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DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS IN THE SYSTEM OF ADULT EDUCATION

Summary. The article deals with soft skills that nowadays are centrally important for human capital development and workforce success and the demand for which has significantly increased over last years. The definition of soft skills as a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills is presented. The author analyzes the diverse investigators' classifications of structure and components of soft skills. There have been distinguished some constituents of soft skills such as social skills; communication; and higher-order thinking skills (including problem solving, critical thinking, and decision-making); supported by the intrapersonal skills of self-control and positive self-concept. As preparing students with technical or academic skills alone will not be enough for them to achieve success and well-being, education systems need to prepare students for their future career and life challenges by means of improving their soft skills. The effectiveness of soft skills acquiring is found to largely depend on the quality of the intervention programme.

Key words: soft skills, social and emotional skills, adult education, structure and components of soft skills.

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РОЗВИТОК «ГНУЧКИХ» НАВИЧОК У СИСТЕМІ ОСВІТИ ДОРΟΣЛИХ

Анотація. У статті розглядаються «гнучкі» навички, які мають важливе значення для розвитку людського капіталу та успішності робочої сили, і потреба у яких значно збільшилася за останні роки. У статті «гнучкі» навички визначаються як широкий набір навичок, компетенцій, поведінки, ставлення та особистих якостей, що дають змогу дорослим ефективно існувати у навколишньому середовищі, працювати разом з іншими та досягти своїх цілей, і доповнюють академічні і професійні навички. Автор аналізує класифікації «гнучких» навичок різних авторів. Виділено компоненти «гнучких» навичок, такі як: соціальні навички; навички спілкування і мислення (вирішення проблем, критичне мислення та прийняття рішень); а також навички самоконтролю та позитивної самооцінки. Оскільки навчання молоді і дорослих лише професійним чи академічним навичкам є недостатнім для досягнення успіху та добробуту в

житті і кар'єрі, система освіти має готувати студентів до майбутніх кар'єрних та життєвих викликів шляхом покращення їх «гнучких» навичок. Зазначається, що ефективність набуття «гнучких» навичок залежить від якості навчальних програм.

Ключові слова: «гнучкі» навички, соціальні та емоційні навички, освіта дорослих, структура та компоненти «гнучких» навичок.

Introduction. Today's adults need a balanced set of cognitive, social and emotional skills in order to succeed in modern life. Their capacity to achieve goals, work effectively with others and manage emotions will be essential to meet the challenges of the 21st century. While everyone acknowledges the importance of socio-emotional skills such as perseverance, sociability and self-esteem, there is often insufficient awareness of “what works” to enhance these skills. Everybody may have got a reputation for being the best expert in any field, but it amounts to little if him/her doesn't work well with others. Some of the most important professional skills for workers and employers alike simply can't be taught in a classroom or measured on paper. These traits are called soft skills and they're more crucial to job search and overall career than you think. Unlike hard skills, which can be proven and measured, soft skills are intangible and difficult to quantify. Some examples of soft skills include analytical thinking, verbal and written communication, and leadership. “Soft skills” are centrally important for human capital development and workforce success. A growing evidence base shows that these qualities rival academic or technical skills in their ability to predict employment and earnings, among other outcomes. As the workplace has modernized around the world, the demand for such skills has increased over the past 20 years.

Since 1959, the U.S. Army has been investing a considerable amount of resources into technology-based development of training procedures. In 1968 the U.S. Army officially introduced a training doctrine known as "Systems Engineering of Training", giving the definition: "job related skills involving actions affecting primarily people and paper, e.g., inspecting troops, supervising office personnel, conducting studies, preparing maintenance reports, preparing efficiency reports, designing bridge structures" [4]. At the 1972 Soft Skills Conference there was presented a report aimed at figuring out how the term "soft skills" (in the areas of command, supervision, counseling and leadership) is understood: "Soft skills are important job-related skills that involve little or no interaction with machines and whose application on the job is quite generalized" [4]. Many industries today give prominence to soft skills of their employees. It is through a 1972 US Army training manual identified formal usage of the term "soft skills" began.

Nowadays a person's soft skill is an important part of their individual contribution to the success of an organization. Organizations which deal with customers face-to-face are generally more successful if they promote activities for staffs to develop these skills through wellness enhancing programs. Training or rewarding for personal habits or traits such as dependability and conscientiousness

can yield significant return on investment for an organization. For this reason, soft skills are increasingly sought out by employers in addition to standard qualifications. Studies by Stanford Research Institute and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation among Fortune 500 CEOs established that 75% of long term job success resulted from soft skills and only 25% from technical skills [(Sinha, 2008)]. Hence, soft skills are as important as cognitive/technical skills. So, many policies and programmes are designed to measure and enhance socio-emotional and soft skills and vary considerably within and across countries [3].

