Key words: social competence, soft skills, employment, hard skills.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje społeczne, umiejętności miękkie, zatrudnienie, umiejętności twarde.

Streszczenie
W artykule przedstawiono tendencje w zakresie zatrudnienia, potrzeb w zakresie umiejętności i nabywania umiejętności miękkich umożliwiających proces rozwoju zawodowego w ramach projektu Grundtvig Gaining and strengthening 'soft skills' for employment through models of supporting methods (peer coaching and mentoring). Umiejętności miękkie (techniczne) są najbardziej istotne dla uzyskania i utrzymania pracy, zaś umiejętności miękkie są niezbędne dla odniesienia sukcesu w miejscu pracy. Wysuwają się one na pierwszy plan w procesie rekrutacji. Właściwy dobór pracowników ze względu na ich kompetencje miękkie stał się kluczym do zatrudnienia. TECHNICAL skills are the most important for getting and keeping a job. Soft skills are essential for the workplace success. Each company looks for different skills and experience depending on the sort of the business. Employers want employees with good communication skills, a "strong work ethic", initiative, interpersonal skills, and problem-solving abilities. Team working and confidence are seen by employers as fundamental for success in the workplace. These skills need a strong foundation of speech, language and communication and are necessary in a potential employment of a new employee. They can be treated as the most important indicator of a job performance. If you want to gain a success
in life you have to develop soft skills that are crucial in the workplace and allowed to get a promotion to a higher level.

The Learning Partnership of the **Soft Skills project** was funded with the support from the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme – Subprogramme Grundtvig and was realized between 2012–2014 in the European consortium composed of eight partners form seven countries:

1. **Hungary: PANDOKRATOR KFT**, project coordinator, it is a private cultural and educational organization promoting multiculturalism, linguistic diversity, European intercultural and environmental awareness, personal development as well as new educational technologies. The company wishes to achieve the above by providing courses, seminars, workshops and consultancy.

   - **12-Evfolyamos Kiegészito Gorog Nyelvoktato Iskola** is a public educational organization which provides minority education. The goal is to promote and teach of Greek culture and language to children and adult learners. It aims at the promotion of diversity and multilingualism the support of learners and their parents with minority roots. It focuses on reaching students in disadvantaged situation, such as living in isolated areas of the country and having special needs.

2. **Austria: Schulungszentrum Fohnsdorf** is a vocational training centre that specialises in provision of personalised adult education to unemployed people and employees of small and medium sized enterprises. It offers a flexible modular individualised training. It offers in the scope of the labour and employment legislation professional qualification measures which have been adapted to the current situation of the labour market and to the demands of customers.

3. **Great Britain: Vocational Rehabilitation Consultants Ltd** is a specialist consultancy in vocational and employment services. We help organisations offer empowering support to unemployed disabled people, aiming at work and economic integration for disabled and disadvantaged people. VRC provides staff development, training and programme design to service providers in the public, NGO and private sectors.

4. **Italy: Melting Pro- Laboratorio per la Cultura** is a cultural association. The aim is to enhance and to promote cultural heritage at Italian and European level through cultural initiatives and training courses for cultural professionals and adults in general. Melting Pro consists of project managers specializing in: cultural training, fundraising, design, development and management of cultural projects, with particular expertise in the European model.

5. **Poland: Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji-Panstwowy Instytut Badawczy** is a state-owned research and development institution conducting basic and applied research as well as implementation of advanced technologies in the field of machines manufacturing and maintenance, materials engineering, environmental protection and systems engineering and also vocational education. The ITeE – PIB is involved in expert activity in the area of economy innovativeness, experiment and manufacturing activity in the field of research devices and special technological devices, as well as printing and publishing activity addressing scientific subjects.

6. **Cyprus: MMC Management Centre Ltd** aims at providing quality learning solutions that will enable our customers to reach business excellence. This is achieved by transferring to our customers’ knowledge and practical knowledge from internationally recognized consultants in a pleasant training and development environment using new and innovative learning methodologies. Their mission is to develop leaders in all areas and enable clients to achieve and experience excellence in their personal and professional life by developing their skills and designing their lifestyle.

7. **Denmark: Randers Bo- og Erhvervstraening** is a generally orientated educational offer of education and vocational training. This is seen in a context with education and training in social areas and with regard to housing. The social housing and vocational training offer is for young people who have difficulties getting on in the established educational system, among other things because of their learning disabilities. The educational courses are planned individually and often consist of both vocational support and in-house support.

