

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO SOFT SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

According to researches conducted in Harvard and Stanford Universities only 15% of your career success is provided by your hard skills, whilst other 85% by so called soft skills. “Soft skills get little respect but will make or break your career” (*Peggy Klaus*).

“Soft Skills” correlates with some terms of a very close meaning: “Life Skills”, “Emotional Intelligence Quotients”, “Social Skills”, and “Interpersonal Skills”.

Soft skills is a term often associated with a person's Emotional Intelligence Quotient, the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, managing people, leadership, etc. that characterize relationships with other people. Soft skills, also known as people skills, complement hard skills to enhance an individual's relationships, job performance and career prospects. It's often said that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get – and keep – the job.

Unlike hard skills, which comprise a person's technical skill set and ability to perform certain functional tasks, soft skills are interpersonal and broadly applicable across job titles and industries. Many soft skills are tied to individuals' personalities rather than any formal training, and are thus considered more difficult to develop than hard skills. Soft skills are often described in terms of personality traits, such as optimism, integrity and a sense of humor. These skills are also defined by abilities that can be practiced, such as leadership, empathy, communication and sociability.

Soft skills could be defined as **life skills** which are behaviors used appropriately and responsibly in the management of personal affairs. They are a set of human skills acquired via teaching or direct experience that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily human life. The subject varies greatly depending on social norms and community expectations. Life skills have been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. They represent the psycho-social skills that determine valued behavior and include reflective skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking, to personal skills such as self-awareness, and to interpersonal skills. Practicing life skills leads to qualities such as self-esteem, sociability and tolerance, to action

competencies to take action and generate change, and to capabilities to have the freedom to decide what to do and who to be.

Life Skills-Based Education has a long history of supporting human development. Life skills-based education is now recognized as a methodology to address a variety of issues of youth development and thematic responses including as expressed in World Youth Report (2003), World Program for Human Rights Education (2004), UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005), the World Development Report (2007), and so on. Expected learning outcomes include a combination of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills with a particular emphasis on those skills that related to critical thinking and problem solving, self-management and communication and interpersonal skills.

Social skills are any skills facilitating interaction and communication with others. Social rules and relations are created, communicated, and changed in verbal and nonverbal ways. The process of learning these skills is called socialization.

Interpersonal skills are sometimes also referred to as people skills or communication skills. Interpersonal skills are the skills a person uses to communicate and interact with others. They include persuasion, active listening, delegation, and leadership. The term “interpersonal skills” is used often in business contexts to refer to the measure of a person's ability to operate within business organizations through social communication and interactions. Interpersonal skills are how people relate to one another.

WHY SOFT SKILLS?

Self

- An awareness of the characteristics that define the person one is and wants to become.

Opportunity

- An awareness of the possibilities that exist, the demands they make and the rewards and satisfactions they offer.

Aspirations

- The ability to make realistic choices and plans based on sound information and on self–opportunity alignment.

Results

- The ability to review outcomes, plan and take action to implement decisions and aspirations, especially at points of transition (*Kumar, A., 2007*).

In order to **SOAR** students need two things:

Academic Roots

- Discipline based knowledge and understanding

Academic Wings

- The ability to enhance that knowledge and understanding with awareness (self and others), critical thinking, reflective practice.

The specificity of Soft Skills

- Discipline specific
- Placement / employability preparation
- Lifelong learners
 - Learning how to learn

