Soft Skills Training and Assessment

Josep Maria Duart

Full Professor

Studies of Psychology and Education Sciences

Universitat Oberta
de Catalunya
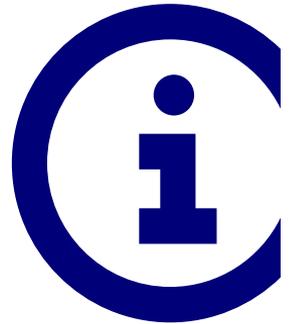
UOC

Skills4Employability

Enhancing the presence of Soft Skills in Higher Education Curricula

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Index

01
What are Soft Skills?

Changing the
Paradigm

Soft Skills

- Known under several names: **Generic** Skills, Skills **for Life**, **Key** Skills/Competences, **Transversal** Skills, etc.

- A **competence** is defined as the ability to successfully meet *complex demands* in a *particular context* through the mobilization of *knowledge*, (*cognitive, metacognitive, socio-emotional and practical*) **skills, attitudes** and **values**.
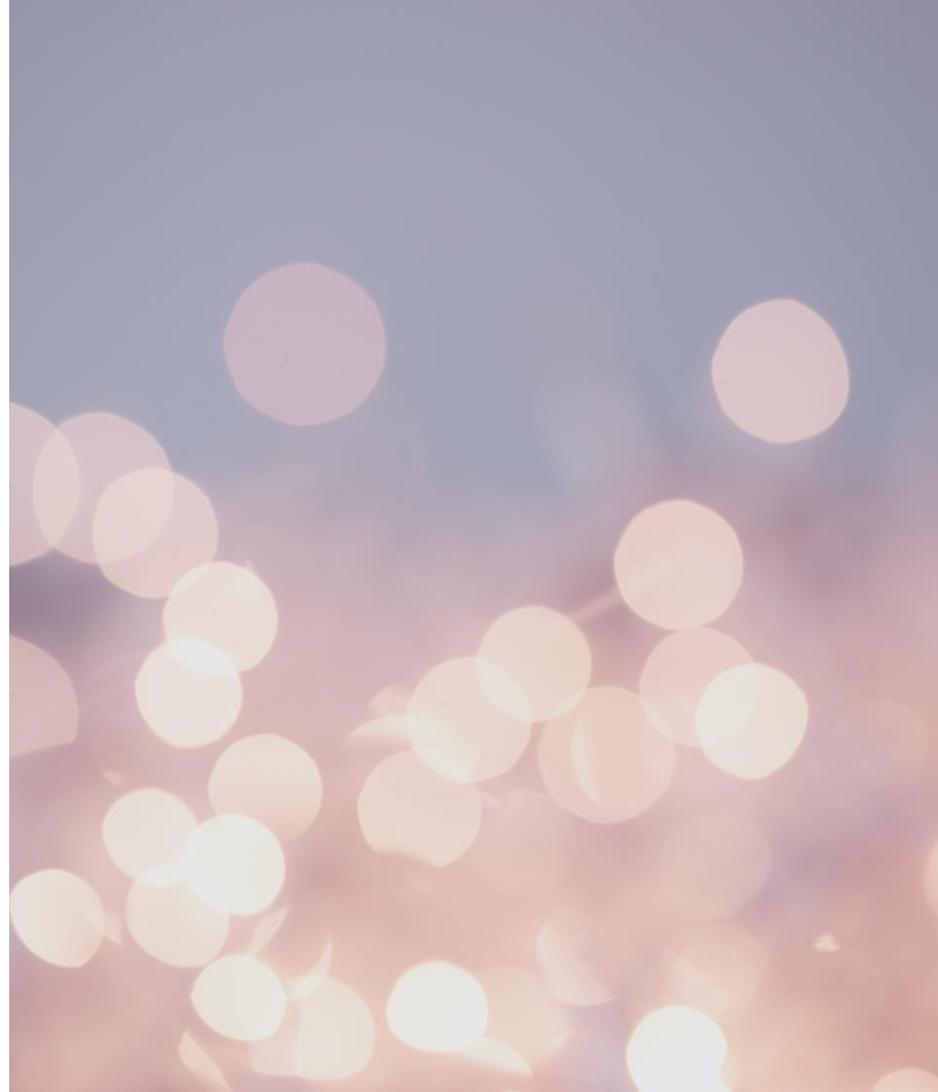
Changing the paradigm