All the partners were chosen from different parts of Europe not only due to the geographical situation but also due to their national specificities and characteristics. The similarities and differences caused that the partnership is an unique mixture of attitude, social background, educational field, expectations, needs and examples of good practices which come from this diversity and are expected
to obtain the outcomes which haven't been delivered in Europe yet. All partners organizations’ represent different kind of setting (formal, informal and non-formal system) and have a wide range of educational experience. Therefore partly or totally these may be used in all European adult educational content and be useful for EU institutions, policy-makers and stakeholders. This means that a project with its methodology, aims and effects apply not only to the local context, but to the European arena as a whole.

Practical learning for adults within the Soft Skills project

The Grundtvig action is a part of the Lifelong Learning (LLP) programme. The basic objectives of the programme include the application of IT and communication technologies, improved quality of vocational education and training, as well as adjustment of the education system to the labour market requirements. The goal is to “contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the Community as an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations”\(^1\). In particular the programme aims to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the Community so that they become a world quality reference.

The main priority of the Lifelong Learning Programme is to enhance the performance of education and training in the implementation of priorities and flagships of the EU 2020 strategy\(^2\) defining the EU growth strategy for the next decade, to create value through knowledge-based economic growth, offering better opportunities to people in integrating societies and ensure to its citizens opportunities of lifelong learning and qualification upgrading.

The emphasis is put on mobility of workers in the European labour market, on graduates and workers’ acquisition of new qualifications during placements and vocational training practice and development of their skills according to the modern standards. It is also important for them to develop openness and intercultural sensitivity, learn foreign languages and develop ability to adjust to the conditions of living and working in different European countries.

The Grundtvig programme “aims to provide adults with more ways to improve their knowledge and skills, facilitate their personal development and boost their employment prospects. It also helps to tackle problems associated with Europe’s ageing population. It covers not only teachers, trainers, staff and organisations working in the sector, but also learners in adult education. These include relevant associations, counselling organisations, information services, policy-making bodies and others such as NGOs, enterprises, voluntary groups and research centres”.\(^3\)

Soft Skills project also promotes lifelong learning assumptions, cooperation between generations and volunteering through models of flexible support, such as peer coaching and mentoring. Development of different forms of learning by fostering cooperation between education and training systems of the participating countries, the use of information and communication technologies, quality improvement of VET and promoting innovative approach to vocational education and development in such a way that education systems could meet the labour market needs in the best way possible – these are the key targets of the Soft Skills project.

Main objective of the Soft skills project is to develop learning tools and environments for strengthening “soft skills” and models of supporting learning and training while connecting generations in order to increase employability and motivation for all ages. The project aims at raising the awareness of the need for these skills and supportive models that incorporate best practices

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\(^3\) The European Commission’s website with all information about Grundtvig programme: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/grundtvig_en.htm.
available for use by individuals, other organizations, enterprises and local, regional, national and European authorities.

The project addresses the lack of researches done on soft skills and related training methods (voluntary methods, such as peer coaching and mentoring) as well as online communities and workshops organized on these topics in Europe. The participants have to understand the need for putting emphasis on soft skills for more quality and better results in their organizations. Therefore, the project aims at raising the awareness of the need for these skills and supportive models that incorporate best practices available for use by individuals, other organizations, enterprises and local, regional, national and European authorities. Furthermore, the researches and activities of the project are expected to be core elements for future cooperation in a so-called knowledge triangle, something that is a priority of the organizations and the European Union.

The general objectives of the project try to face the challenge of growing elderly population and unemployment in Europe and to increase the number of adult learners in lifelong learning and to improve conditions for mobilities. The target group consists of unemployed people, people with special educational needs and people 50+. The partnership try to improve the access to adult education especially to people on the margins of society or dropouts.

Another aspect of the project comes from the trend of growing elderly population and unemployment in Europe. The participant countries of the partnership are in an extremely difficult economic situation today, with the highest percentage of unemployment in Europe. In this era of crisis, there is a huge demand for gaining the sufficient skills, especially “soft skills” and the creation of learning opportunities on them. Soft skills enable individuals to participate in learning, to develop their own life plans and activities that connect – through learning, volunteering and cultural and social activities – to economic engagement. Volunteering is an excellent approach of learning and it still not have the value it should have had. It is important to point out that learning opportunities where young and elder learn and cooperate together are still rare. The untapped potential of intergenerational cooperation is a common phenomenon in Europe.

