IUP Journal of Soft Skills. 14 (4), p12-19. Business Source Ultimate

to be polite, how to put across your points, how to encourage the reticent participants. Group-Based Learning<sup>39</sup>: a blended mode where classroom-based training is also offered as a support and Game-Based Learning: playing games in simulated condition that form the basis of developing soft skills are often used. The role of Problem-based learning<sup>40</sup> in the development of soft skills while training students of the technical and other specialities is invaluable. This form of training enables not only enhancing students' conflict resolution skills, leadership and interpersonal skills, but also factors influencing the process; clarity of instruction, instructor personality, lead time, etc. One of the approaches that has been widely used in recent years is client-sponsored projects as an excellent method of transferring practical experience compared to using text case studies. Educators can use a variety of procedures to develop classroom experiences by integrating real business world pressures, coaching, and responsibilities to better prepare graduates for their careers and meet the skills expected by business leaders.<sup>41; 42</sup>

The development of soft skills became even more difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic. Universities were forced to adapt quickly to digital learning methods and the use of different platforms for e-learning. A method and tools<sup>43</sup> have been developed for the development of soft skills in students, which can be used in various subjects and as part of the strategy of higher education institutions. Although pilot studies are still ongoing, it is believed that this method will help integrate the development of soft skills through online learning and their link with the course subjects will help universities better train students for 21st century reality even after the Covid-19 crisis. Santora<sup>44</sup> recommends special training for e-coaches who, using e-coaching methods, can remotely develop the soft skills of individuals.

In order to promote student learning, it is also important to assess effective performance by providing quality feedback. When analysing group work on a specific phenomenon that is being acquired, during the feedback, it is necessary to encourage students to assess their soft skills, which were necessary to complete the specific learning task. When creating the traditional feedback on what has been learned and understood during the lesson, it is necessary to encourage students to analyse questions such as: What soft skills are needed to apply what has been learned in practice?; How do I currently assess my own level of development of the required soft skills?; What can I do to increase these soft skill levels?. A tool to evaluate team based learning in nursing has been developed and tested<sup>45</sup>, with the help of which it is possible to assess group synergies and team learning

---

<sup>39</sup> Manishankar, C. (2021), *The Dynamics of Soft Skills*. IUP Journal of Soft Skills. 15(1), p20-26., Database: Business Source Ultimate

<sup>40</sup> Deep, S., Ahmed, A., Suleman, N., Abbas, M., Nazar, U., Shaheen, H. & Razzaq, A. (2020), *The Problem-Based Learning Approach towards Developing Soft Skills: A Systematic Review*. Qualitative Report. 25 (11), p4029-4054, Database: Academic Search Ultimate

<sup>41</sup> Thompson, K., Conde, R., Gade, M. & Mims, T. (2021), *An Immersion Approach to Client-Sponsored Projects: Preparing Students with Soft Skills Required for Hiring -- Face to Face & Virtual Methods*. International Journal of Higher Education, 10(2) p42-61 Database: ERIC

<sup>42</sup> Jalinus, N., Syahril N. & Rahmat, A. (2020), *How Project-Based Learning and Direct Teaching Models Affect Teamwork and Welding Skills among Students*. Online Submission, International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. 11 (11) p85-111, Database: ERIC

<sup>43</sup> Naamati S.L., Meirovich A. & Dolev, N. (2020), *Soft Skills On-Line Development in Times of Crisis*. Romanian Journal for Multidimensional Education. 12, p122-129. DOI: 10.18662/rrem/12.1sup2/255

<sup>44</sup> Santora, J. C. (2021), *E-Coaching: Building Better Employee Soft Skills*. International Leadership Journal. 13 (1), p120-123

<sup>45</sup> Keister, K. J., Farra, S. L., Smith, S. J. & Bottomley, M. (2021), *Development of a Scale to Measure Synergy: A Tool to Evaluate Team-Based Learning in Nursing*. Nursing Education Perspectives (Wolters Kluwer Health). 42 (2), p87-92. DOI: 10.1097/01.NEP.0000000000000783



among nursing students. ePortfolio<sup>46</sup> is an innovative tool for promoting the development of soft skills. Three ePortfolios can be distinguished according to their main tasks: 1) e-portfolio to support learning; 2) an e-portfolio related to learning outcomes 3) an e-portfolio to present yourself in the world of work. The authors emphasize that the e-portfolio is a powerful tool to support the self-assessment of individuals throughout the studies with the provision of feedback from teachers and practice managers not only on academic or professional results, but specifically on the development of soft skills.

It should be noted that soft skills help to be dynamic, ready for change, to look for solutions in every situation.<sup>47</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic, employers had to make great use of both their own and employees' soft skills - to react quickly to the situation, often to restructure their activities, train employees to perform new duties, where it was important to understand the employee and apply the most appropriate type of communication and training.