- Reflective practitioners

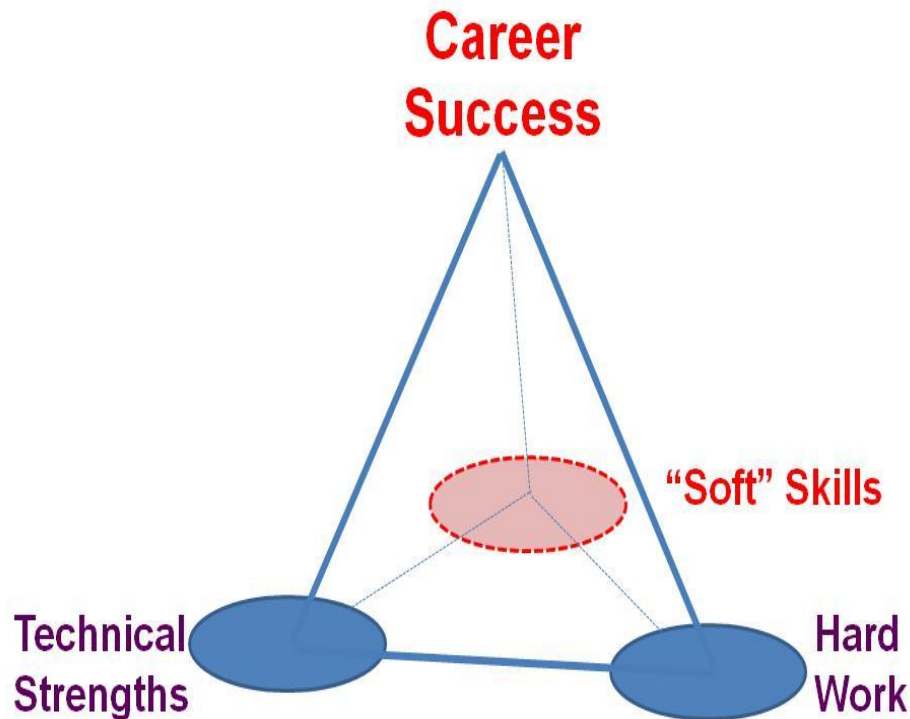


Fig. 1. Soft Skills

Soft skills focus more on people than processes. Today's service economy and ascendance of work teams in large organizations puts a new premium on people skills and relationship-building (Kocon, L.).

Soft skills = People skills=Street Smarts

THE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

The module content is centered on students' learning and development. It seeks to motivate students by helping them to be more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners by improving their capacity to understand what they have learned, how and when they are learning, and to encourage them to monitor, reflect on, evaluate, plan and take responsibility for their own learning.

The Main tasks of the Soft Skills module are *to develop and enhance*:

- Critical and reflective thinking;
- Self-management and self awareness skills;
- Communication skills, including interpretation and use of feedback;
- Team working and peer support strategies.

DEFINITIONS

"What exactly are soft skills?" This basic question is not easy to answer, because the perception of what is a soft skill differs from context to context. A subject may be considered a soft skill in one particular area, and may be considered a hard skill in another. On top of it the understanding of what should be recognized as a soft skill varies widely.

Generally, soft skills may be subdivided into three basic categories:

1. Personal qualities
2. Interpersonal skills
3. Additional skills/knowledge

Soft Skills:

Critical thinking	Communication Skills
Listening to others	Reflective Practice
Group Work / working with others	CV and Applications
Self assessment	Professional practice
Assertiveness	Creative problem solving
Mentoring and peer support	Information Literacy
Digital Literacy	Portfolio management

(tools for delivery, recording and reflection)

Soft skills complement hard skills to enhance an individual's relationships, job performance and career prospects. Unlike hard skills, which tend to be specific to a certain type of task or activity, soft skills are broadly applicable.

While your technical skills may get your foot in the door, your people skills are what open most of the doors to come. Your work ethic, your attitude, your communication skills, your emotional intelligence and a whole host of other personal attributes are the soft skills that are crucial for career success.

Soft skills are often broken down into categories, or types of skills according to the level of complexity and interaction. An example of one way of categorizing social skills can be found in the table below:

Table 1.

Soft Skills Categorizing

Skill Set	Used for	Examples
Foundation Skills	Basic social interaction	Ability to maintain eye contact, maintain appropriate personal space, understand gestures and facial expressions
Interaction Skills	Skills needed to interact with others	Resolving conflicts, taking turns, learning how to begin and end conversations, determining appropriate topics for conversation, interacting with authority figures
Affective Skills	Skills needed for understanding oneself and others	Identifying one's feelings, recognizing the feelings of others, demonstrating empathy, decoding body language and facial expressions, determining whether someone is trustworthy
Cognitive Skills	Skills needed to maintain more complex social interactions	Social perception, making choices, self-monitoring, understanding community norms, determining appropriate behavior for different social situations.

(Canney and Byrne, 2006)