The partnership believes that aged people have a lot to teach to the young and are core pillars of the society through their life experiences and special skills. On the other hand, the knowledge offered by youngsters to elderly people is very important. Digital and language knowledge or methodology on learning styles and environments are some of them. Studies are done on training and learning models of supporting methods and their effectiveness but no research has been done on how effective can be a voluntary learning or training relationship on skills between elder and young for better opportunities of employment can be. Although there are publications on defining the soft skills needed for today’s workforce and assessing their importance to employers, not much has been done on this topic in accordance to elder people and in a comparative transnational aspect. In the era of economic crisis and mobility, it is important to develop a common ‘soft skills’ toolkit which can be used and accessible to all in the European stage. The results rising from the piloting are expected to be an unique resource for further research, as the involved learners, trainers and volunteers are from very different types of organizations from both the private and public sector in all educational settings.

The general objective of this partnership was to collect and exchange best practice and information about soft skills and training opportunities and existing models of supporting methods in each of the partner countries and within a European context. It was aimed at reinforcing competencies in soft skills which are crucial to a workplace in order to improve the integration of individuals, especially in disadvantaged situation, and enhance European employability.

**Soft skills are the key to success**

Necessity of acquiring of new skills in the era of globalisation and rapid technological changes cause important shifts on labour markets and in VET systems. Demographic and cultural changes contribute to the skills shortages therefore the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs’ aims at promoting employment and reintegration into the labour market of workers made redundant through activation.

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retraining and skills upgrading measures. It's important to develop partnership between education and training providers, research institutions and cultural actors to support innovation and to increase employability and to make education and training more relevant to the world of work.

In today’s rapidly growing economy everyone is much more concern about how to find a job and how to excel in the field he has chosen. Employers are looking for different types of skills: hard skills – that a person needs to perform a job (skills that are unique to the occupation, such as maths, physics or accounting) and soft skills – that a person needs in the development on how to behave at work (e.g. communication, networking skills or teamwork skills). Those skills are in greater demand during the requirement process. They can be the most important as the indicator of job and play a vital role for the professional development path.

Everybody possesses soft skills, although some people have more of them than others. The question is how to underline the importance of soft skills that give a higher chance of success. The problems solved within the Soft Skills project try to fulfil the basic research question: How to improve soft skills in order to develop supporting tools and methods needed in today’s workplace?

The term “soft skills” has a very broad scope. Soft skills refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that make someone a good employee and compatible to work with. Companies value soft skills because research and experience show that they can be just as important an indicator of job performance as ‘hard skills’. Soft skills are the abilities required and expected from people for finding a suitable job, its maintenance and promotion. They include, among others: the ability of verbal and nonverbal communication, assertiveness, empathy, cooperation skills , problem solving, and self-presentation. These skills make people social beings and determine the ability to interact with other people. Soft skills are useful not only when applying for a job, but also in the performance of professional duties, or just in everyday life.

These kind of skills are currently the most important professional skills and they are treated as essential social skills necessary in every aspect of life. Nowadays, more and more employers pay attention to the soft skills of employees. They are desirable in life because due to them we are able to achieve success and our assumed goals. These kind of skills a person does not acquire during the studies or courses but possesses them during the work experience. Soft skills can’t easily be learned, they need to be developed over time. During the lifetime people can learn a set of technical requirements needed for a specific job but soft skills are the key competences. “Competences are defined here as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. Key competences are those which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.” Those are essential competencies in a knowledge society and guarantee more flexibility in the labour force, allowing it to adapt more quickly to constant changes in an increasingly interconnected world. “Soft skills mainly depend on personality characteristics which are shaped at an early age and it is less clear whether higher education at tertiary level can teach or develop these soft skills.”

What are soft skills for employability?

Literature presents many explanations regarding what skills are essential to gain a success in the professional career. Soft skills are necessary for entry into employment. Young people were lacking in ‘soft skills’ (such as confidence, presentation skills, networking, motivation, drive and teamwork). Soft skills concern changes in skills, behaviour or attitudes for which there are not such obvious and clear-cut measures but which may represent crucial steps towards being able to obtain and retain work, to further a career, and to succeed in other areas of life.