### **3.2. Soft skills development - personal decision of every individual**

Students learn not only to obtain an academic degree, but get competencies and abilities that will be developed lifelong (Longlife Learning). Soft Skills acquisition, of course, does not occur only in the university, competencies are also obtained outside the school in everyday personal and social life and so one of the higher education missions is to create a desire in students to develop, improve and enhance their abilities throughout their lifetime. It has been found<sup>48</sup> that soft skills acquisition has a positive impact not only on students' education / professional experience, students' readiness to learn the course and willingness to improve academic and professional skills and abilities, but also on their readiness and motivation to develop soft skills. Ammani & Chitra<sup>49</sup> point out that the existence of soft skills helps create a good working environment for sharing knowledge, ideas and information. It is therefore necessary to focus on developing areas such as individual self-confidence, self-motivation, cooperation, empathy, interpersonal skills, listening skills, negotiation and humour. Work performance and the expression of other soft skills affects the individual's skills to realize and manage their stress. Even in situations that create stress, it is possible to gain strong positive and constructive energy that can be used productively, focusing on the goal. M. Tripathy<sup>50</sup> emphasizes that deliberate stress management in the workplace promotes wellbeing and emotional freedom.

To develop future capabilities and skills, every individual needs to understand their personality, be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and consciously decide on the development of their skills and abilities. If individuals consciously set the objective of improving themselves, it is up to them to decide what to focus on - the identification and development of their talents or on training skills and abilities that are not so well developed.

---

<sup>46</sup> Cimatti, B. (2016), *Assessment of soft skills and their role for the quality of organizations and enterprises*. International Journal for Quality Research 10(1) 97-130; DOI - 10.18421/IJQR10.01-05

<sup>47</sup> Manishankar C. (2021). *The Dynamics of Soft Skills*. IUP Journal of Soft Skills. 15(1), p20-26., Database: Business Source Ultimate

<sup>48</sup> ElShaabany, M. M. (2021). *Does Accounting and Finance Courses Enable Soft Skill Learning? A Mediation Study*. World Journal of Education, 11(1) p42-50. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v11n1p42>

<sup>49</sup> Ammani, S. & Chitra, V. B. (2020), *Blended Learning of Soft Skills Through Life Skills in an Organization*. IUP Journal of Soft Skills. 14 (4), p7-11.

<sup>50</sup> Tripathy, M. (2018), *Recognizing & Handling the Underlying Causes of Stress at Workplace: An Approach through Soft Skills*. International Journal of Management, Accounting & Economics. 5 (7), p619-632, Database: Business Source Ultimate

Nobel Prize winners in the economics, Kahneman<sup>51</sup> and Thaler<sup>52</sup> in their work describe thinking systems characterising two ways of personality thinking. People of system 1 take decisions automatically, quickly, without mental effort (or minimal effort), without conscious control, intuitively, easily changing their views. They have little sense of what may happen in the future. On the other hand people of system 2 are able to actively use rational thinking, pay attention to the effort-related mental actions. People of this system make deliberate decisions, plan their future and assume responsibility for their decisions. Individuals, who mostly use system 2 thinking make more informed, more rational decisions regarding self-improvement and the development of certain soft skills and most often - the decisions are also realized. Individuals, who in their thinking rely more on the confluence of circumstances may find it not only difficult to make decisions on the development of their soft skills but also in implementing such decisions. Therefore the educator's recommendations, planned and controlled soft skills development process during the whole study period play an important role. In order to make decisions regarding the necessity for change, it is possible to use the "5 steps to designing the life you want" model developed by Professor Bill Burnett.<sup>53</sup>

One and the same person, in different circumstances, may act very differently and even the most in depth personality research does not allow 100% certainty in predicting human behaviour in real life situations. However, such research could prove useful in order to understand oneself, make conscious decisions on self-improvement and changing one's life. Within the framework of the DISCOM project, a step 5 method is offered, which can help students consciously make decisions on the need to improve certain aspects of their personality (refer figure 3).