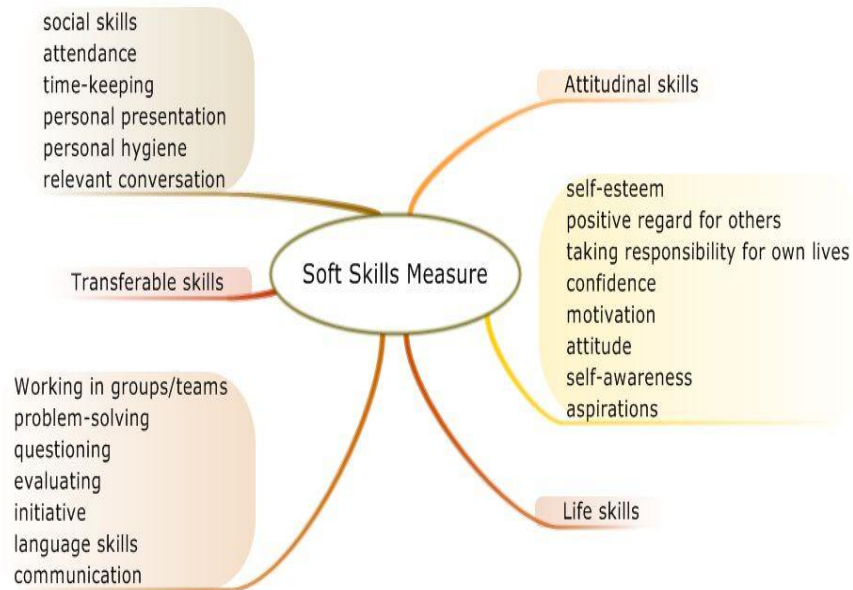


Fig. 2. Soft Skills Differentiation

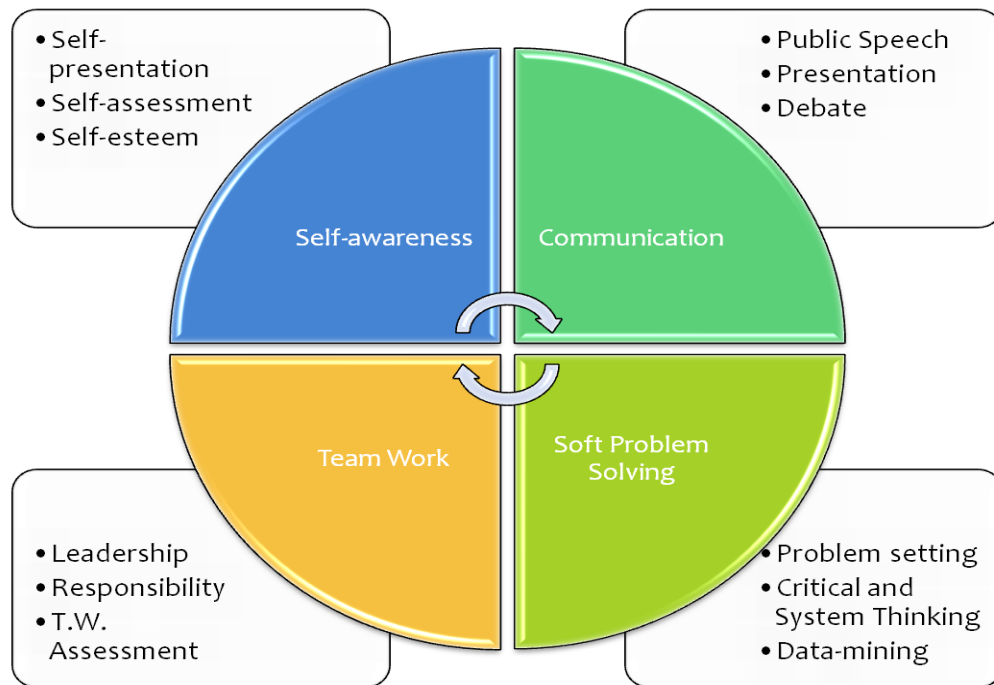


Fig. 3. Soft Skills and Outcomes

Self-awareness includes identifying knowledge gaps, taking responsibility for own learning and development, understanding the impacts of self-efficacy, dealing with pressures and emotions, reflective practice, professional development and current awareness.

The mentioned skills assist students in understanding the learning process and constructing their own Selves in academic and professional activities. They become apparent in

- Surface / deep / strategic learning
- Self-efficacy
- Requires reconstruction of known events in their own lives
- Constructing a self-MAP
 - Motivation
 - Ability
 - Personality

INTEGRAL PARTS OF SOFT SKILLS

I. Self-Management System consists of Self-motivation, taking responsibility, task setting/prioritizing, time-management. The structure of Self-Management System is detected in the Table below.



Fig. 4. Self-Management Structure

II. Critical Thinking:

- «thinking about thinking» (Raiskums, B. W.)
- «this way of thinking, which does not accept the arguments and conclusions blindly, rather, it examines assumptions, recognize hidden values, evaluates the data and conclusions» (Mayers, D.)
- «reasonable reflective thinking, aimed at deciding what to trust and what to do» (Ennis, R.)
- “An expert is a man (woman) who has made all of the mistakes which can be made in a very narrow field” (Bohr, N.)
- “Imagination is more important than knowledge” (Einstein, A.)
- Critical thinking is the ability to question and to cope with uncertainty, without which none of the above would be possible.

Critical Thinking Characteristics include logic; imagination; risk; “accepting nothing, questioning everything”, reaching your own conclusion; being prepared to change that conclusion in the light of emerging evidence; “The world was flat until we discovered it wasn’t...at the minute we believe it’s a sphere...”.

Example of Critical Thinking:

- Experimentation (lab / hypothesis testing)
- Social research
- Data interpretation and explanation
- Creative problem solving
- Identify the issue
- Come up with alternative solutions
- Learning to cope with uncertainty and embracing it as a learning tool (Pickard, A., 2010).

III. Reflection is a form of thinking used to fulfill a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding that we already possess.

