

MODULE 1 | WEEK 01 - ACTIVITY 01



In this first week of the course, please read the document “the value of soft skills in the labour market” in the next page and pay attention to attitudes and behaviours in your professional setting.

FOR CERTIFICATION ONLY

Send your reflexions on the following points:

- 1) How would you define your “mindset”?
- 2) What soft skills would you define as most important for your professional success?
- 3) If you had influence on the strategies of the Institution where you work or study, how would you promote the development of a “growth mindset” and of soft skills?

The value of “soft skills” in the labour market



Nowadays' workplace is constantly changing due to increasing knowledge and technology. Individuals must be able to adapt to different working environments and new ways of thinking. A broad set of cognitive and affective skills have been designated as “twenty first century skills” and were grouped in three clusters: i) cognitive skills - nonroutine problem solving, critical thinking, systems thinking; ii) interpersonal skills - complex communication, social skills, teamwork, cultural sensitivity, dealing with diversity; and iii) intrapersonal skills: self-management, time management, self-development, self-regulation, adaptability, executive functioning (Koenig, 2011). These skills have also been referred as personal success skills, encompassing the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies that individuals draw on to shape their future and thrive in the 21st century workforce throughout their adult lives (Shechtman, 2016).

The concept that different types of skills are needed in the workplace was introduced in the early seventies to distinguish work expertise - hard skills, from job related skills involved in managing people – soft skills. Since then, the term “soft skills” has been widely used to address all kinds of skills related to interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities. Other terms have also been used such as transferable skills, transversal skills, emotional intelligence skills, employability skills. Recently, the term CORE skills (Competences in Organizational and Relational Effectiveness), was proposed to substitute “soft skills”. The authors argued that some negative associations with the term “soft” may hinder the importance of these skills for workplace success (Parlamis & Monnot, 2019).

Evidence that similar sets of transferable skills are important in different working environments has been building from research studies and study cases over the years. A study that analysed the requested skills within job advertisements in data science and data engineering from 2010 to 2016, highlighted 16 “hard skills” and 29 “soft skills”. The most prominent requested skills were four soft skills: communication, writing, organizational skills and customer service. Other prominent skills were: research, budgeting and computer skills (technical and scientific skills), along with soft skills such as supervisory skills, project management, teamwork or collaboration, problem solving, planning and building effective relationships (Borner et al., 2018). In business soft skills are also considered a very important attribute of job applicants, with 10 soft skills perceived as most important by business executives: integrity, communication, courtesy,

responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic (Robles, 2012).

In research environment, the five skills ranked higher by 46 worldwide highly cited research team leaders were: inspiring moral trust, emotional intelligence, strategic thinking, empower talents of others, and flexibility (more than 85% of research leaders ranking as always important or often important) (; Gibert, Tozer, & Westoby, 2017). Awareness of these skills, as well as learning, can be powered by group training more efficiently than by self-analysis, and two to three days of training per year is suggested. Most research leaders also believed they could assess these skills in job applicants, thus being aware of your own skills, and being able to articulate them, may be an advantage in job interviews (Gibert et al., 2017). Furthermore, soft skills such as responsibility, initiative, and decision making, have been linked to higher satisfaction with career progress in academia, due to higher ability to adapt, manage difficult situations, evaluate alternative solutions as learning opportunities, and overall positive attitude (Gurbuz, Ergun, & Teraman, 2016).

In food industry, urban food systems professionals pointed communication skills, mainly listening effectively, and team-work skills as the most important skills in professionals working in the food area (Artavia-Rojas, Shoemaker, Favor, Rivard, & Pliakoni, 2019). According to a recent publication of the European Food Safety Authority, data, methods, and people are the basic elements of expertise in the food sector. The rise in robotics and artificial intelligence in the society calls for a higher awareness of ethics and values, both at individual and organizational level. Future professionals will need to be assessed in a new range of technical skills such as data science, computer science and artificial intelligence. Alongside, a large set of transversal skills will also be required: collaboration, courage, creativity, curiosity, alternative thinking, adaptability, complex problem solving, networking and entrepreneurship (Naydenova, de Luca, & Yamadjako, 2019).

To develop these employability skills, it is essential to have a “growth mindset”. In fact, the beliefs that an individual has on his/her learning capacity influence success attainment (Zhang, Kuusisto, & Tirri, 2017). A “growth mindset” is grounded on the adult brain plasticity, and its capacity to improve competences, attitudes, and behaviours, with effort and good supports. On the contrary, a “fixed mindset” is based on the belief that competences and human behaviours are not possible to change. A “growth mindset” supports learning, motivation, and persistence to achieve goals, whereas a “fixed mindset” promotes depressive states, procrastination and difficulties in learning (Zhang et al., 2017). Many studies also show that it is possible to learn to have a growth mindset and that doing so boosts success (Shechtman, 2016).

Coaching is a valuable resource to develop a “growth mindset” and employability skills. Furthermore, leaders will be more impactful when they build their vision of the organization or team goals and use their skills to inspire the collaborators to share this vision, and work for a common goal. Coaching practice focus on people, instead of only on tasks, and has been shown to provide a practical way of group/project leaders to raise confidence, awareness, develop soft skills, and build supportive and collaborative skills within the team (Thompson, 2019). A previous study to examine the effects of coaching on team performance and members’ satisfaction with the team, has shown a direct positive effect of leader coaching and peer coaching on individual and team outcomes (Dimas, Rebelo, & Lourenço, 2016).

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