Traditional Soft Skills Paradigm

- Generic approach
- Context-independent
- Instrumental-based (Communication, planning, Time management, etc)
- Easy to teach

New Soft Skills Paradigm

- Human and Cultural Capital approach
- Complex and holistic
- Grounded in contextual and professional needs
- Difficult to teach
- Adding personal, social and professional value

Key Competence (soft skill)

- are **learnable** and **teachable**;

- contribute to **highly valued individual outcomes** (gainful employment, income, personal health and safety, political participation, intellectual resources, social networks, cultural participation) and **societal outcomes** (economic productivity, democratic processes, solidarity, social cohesion, human rights and peace, equity and equality, ecological sustainability);

- are **instrumental** for meeting important **complex demands** in a **wide spectrum of contexts**;

- are **important for all individuals**;

- involve a **higher level of mental complexity**, identified as reflectivity/reflectiveness or reflective practice implying the use of metacognitive skills, creative abilities and taking a critical stance.

Universities impact on labour market

01

It is essential that **higher education offer matches the skills gaps** at local, regional and international level.

02

It is increasingly important **to make the existing curricula more competitive** and **tuned to the forthcoming changes**.

03

To make higher education institutions more responsive to skill demands is **to help them effectively assess the extent to which their programs offer an appropriate curricula** for acquiring and developing the skills that are relevant for the labour market.

02
Soft Skills and Curricula

Integration
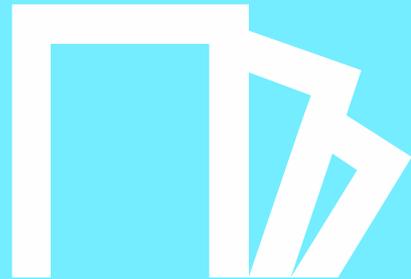
Integration of the soft skills into the curriculum