Analysis of recent publications. The problem of development soft skills is traditionally raised in many scientific articles and publications. Thus, foreign authors Paul.G. Whitmore, Klaus Peggy, Giuseppe Giusti, Marcel M. Robles, John P Fry, Heckman and Kautz, K.H. Silber, W.R. Foshay and others have investigated the essence, structure and components of these skills. They have studied the proposes strategies to raise them, analysed the effects of skills on a variety of measures of individual well-being and social progress, which covers aspects of lives that are as diverse as education, labour market outcomes, health, family life, civic engagement and life satisfaction. Nevertheless, a soft skills “gap” is noted by many employers around the world, who report that job candidates lack the soft skills needed to fill available positions.

Thus, ***the aim of this publication*** is to analyze the sense of soft skills in the context of lifelong and adult learning, their role for an adult person; to analyze the structure and main components, to consider forming these skills.

Research findings. Soft skills refer to a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills. Soft skills are regarded as a combination of people social skills, communication skills, character of personality traits, career attribute, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients among others [8]. The Collins English Dictionary defines the term "soft skills" as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude” [7].

Unfortunately, there is not a clear consensus about which soft skills are most critical for workforce success. Developing a common understanding is hampered by a lack of comparability in the constructs, definitions, and measures used to assess youth and monitor progress. This confusion obstructs knowledge development and guidance for future investments in youth workforce development programs.

Researches L. H. Lippman, R. Ryberg, R. Carney and K. A. Moore have distinguished the key soft skills for workforce success. According to their study, there are five critical skills most likely to increase odds of success across all outcomes and which employers expect employees to have: social skills; communication; and higher-order thinking skills (including problem solving, critical thinking, and decision-making); supported by the intrapersonal skills of self-control and positive self-concept [2, p. 56].

Social skills help people get along well with others. This ability includes respecting others, using context appropriate behavior, and resolving conflict; they are universally important. They predict all four types of workforce outcomes (employment, performance, income/wages, and entrepreneurial success), are sought by employers, and are seen as critically important by experts in the field. Social skills were supported across types of evidence, in all regions of the world, and within both formal and informal employment.

Communication skills refer to the specific types of communication used in the workplace, and include oral, written, non-verbal, and listening skills. Strong general communication skills contribute to the development of other soft skills, like social skills. However, the communication skills referred to in this paper are a distinct set, important for workplace success across sectors. There is evidence that communication skills are related to three of the workforce outcomes studied for youth, they are the most frequently sought skill among employers, and they were strongly endorsed by stakeholders in this project. The strong support for communication holds true across regions of the world, for both formal and informal positions, and for entry-level employees.

Higher-order thinking consists of problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making. At a basic level, this includes an ability to identify an issue and take in information from multiple sources to evaluate options in order to reach a reasonable conclusion. Higher-order thinking is very much sought by employers and is critical for all four workforce outcomes in all regions of the world.

Self-control refers to one's ability to delay gratification, control impulses, direct and focus attention, manage emotions, and regulate behaviors. Self-control is an intrapersonal skill, foundational to many others: it enables successful decision-making, resolution of conflict, and coherent communication. Self-control is highly supported as related to all four workforce outcomes, especially by a rigorous literature.

A positive self-concept includes self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness and beliefs, as well as self-esteem and a sense of well-being and pride. Positive self-concept is another intrapersonal skill that is important for workforce success. It is related to success across all four workforce outcomes and is especially supported in scientific literature.

Hard work and dependability, responsibility, and self-motivation are also highly valued by employers and supported by a strong base of research evidence, placing them in the top supported skills. The field is building more evidence that these can be improved through interventions among youth and young adults, and it is expected that, in time, they may emerge with as much support as those above enjoy. Teamwork involves proficiency in these as well as other skills, so while it appears among the top ten supported skills, the recommendations focus on some of the components of teamwork, rather than on the overarching set of skills that it represents.

Youth and adults who are competent in these soft skills are effective in their job searches and interviews and thus are more likely to be hired. They are more likely to be productive, retained on the job, and promoted, and thus they tend to

earn more than those less competent in soft skills. Youth and adults competent in these soft skills contribute to the collective efficacy, productivity, and growth of their employers, and when they start their own businesses, they are more likely to be successful [2].

Many research teams have independently found a similar five-factor structure of personality characteristics presented soft skills. Thus, international survey “The Study on Social and Emotional Skills” of OECD draws on a well-known framework in this field and provides a general outline of how these skills should be organized [5]. Social and emotional skills in this model are arranged hierarchically, with five general skill categories that can be split into narrower, lower-order skills. The broad categories of the “Big Five” are :

- openness to experience (open-mindedness);
- conscientiousness (task performance);
- emotional stability (emotional regulation);
- extraversion (engaging with others) ;
- (collaboration).

The study also includes the so-called “compound” skills. These skills represent combinations of two or more individual skills. For example, self-efficacy represents a combination of skills from the conscientiousness, emotional stability and extraversion categories of the Big Five. Compound skills are found to be useful for describing and understanding certain aspects of behaviour and in many cases they are shown to affect important life outcomes. The study assesses 15 social and emotional skills spread across the 6 broad domains – the “Big Five” dimensions and the compound skills; each of the skills, accompanied by some typical skill-related behaviour. They are following.