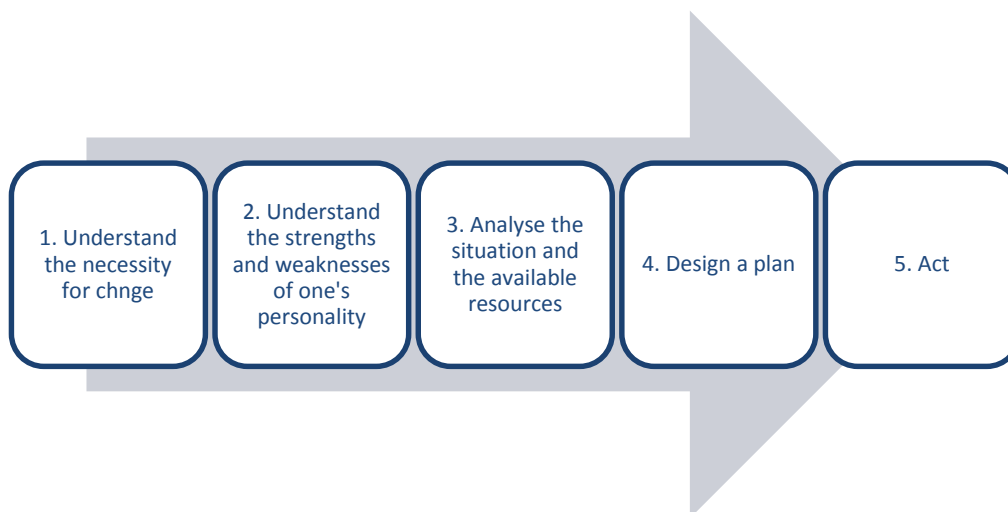


Figure 3. Model for making decisions regarding development of one's soft skills

<sup>51</sup> Kahneman, D. (2011), *Thinking, fast and slow*. London: Penguin Books. ISBN 9780141033570.

<sup>52</sup> Thaler, R. & Sunstein, C. (2008), *Nudge: Improving Decisions on Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. Yale University Press.

<sup>53</sup> Burnett, B. (2017), *5 steps to designing the life you want*. TED x Talks. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SemHh0n19LA>

Using this model<sup>54</sup>, it is possible to be continuously aware of the need for change, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of your personality, analyse the situation and available resources, develop a plan and not only make a decision, but also start to implement this decision. The person realizes the need for change (step 1) by receiving external encouragement (feedback from friends, parents, teachers, direct managers), by being aware of his / her insufficient ability to do something, and also by feeling stressed about how to succeed in realizing an idea. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of your personality (Step 2), you can use the online personality tests and get an interpretation of the test results. However, it should be remembered that professional personality research tools are the work tools of certified psychologists<sup>55;56</sup> and a direct conversation with a psychologist, career counsellor, personality development coach or any other type of certified specialist can help to make a qualitative analysis of the person's strengths and weaknesses, as well as a situational analysis, which will facilitate the development and implementation of the plan. When analysing the situation and the available resources (step 3), it may also be useful to talk to someone who has already dealt with a similar situation or is currently dealing with it. Logical Levels model<sup>57</sup>, which is extensively used in coaching, makes it easier to understand and be aware of the need for change in order to decide on the goal a person wants to achieve and choose the appropriate actions.

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. The conscious setting of short term and long term goals, the creation of a conscious plan, is a step that a person takes using system 2 thinking. While setting goals and developing a plan, keep in mind that goals must meet the SMART<sup>58</sup> criteria: S - Specific (or Significant); M - Measurable (or Meaningful); A - Attainable (or Action-Oriented); R - Relevant (or Rewarding); T - Time-bound (or Trackable). In order to stimulate the introduction of new habits and ensure the preservation of new activities in the long run, the plan must provide for "small peaks", at which a person gives himself a small "prize" (which, of course, will be completely individual). In order to make it easier to start the implementation of the plan (step 5), it is recommended to take at least a small step in its implementation already at the moment of accepting the plan.

To make soft skills development programs more effective, it is possible to use different approaches and methods that help learners do, know or understand.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills required include learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live. The new knowledge economy resulting from technological development requires graduates in all disciplines with flexible thinking and transferable skill sets that are able to innovate and adapt to a dynamic work environment. As a result, universities need to develop the transferable general skills necessary for graduates to advance their careers and foster economic innovation and social development. The student

---

<sup>54</sup> Škuškovnika, D. (2021), *SOFT SKILLS - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?* <http://skills.turiba.lv/files/ABOUT%20SOFT%20SKILLS%20.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Mental help (2021), *Introduction to Psychological Testing*. <https://www.mentalhelp.net/psychological-testing/>

<sup>56</sup> Personality Project (2018), *Personality Theory and Research*. <https://personality-project.org/>

<sup>57</sup> Dilts, R. (b.g.). *Agile, The Dilts Pyramid and the Changes*. <http://agile-space.com/en/agile-dilts-pyramid-changes/>

<sup>58</sup> Personal Goal Setting. Planning to Live Your Life Your Way (b.g.) <https://www.mindtools.com/page6.html>

must be able to use knowledge, skills and express attitudes in a complex way, solving problems in changing real life situations.

It is concluded that the implementation of the basics of soft skills should be taken care of at 5 levels: national, institutional, curricula, extracurricular activities and the individual level. Businesses and higher education institutions need to work together not only to raise students' awareness of the importance of soft skills, but also to make them individually responsible for acquiring and developing these essential skills in order to adapt to a constantly changing labour market. In order to promote student learning, it is important to use modern teaching/learning methods and also to provide quality feedback when assessing the effectiveness of student performance.

The article describes the 5-step method offered within the ERASMUS + Strategic Partnership DISCOM project, which can help students make decisions regarding the need to consciously improve certain aspects of their personality. Using this model, it is possible to be aware of the need for change, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of one's personality, analyse the situation and available resources, develop a plan and not only make a decision, but also start to implement this decision.