Beard, D., Schweiger, D., & Surendran, K. (2019). Integrating soft skills assessment through university, college, and programmatic efforts at an AACSB accredited institution. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, *19*(2), 11.
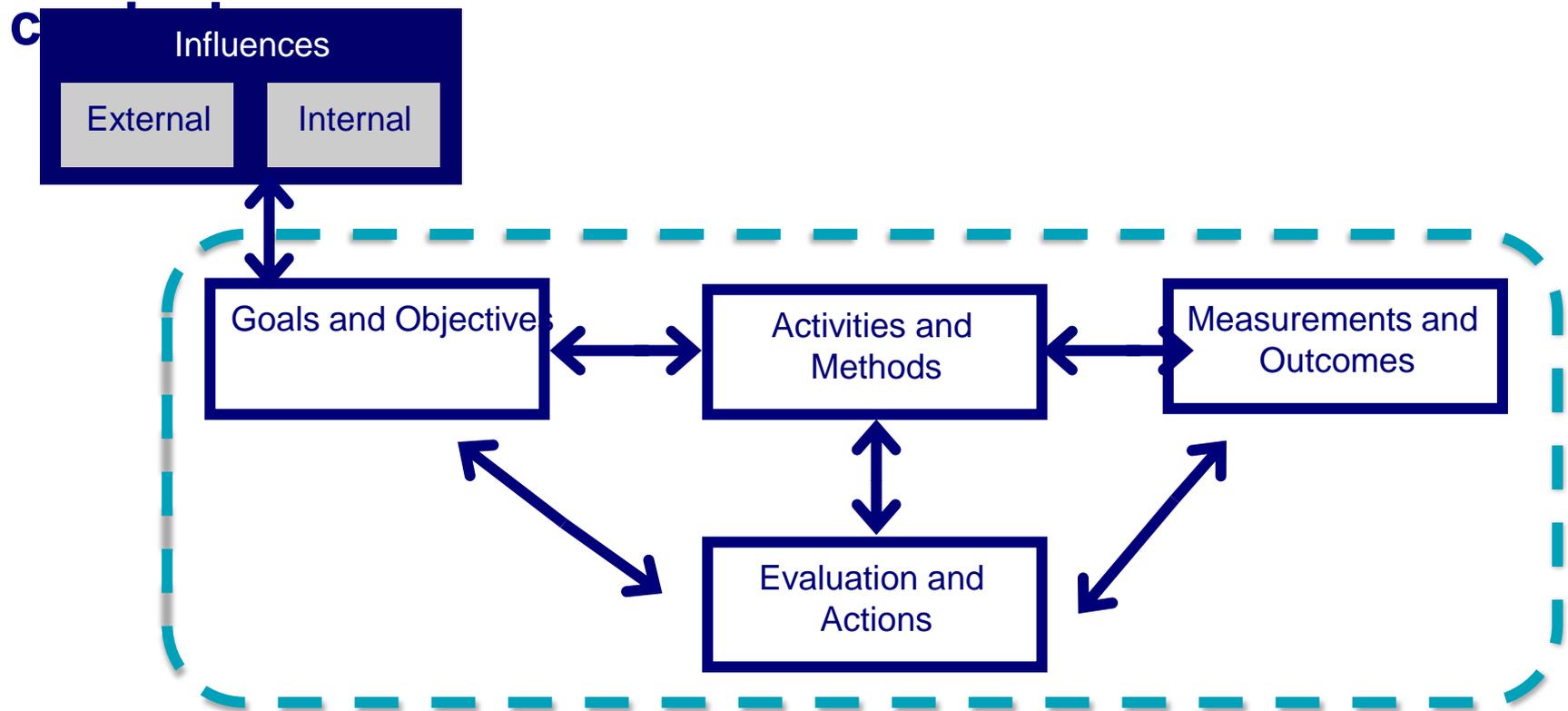
Soft Skills Categorisation (Reboot Project)

About Me: How I Work

1. Self-awareness
2. Understanding Change
3. Curiosity
4. Openness
5. Resilience
6. Adaptability
7. Self-efficacy
8. Motivation

Context: How We Work

1. Teamwork
2. Communication (oral and written) in different contexts and audiences
3. Multicultural skills
4. Negotiation skills
5. Networking
6. Leadership
7. Interdisciplinary skills

Into Action: Get to Work!

1. Taking initiative
2. Creativity
3. Learning from Experience
4. Planning
5. Time management
6. Change management
7. Problem-solving

Rebooting, Re-rooting and Re-Skilling Unemployed and Underemployed Higher Education Graduates for Work 4.0. Erasmus+ Project

Skill set proposed by Skills4Employability

|	
Intellectual Skills	- Interdisciplinary skills to combine knowledge, analyse and think critically - Problem solving skills - Creativity - Learning from experience
Self-management Skills	- Planning skills - Time management skills - Change management skills - Taking initiative / Ownership
Oral and writing communication skills	- Multicultural skills - Networking skills - Negotiation skills - Team working skills

03
Soft Skills Assessment

Teaching and learning strategy
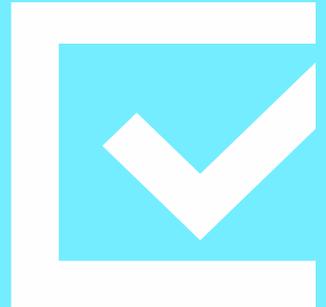
Soft skills assessment strategy

- Soft skills **integration into the curricula**, not as external part.