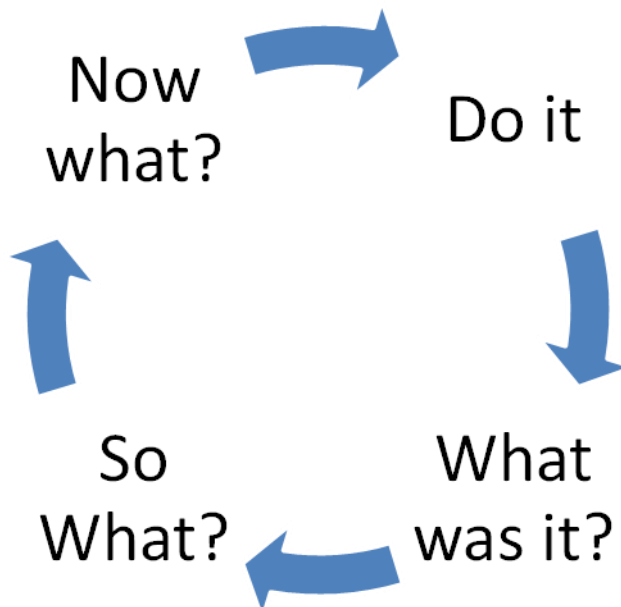


Fig. 5. Reflective Practice Circle

Reflective Practice is triggered with the help of Self assessment questions:

- What am I trying to do exactly?
- Why am I doing it?
- What went well and why?
- What went less well and why?
- How could I do better next time? (Shenton, A., 2012)

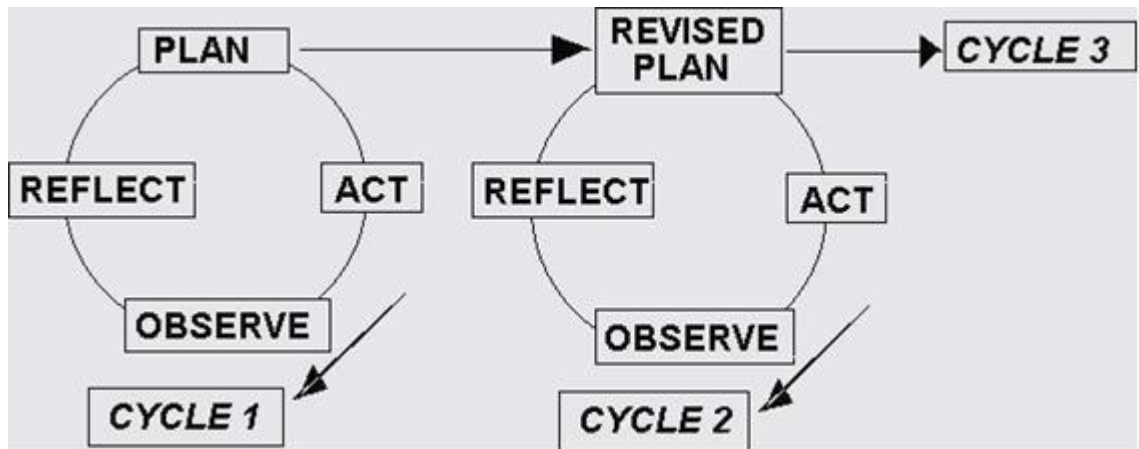


Fig. 6. Reflective Practice (Kolb, 1984; Carr & Kemmis, 1986)

Another scheme of **reflective practice** consists of 1) the reflective diary; 2) description; 3) interpretation; 4) outcome which involves hard systematic thinking and soft insight, intuition and tacit knowledge leading to a plan of action based on critical evaluation of all the available evidence.

IV. Communication and Interaction

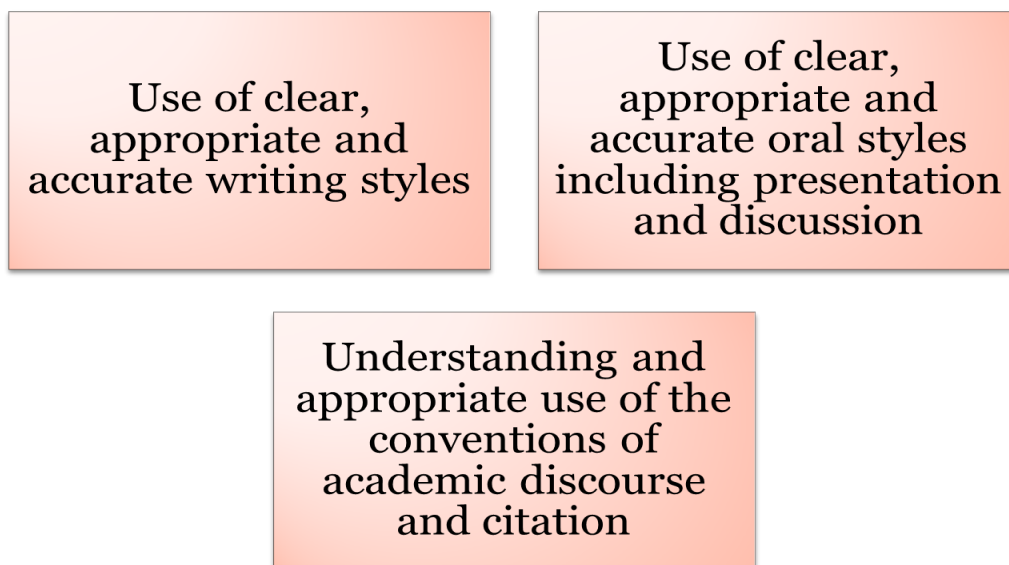


Fig. 7. Effective Communication

Effective communication provides for high level of ***presentation skills***:

- to increase both skills and confidence levels
- to improve research, design and communication skills
- to develop team working and project management skills
- to strengthen learning and enthusiasm for further knowledge
- to promote critical and analytical thinking

academic debates:

- Content and formats of academic debate
- Listening skills
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Reacting to grounded criticism

and ***effective writing and listening***:

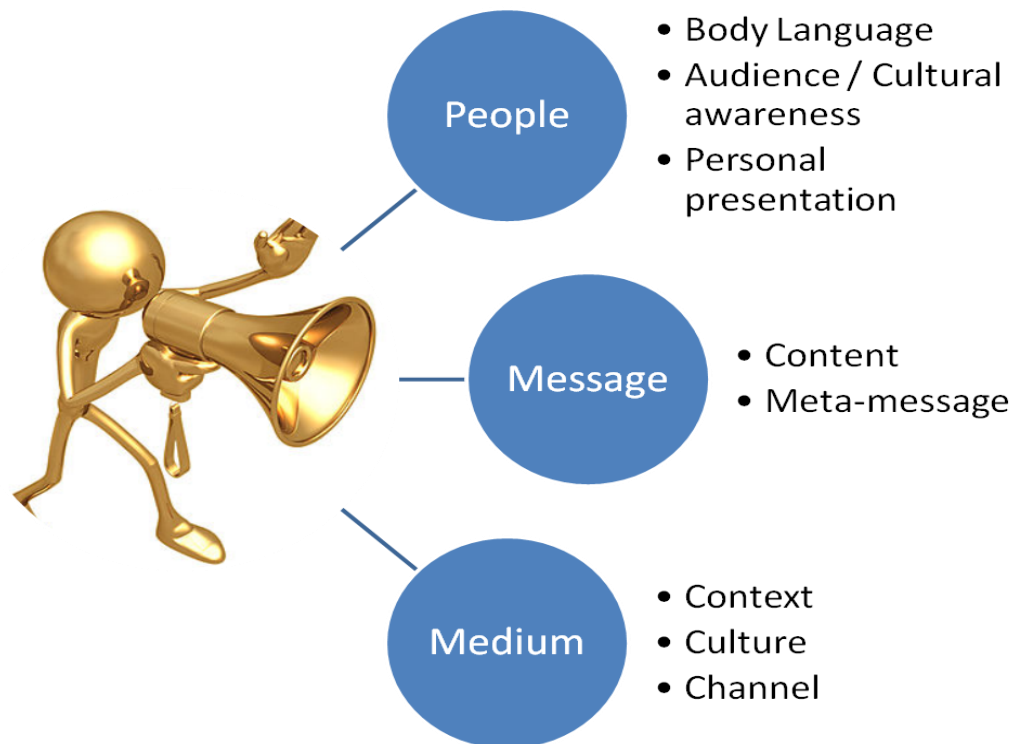


Fig. 8. Skillful Writing

Skillful writing examples:

- Technical Writing
- Script writing / audience analysis / performance / reflection
- Observation (self and others)
- Press release;
 - Same incident from multiple stakeholder perspectives
- Sign language qualifications (*Strachan, R., 2010*)