Soft skills are currently described as the most important professional competence. They are increasingly valued by employers because they are essential to the smooth functioning in the workplace. A person with a high level of soft skills copes well with stress, is assertive, is able to motivate herself and is consistent in action. Moreover, the person is able to manage the time well, is efficient in self-presentation and in the creation of his image, is successful in negotiations, effectively

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communicates and cooperates with other people and also creative, able to resolve conflicts and works well in team management. Efficiently creates and effectively uses a network of professional contacts (i.e. networking). Soft skills perform the ability to handle interpersonal relations and empower people. Employers seek positive work ethic, good attitude and desire to learn and to be trained. The candidate should take responsibility for his actions and be ready to solve problems in the creative way.

However, it has to be pointed out that employees should have been trained in the area of the specific soft skills. Public Employment Services provide counselling services directed to employers which include assistance in selecting candidates to work and assistance in individual career development. These services are provided at the local labour offices by vocational counsellors for all interested employers. First of all, local and regional labour offices offer vocational guidance to support workers in the successful development of their professional career. That is why anyone can obtain information on labour market conditions and available job offers, but also occupational requirements and the possibilities of training and education, even without the necessity to register as unemployed or a job seeker. The unemployed and job seekers can also take advantage of workshops aiming at active job search and provided with the use of standardised methods to facilitate their choice of profession, qualifications or change of employment. It is clear that education and training need to be adapted and linked more closely to the world of work, by bridging that gap between academia and labour market that now appears to be obsolete. Effectively anticipating which skills will be required in years to come by companies is crucial if workers with the right competencies are to be trained. The training is the most important asset can be due to the fact that many young people have received the same average training / schooling time and have little or almost none experience compared to other segments of the labour market. The most common difficulties and lack of skills that youth suffer are related to their communication issues, their work performance, their general behaviour and politeness, work relations and self-discipline as well as poor work job appraisal, poor education / training knowledge acquisition and relational stress issues.

It is happen, that the soft skills are important during the recruitment phase and have a great influence/ impact on the candidate’s choice. "Some people call soft skills as employability skills as these help in acquiring employment. People often think of soft skills as communication skills. In fact, these are beyond communication skills. Soft skills areal about skills, abilities and traits pertain to personality, attitude and behaviour that help in non-technical and non-domain skills. These are collection of several skills such as team building, leadership, motivation, time management, presentation skills, etc. These skills are also known as people skills, emotional intelligence, social skills and interpersonal skills".  

Soft skills" refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that make someone a good employee and compatible to work with. Companies value soft skills because research and experience show that they can be just as important an indicator of job performance as 'hard skills'. Soft skills enable individuals to participate in learning, to develop their own life plans and activities that connect – through learning, volunteering and cultural and social activities – to economic engagement. Most job candidates declare to have highly-developed soft skills. However, these capabilities can not be confirmed by any of formal certification, as this situation happens with most other competence. For this reason, employers always check the level of qualifications required for the job during the recruitment process. Soft skills are more and more valued by employers, as they are essential to the smooth functioning in the workplace. An example of a hard skill to know the Java programming language, and an example of soft skills is the ability to work in a group. Since soft skills are not confirmed by certificates, certificates, etc., most people applying for a job attribute them to the kind of “out of the box”.

Conclusion

The most important element in improving soft skills is to use them in practice. The development of soft skills is a process that requires commitment and virtually never ends – our social skills we train for life. And the results of this work can bring a lot of benefits both at the professional and private.

Therefore, people should invest in yourself time, effort, and sometimes money. The return on this investment can make the difference are beyond our wildest expectations.

Soft skill is the ability required and expected from people for finding a suitable job, its maintenance and promotion. Any person who is equipped with the necessary soft skills have higher chances of success. Soft skills create opportunities of success and handle interpersonal relations. They are essential in taking appropriate decisions. People become more confident and enable to communicate more effectively. Soft skills empower people and every skill helps to get success in life.

References


mgr Katarzyna SLAWIŃSKA
Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji – PIB, Radom
katarzyna.slawinska@itee.radom.pl

prof. Carlo Smaldone VILLANI
Prometeo
Via A. Valenziani, 12
00187 Rome, Italy
Email: carlo.smaldone@gmail.com