- **Engaging students in their learning process**:
    - **Leading** their learning process
    - **Contextual and authentic** activities
    - Relation with **employers and society requirements**
    - **Comprehensive and critical** approach
    - Continuous **self-assessment** process

- **Regular (continuous) measurements** of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Soft skills: objectives, measurement and evaluation tools

	Objectives	Teaching activities	Evaluation tools
Intellectual skills • Interdisciplinary skills to combine knowledge, analyse and think critically • Problem solving skills • Creativity • Learning from experience	• To be **creative** in different contexts and making effective proposal for specific issues. • To **use** terms, concepts, theories and principles **appropriately** in different contexts. • To demonstrate ability for **continuous learning** from **their own experiences** and **their previous learning** • To demonstrate **ethical values** and **compromise**.	• Team projects • Transversal projects • Cross-cultural activities • Problem-based learning • Prospective proposals	• Portfolios • Rubrics • Self-assessment • Peer-assessment • Case studies • Cultural and ethical dilemmas • Observation tools • Data analysis • Final Degree Project

Soft skills: objectives, measurement and evaluation tools

|	Objectives	Teaching activities	Evaluation tools
Self-management skills • Planning skills • Time management skills • Change management skills • Taking initiative / Ownership	• To demonstrate **initiative to reach decisions** by **identifying problems, presenting and evaluating alternatives**, and **solving** the problem. • To use **technology and management applications** (planning, time management, etc) effectively. • To demonstrate **critical thinking** on different contexts and analysing proposals and solutions.	• Digital competences assessment tools • Observation tools for time and planning management • Case studies • Entrepreneurial activities • Critical and systematic thinking activities	• Self-assessment • Peer-assessment • Portfolios • Rubrics • Case studies • Observation tools • Data analysis • In-company training • Final Degree Project

Soft skills: objectives, measurement and evaluation tools

	Objectives	Teaching activities	Evaluation tools
Oral and writing communication skills • Multicultural skills • Networking skills • Negotiation skills • Team working skills	• To demonstrate **communication skills, writing** business documents, creating and delivering professional **presentations**, collecting **information**. • To provide evidence of **adapting** to other cultures, sharing **feelings, perceptions and experiences** • To demonstrate effective **leadership** and **teamwork** skills.	• Set of written documents • Presentations • Reports of information collected and categorised • Cross cultural dilemmas or/and cases. • observation tools for team leadership	• Portfolios • Rubrics • Case studies • Cultural and ethical dilemmas • Observation tools • Data analysis • Final Degree Project