Listening to Others

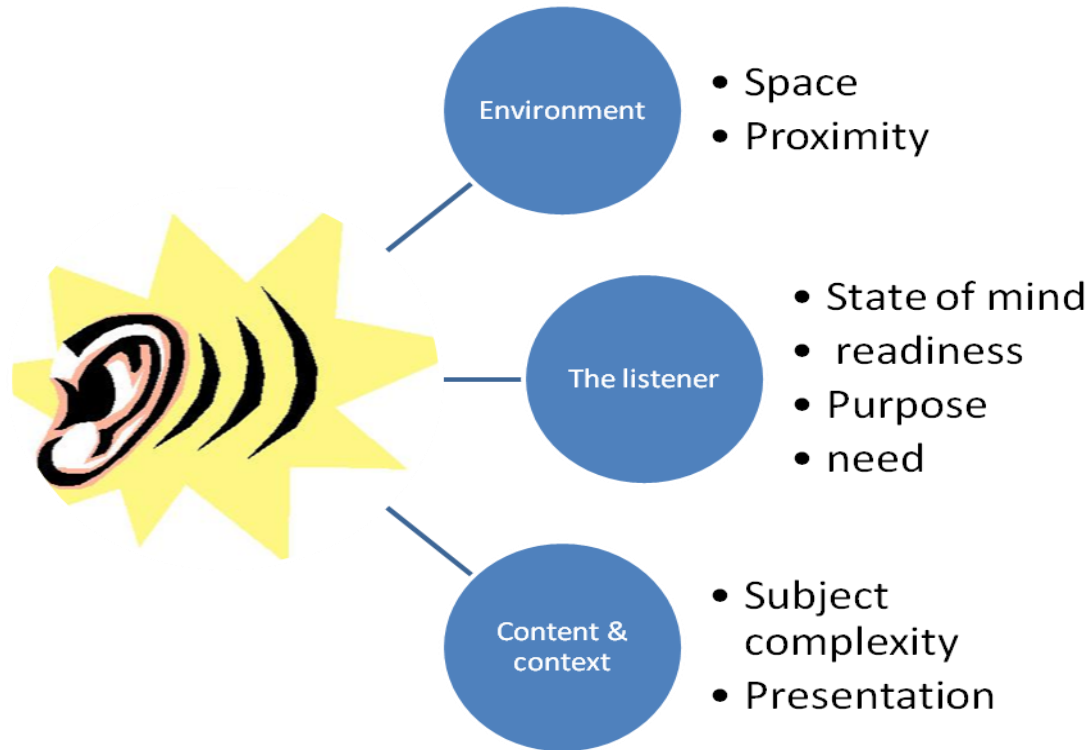


Fig. 9. Listening to Others

The examples of effective listening include:

- Role play
 - Sender / receiver
- Same audience, same message, how many interpretations?
- Constructed conversations

V. Group work is one of the most useful ways of learning about cooperation, shared responsibility, project planning, and time management. Learning how to work successfully in a group has a close association with how we participate in the work place and includes:

- Social responsibility
- Using logical and rational arguments to persuade others
- Identifying the needs of others and building positive relationships
- Understanding group dynamics
- Understanding yourself in relation to others and how they might perceive you.
- Reflection on the image you portray

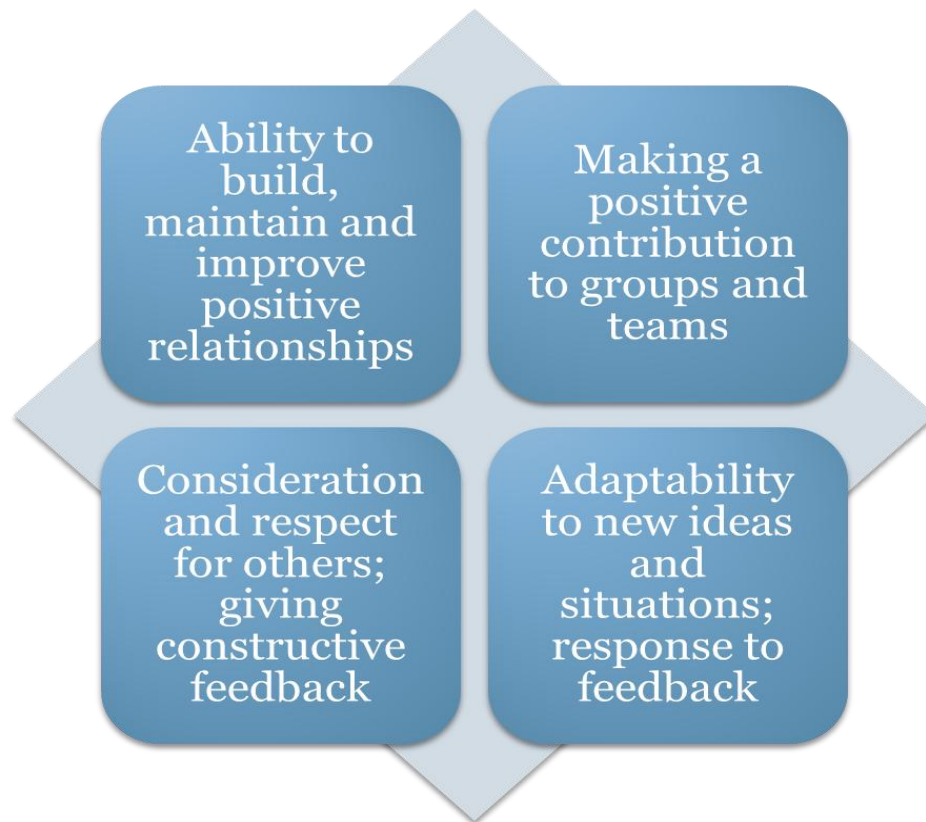


Fig. 10. Group Work Productive Skills

VI. Assertiveness

Assertiveness means “confident behaviour” and “self-confidence”. It is an individual ability to advance and come true own aims, needs, wishes, claims, interest and feelings. Phenomenon of assertiveness presupposes an existence of: **a)** subjective attitude toward Self (self-allowance to have the own claims); **b)** social readiness and ability to realize it in adequate manner (to have the own claims and achieve their realization); **c)** freedom from social fear and inhibition (ability to register and reveal own claims).