Achievement motivation and *responsibility* are predictive of a wide range of life outcomes, with special relevance for school and work settings. *Self-control and emotional control* have attracted substantial research attention in many fields, with evidence pointing to their strong relevance for people and how their lives will be shaped after school. *Stress resistance/resilience* and *optimism* are highly predictive of a wide variety of positive future life outcomes, and are increasingly relevant skills for the modern world.

Sociability and empathy/compassion provide a basic set of social and emotional skills needed for effective functioning and integration in work and personal environments. *Assertiveness* is a characteristic of leadership and is also related to entrepreneurship, while *energy/activity* allows people to lead a more dynamic and eventful lifestyle. *Trust* is highly relevant for personal well-being and societal cohesion, while *tolerance and cultural flexibility* have growing social relevance in increasingly diverse and polarised societies. *Respectfulness and co-operation* are both very relevant and are highly regarded skills in the workplace.

Curiosity is a critical skill that improves learning outcomes and provides intrinsic incentives for lifelong self-development. *Creativity/imagination* is another skill that can bring strong benefits to both individuals and societies, while critical thinking is gaining importance in a world full of false and misleading information. *Metacognition/self-reflection* has been found to be one of the most fundamental

skills for lifelong learning, along with the ability to adjust to changing requirements and settings. *Self-efficacy* is a well-researched skill with high predictive validity and of special importance in school settings [6].

By Daniel Bortz, soft skills help facilitate human connections, they are key to building relationships, gaining visibility, and creating more opportunities for advancement. He refers to the soft skills: communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem solving, critical observation, conflict resolution, and leadership. So, employers actually care more about soft skills than they do technical abilities like reading comprehension and mathematics. “Basically, you can be the best at what you do, but if your soft skills aren’t cutting it, you’re limiting your chances of career success. Read on to learn which soft skills are critical to have firmly under your belt and what steps you can take to acquire them” [1].

Over the last years, soft, as well as social and emotional skills have been rising on the education policy agenda and in the public debate. But for the majority of students, their development remains a matter of luck, depending on whether this is a priority for their teacher and their school. A major barrier is the absence of reliable metrics in this field that allow educators and policy-makers to make progress visible, and to address shortcomings.

Education systems need to prepare students for their future, rather than for our past. In these times, digitalisation is connecting people, cities and continents to bring together a majority of the world’s population in ways that vastly increases our individual and collective potential. But the same forces have made the world also more volatile, more complex, and more uncertain. And when fast gets really fast, being slow to adapt makes education systems really slow. The rolling processes of automation, hollowing out jobs, particularly for routine tasks, have radically altered the nature of work and life and thus the skills that are needed for success. For those with the right human capacities, this is liberating and exciting. But for those who are insufficiently prepared, it can mean the scourge of vulnerable and insecure work, and life without prospects [5].

We know that preparing students with technical or academic skills alone will not be enough for them to achieve success, connectedness and well-being whatever endeavours they wish to pursue. Social and emotional skills, such as perseverance, empathy, mindfulness, courage or leadership are central to this. Social and emotional skills develop and change with age, and are affected by a combined influence of biological and environmental factors, life events, and changes in self-perception. On average, levels of conscientiousness, emotional stability, social dominance and agreeableness generally increase with age.

The most comprehensive studies prove that systematic interventions can change the social skills of a person in desired directions. The effectiveness of intervention is found to largely depend on the quality of the intervention programme. Those interventions that used a coherent and co-ordinated set of activities, with a focus on the development of particular soft skills rather than a general skillset, are shown to have strong intervention effects. The evidence indicates that continuing to learn after finishing formal education, including learning in the workplace, can have a significant influence on people’s soft skills.

Furthermore, recent studies on the effectiveness of cognitive and clinical interventions indicate that substantial changes in these skills are possible, even after relatively short treatment periods, and also across lifespans [2].

Conclusions. Soft skills refer to the abilities to regulate one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour. These skills differ from cognitive abilities such as literacy or numeracy because they mainly concern how people engage with others, perceive themselves and manage their emotions, rather than indicating their raw ability to process information. But, like literacy and numeracy, they are dependent on situational factors and responsive to change and development through formal and informal learning experiences. Importantly, soft skills influence a wide range of personal and societal outcomes throughout one's life.

In an increasingly fast-changing and diverse world, the role of soft skills is becoming more important. A faster pace of living and a shift to urban environments means people need to engage with new ways of thinking and working and new people. Ageing and more diverse populations and the dismantling of traditional social networks place additional emphasis on people's sense of trust, co-operation and compassion. Rising complexity and the increasing pace of technological change call for the ability to act independently and to adjust to changes on-the-go.

Soft skills determine how well people adjust to their environment and how much they achieve in their lives. But the development of these skills is important not only for the well-being of individuals, but also for wider communities and societies as a whole. The ability of citizens to adapt, be resourceful, respect and work well with others, and to take personal and collective responsibility is increasingly becoming the hallmark of a well-functioning society. Increasing ideological polarisation and social tensions are increasing the need for tolerance and respect, empathy and generosity, and the ability to co-operate in order to achieve and protect the common good.

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