Soft Skills assessment most valuable tools

- Portfolios

- Self-assessment

- Peer-assessment

- Case Studies

- Problem solving activities

- Dilemmas

- Observation tools

- **In company training / practices**

- **Final Degree Project**
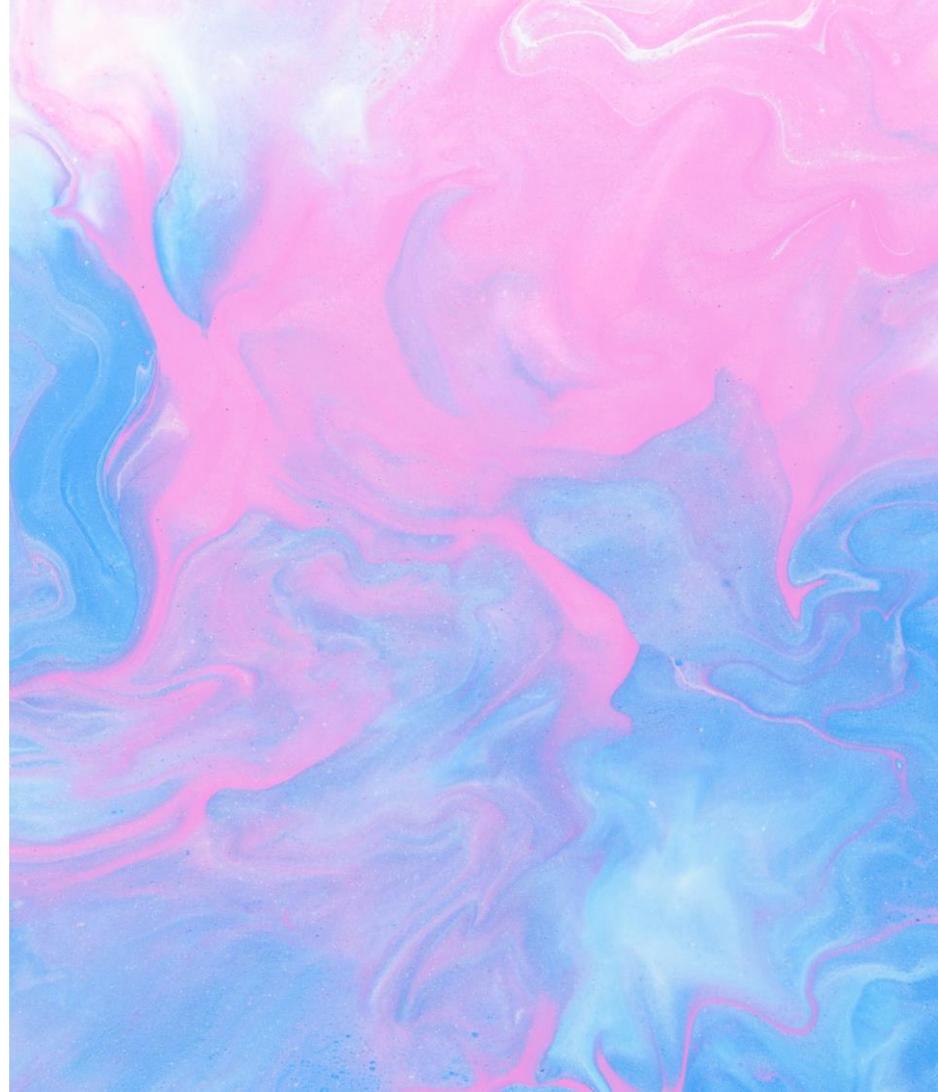
04
Closing remarks

- Soft skills **can be considered integrated with hard skills** and can be taught together with them

- The **context** play an important role for soft skills and can't be separate from it.

- Soft skills **involve several actors**: teachers, classmates, employers… A true **dialogue** between them is needed.

- A precise measurement for soft skills is impossible

- To effective soft skills teaching we need to **update didactics and teaching and learning methodologies**.
- **New technologies** can be very powerful to teach soft skills
- **Collaboration between universities and companies** play an important role in the development of soft skills
- Soft skills are not only necessary for professional activity, **can make people happier.**

References

- Beard, D., Schweiger, D., & Surendran, K. (2019). Integrating soft skills assessment through university, college, and programmatic efforts at an AACSB accredited institution. Journal of Information Systems Education, 19(2), 11.
- Cimatti, B. (2016). Definition, development, assessment of soft skills and their role for the quality of organizations and enterprises. International Journal for quality research, 10(1).
- Hora, M. T., Benbow, R. J., & Smolarek, B. B. (2018). Re-thinking soft skills and student employability: A new paradigm for undergraduate education. Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 50(6), 30-37.
- Rao, M. S. (2010). Soft skills-enhancing employability: connecting campus with corporate. IK International Pvt Ltd.
- Ricchiardi, P., & Emanuel, F. (2018). Soft skill assessment in higher education. Journal of Educational, Cultural and Psychological Studies (ECPS Journal), (18), 21-53.
- Ruiz-Morales, Y., García-García, M., Biencinto-López, C., & Carpintero, E. (2017). Soft Skills assessment through virtual environments in the university sector: A narrative review. RELIEVE, 23(2).
- Soft Skills for Employability. (2020) Guidelines for improving European HEIs student's employability: embedding the most demanded soft skills in the curricula. (not published – under review)

Thank you

Josep M. Duart, PhD.
Full Professor
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC)
OpenEvidence Research
Editor-in Chief "*International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*"

jduart@uoc.edu
🐦 @jduart