Fig. 11. Assertive Behavior

Assertiveness training helps to:

- recognise the three main categories of behaviours, advantages and disadvantages and how to respond to them
- explore strategies for assertiveness and influence
- understand and use the 'Assertiveness Model' for greater effectiveness
- develop and enhance self confidence and self esteem
- create an action plan to move forward with assertiveness skills

In order to develop assertive behaviour we need to explore how to:

- Create boundaries and say 'No'
- Deal with disagreement, conflict and aggressive behaviour
- Negotiate win-win solutions
- Use assertiveness techniques and strategies in a variety of work settings

VII. Peer-to-Peer is an interaction and learning method (technology) when the source of knowledge is not a professor but a peer student (peer instructor). It promotes participation and interaction. Peer-to-Peer activity includes both trainers and trainees into campus life and promotes a sense of belonging that combats the anonymity and isolation many students experience at large universities during the first year of study.

Mentoring

- Developed their personal and professional skills such as leadership, team working, organising, time management, listening, interpersonal communication, facilitation and presentation skills
- Enabled them to gain confidence especially in situations when teamwork is required to attain a goal
- Provided valuable experience to enhance their CVs
- Enabled them to revise and practise their subject, and gain a deeper understanding of it (*Pickard, 2008*).
- Not just doing the evaluating but also actively engaged
- Mentoring at point of need
- Evidence of strong success rate
- Number of models:
 - Mentoring (PAL's)
 - Learning Leaders
 - Student ambassadors

OUTCOMES OF SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Oral communication skills

Students are able to communicate confidently and effectively with a range of audiences, in a variety of modes or registers and settings, including persuasion, argument and exposition, and they are able to make use of different support tools, including visual, audio-visual and technological.

Interpersonal Skills

Students have the skills to be able to work effectively with a range of people in a range of different contexts, including teams, where they can be effective members and, if required, leaders,

including organizing team roles and activities. Students are open to the ideas of others. Students are capable of listening and understanding in a range of contexts.

Problem Solving Skills

Students are able to identify and define problems and through the use of skills of analysis and critical evaluation plan an appropriate course of action and devise solutions. Students are able to make judgments concerning different possible solutions. They will be able to make use of creative and lateral thinking.

Organizational Skills

Students are able to set priorities, and anticipate potential problems or needs. They are able to set and achieve targets in relation to both study and workplace tasks. Students are able to manage their time effectively.

With these soft skills you can excel as a leader. Problem solving, delegating, motivating, and team building are all much easier if you have good soft skills.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENTAL PLAN (PDP)

Personal Development Plan is a form of summative assessment.

What is PDP? It is ‘a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development’.

The primary ***objective for PDP*** is to improve the capacity of individuals to understand what and how they are learning, and to review, plan, and take responsibility for their own learning, helping students:

- become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners;
- understand how they are learning and relate their learning to a wider context;
- improve their general skills for study and career management;
- articulate personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement;
- and encourage a positive attitude to learning throughout life.

PDP Structure:

- What are my development objectives?
- Priority
- What activities do I need to undertake to achieve my objectives?
- What support/resources do I need to achieve my objectives?
- Target date for achieving my objectives
- Actual date for achieving my objectives

Table 2.

Benefits of Personal Developmental Plan

Benefits for Students	Benefits for Staff
A structured, systematic framework for recording, and reflecting on, <i>all</i> aspects of their HE experience	A framework for encouraging, and enabling, greater independent learning
Drawing together different aspects of their degree programme	A structure for tracking student progress, identifying and addressing areas of concern

Scope for including extra-curricular activities	Student retention
Identifying, and addressing, areas of strength and weakness	Student achievement
Improving performance on assessed work	More and better information for preparing student references
Job seeking	A systematic approach
Identifying and developing skills valued by employers	Drawing together, and making explicit, existing good practices
Evidence for use in job applications, interviews etc	Useful evidence for (e.g.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • institutional audit • addressing HE agendas (progress files, 'student success', employability)
Skills for continuing professional development (CPD)	
Feeling good about achievements	

Motivating Staff:

- Ensure that it 'fits' with existing practices & priorities
- E.g. personal/guidance tutor system – avoid duplication of work
- Use to support student retention & achievement
- A reflective approach is something that we already use and value
- PDP need not be something 'different' or 'extra'
- 'Lifelong learning' approach

Motivating Students:

- Ensure that we communicate (explicitly) the potential benefits of PDP
- Lead by example! – if staff value PDP, so will students
- Recognize their efforts (accreditation?)
- Emphasize link with employability
- Employers value graduates who are reflective, and capable of managing their own learning, personal & professional development.

PDP skills set insight, perception, Self-evaluation, and awareness and lead to autonomy and high levels of self-efficacy.

LONGITUDINAL EVIDENCE

A study on 1979 Harvard MBA students asked them: "Have you set clear, written goals for your future and made plans to accomplish them?" Only 3% of the graduates had written goals and plans; 13% had non-written goals and 84% had no specific goals at all.

TEN YEARS LATER they were interviewed again.

1. The 13% of the class who had goals were earning, on average, twice as much as the 84% who had no goals.

2. The 3% who had clear, written goals were earning, on average, ten times as much as the other 97% put together.

You could say they were so focused that would have happened anyway but it's impossible to separate the behavior from the output. One assumption of PDPs is that we can all 'learn' to be focused.

ACTIVITIES

Learning styles questionnaire (P. Honey, A. Mumford)

This questionnaire is designed to find out your preferred learning style(s). Over the years you have probably developed learning 'habits' that help you benefit more from some experiences than from others. There is no time limit to this questionnaire. The accuracy of the results depends on how honest you can be. There are no right or wrong answers. If you agree more than you disagree with the statement, put a tick against the appropriate number on the score sheet. If you disagree more than you agree, put a cross against the appropriate number on the score sheet. Be sure to mark each item with either a tick or cross.

LEARNING-STYLE PREFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

How well do you learn from these methods?

Whole Class Activities	Very well	Well	Okay	Not Well	Badly	Notes
Lecture/Teacher talk						
Question & Answer						
Demonstration						
Watching a video/film						
Notice board style displays						
Overhead projector						
White/blackboard						
Teacher led whole class discussion						
Free flowing whole class discussion						
Visits						
Dictation						
Individual Activities	Very well	Well	Okay	Not Well	Badly	Notes
Essay writing/formal reasoning						
Exam paper questions						
Worksheets or other individual work						
Self produced handouts						
Commercially produced handouts						
Homework/private study						
Individual assignments						
Student personal choice in an assignment						
Individually negotiated activities						



Learning styles description

Learning style	Attributes	Learning activities
Activist	Activists are those people who learn by doing. Activists need to get their hands dirty, to dive in with both feet first. Have an open-minded approach to learning, involving themselves fully and without bias in new experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brainstorming • problem solving • group discussion • puzzles • competitions • role-play
Theorist	These learners like to understand the theory behind the actions. They need models, concepts and facts in order to engage in the learning process. Prefer to analyze and synthesize, drawing new information into a systematic and logical 'theory'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • models • statistics • stories • quotes • background information • applying theories
Reflector	These people learn by observing and thinking about what happened. They may avoid leaping in and prefer to watch from the sidelines. Prefer to stand back and view experiences from a number of different perspectives, collecting data and taking the time to work towards an appropriate conclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paired discussions • self analysis questionnaires • personality questionnaires • time out • observing activities • feedback from others • coaching • interviews
Pragmatist	These people need to be able to see how to put the learning into practice in the real world. Abstract concepts and games are of limited use unless they can see a way to put the ideas into action in their lives. Experimenters, trying out new ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time to think about how to apply learning in reality • case studies • problem solving • discussion

FURTHER READING

Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2007) Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does. (3rd edition). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Brison, C. & Hardy, C. (2012) "The nature of academic engagement – what students tell us". In Solomonides, I., Reid, A., and Perocz, P. (eds.) *Engaging with Learning in Higher Education*. Faringdon, Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing

Burns, T. (2012) *Essential study skills: the complete guide to success at university*. 3-rd edn. London: Sage.

Cottrell, S. (2013) *The study skills handbook*. 4th edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kumar, A. (2007) *Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education – SOARing to Success*, London & New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis.

Pickard, A. J., Gannon-Leary, P. & Coventry, L. (2010) JISC Users' trust in information resources in the Web environment: A status report. Available at: <http://ie-repository.jisc.ac.uk/470/2/JICUsertrustfinalreport.pdf>

Strachan, R, Pickard, A. J. & Laing, C. (2010) Bringing technical authoring skills to life for students through an employer audience. *ITALICS* November, 2010 9(2)

Pickard, A. J. (2008) Rich pictures: researching the role of peer interaction for pupils using the internet. *Popular media narrative*. 1(2) pp 169-181

Shenton, A. & Pickard, A. J. (2012) The evaluation challenge, *Creative teaching and learning*. Vol 3.2, pp 22-28

Useful reading:

<http://www.nea.org/tools/35542.htm>

http://peers.aristotlecircle.com/uploads/NTA_Peer_Tutoring_Factsheet_020107.pdf

http://www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/pdfs/schoolresearch/2012_PolicyBriefs/Nguyen_Policy_Brief.pdf

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/middleyears/students/index.htm>

<http://www.cdttl.nus.edu.sg/success/sl37.htm>

<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ceed/publications/tipsheets/preschoolbehavior/peertutor.pdf>

http://www.reed.edu/nsfaire/nsfaire_sciencePsych4.html

<http://wrt-intertext.syr.edu/viii/dabkowski.html>