

Handbook for Educators

Supporting the Development of Soft Skills

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Visualising Skills and Learning Paths and
supporting acknowledgement of
competences

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VISUAL PATHS

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1 The importance of the promotion of competences in after-pandemic time	4
1.1 Reference to Key Competences	4
1.2 The aim - supporting the development of soft skills	4
1.3 Key descriptions of soft skills	5
1.4 Interconnection with other methods within the Visual Paths project	6
2 The need of integration of soft skills into educational process	7
2.1 The importance of soft skills in personal sphere	9
2.2 The importance of soft skills in education	9
2.3 The importance of soft skills in the workplace	10
2.4 Soft skills framework	10
2.5 Formal and informal learning and soft skills	13
3 Soft skills assessment tool	14
3.1 Soft skills assessment tools - to check learner's basic knowledge about soft skills	14
3.2 Soft skills assessment tool for educators and learners	16
4 Soft skills integrated in the app	21
4.1 Monitoring learner's development of soft skills through the app	22
Conclusions	23
Bibliography	24

Introduction

Self-assessment and supporting the development of social skills are essential in a rapidly changing and digital world. This handbook targets educators who want to learn more about supporting the development of social skills of learners. Divided into four chapters, it addresses the following themes: (1) The importance of promoting competences in a (post-) pandemic era and (2) the need to integrate social skills into the educational process. It proposes (3) an assessment tool and a method for self-assessment of soft skills and describes (4) how this method can be implemented and used in the Visual Paths online environment.

This handbook was developed as a part of the Erasmus+ project "Visualization of skills and learning paths as a contribution to the recognition of competences" in order to address this topic and offer an innovative and easy-to-implement solution for the practical use.

A traffic light system is proposed for teachers and learners to assess the level of expected competences and get an overview of the level of competence. The learners can orientate themselves independently and set themselves goals for competencies to be achieved. They become co-creators of their own learning process. For this purpose, working with digital flashcards is suggested between the assessments, in which both learners set themselves tasks, but teachers can also assign tasks. In this way, learners can always work at their personal performance level and stay motivated to develop further in the desired direction.

On the one hand, this handbook is to be seen as independent information material for educators to promote social skills in the learning process. On the other hand, in combination with the other manuals and resources developed as parts of the Visual Paths project for the visualization of learning paths, it forms an effective overall instrument for the recording, the development and proof of social skills. The eLearning platform and the app are the central tools of the suite.

1 The importance of the promotion of competences in after-pandemic time

The COVID-19 pandemics changed our lifestyles significantly, imposing big changes in personal life, education and employment. It has consequently shifted our attention to the necessity of developing and promoting competences that can help us adapt to different life conditions and conduct a satisfactory life “as thriving individuals, responsible social agents, and reflective lifelong learners” (21).

1.1 Reference to Key Competences

In 2006 European Reference Framework introduced Key Competences for Lifelong learning: “Key competences are those which all individuals need for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.” (23) The main aim of the document was to help citizens adapt to a quickly changing world.

“In May 2018, the Council of the European Union adopted the revised Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, setting out a core set of skills necessary to work and live in the 21st Century. The aim is that everybody should have the essential set of competences needed for personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. These competences include Literacy, Multilingual, Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, as well as Digital, Personal, Social and Learning to Learn, Citizenship, Entrepreneurship, and Cultural awareness and expression.”(21)

Nowadays, four years later, Europeans face similar problems during the Corona crisis. After having the crisis dictate our lives for the past two years, people may feel alienated and vulnerable in the face of new challenges and new decisions, thus again they have to adapt their knowledge, skills and aptitudes to the new environment especially in terms of employability.

1.2 The aim - supporting the development of soft skills

Bearing above mentioned needs in mind, it was decided to introduce a concept of soft skills development support into the educational process, during which learners are

supported in their personal development to become more flexible and adaptable to rapidly changing working and life conditions. Its aim is, on one hand, to make learners aware of the role of personal development and, on the other hand, to integrate digitalization, formal and informal learning while emphasizing the importance of personal development of learners.

In addition, this method, being a part of Visual Paths project, draws educators' attention to the importance of soft skills which play a significant role for learners' future life, their ability to be flexible, adaptable and confident in different social and professional situations. It facilitates educators with useful information about the concept of soft skills, framework of these competencies and assessment tools in order to help educators support the development of learner's soft skills.

As mentioned in European Reference Framework: „Education in its dual role, both social and economic, has a key role to play in ensuring that Europe's citizens acquire the key competences needed to enable them to adapt flexibly to such changes.“ (23)

The main target groups of this approach are on the one hand teenagers as well as young adults and on the other educators who want to focus on the development of soft skills in terms of personal development and employability.

1.3 Key descriptions of soft skills

In many studies and researches there was a common “observation that soft skills represent an added value for company competitiveness and, at the same time, they are a factor encouraging the employability of persons looking for a job“(16). In the European Framework for Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning **Skills** are one of the three components of **Competency** - “Competencies are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context.“ (23)

Competence includes **all the skills and features** that allow the person to perform a job. Having a competency means using certain knowledge to efficiently solve any problems. This knowledge may cover the technical aspects of various activities (e.g. the operation of computer programs, speaking foreign languages), as well as the various aspects of interpersonal functioning (e.g. working in a team, adapting to different situations). A competent person is, therefore, the one who has the appropriate skills and attitudes to perform a given function, to speak on specific issues and to take responsibility

for them. Competence is often considered as individual characteristics of a person to determine his or her potential.

Competences (and thus skills) are strongly influenced by values or beliefs and ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Values have a major influence on a person's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations. (16)

There are many types of competences depending on their value. As far as skills are concerned, they may be **specific** (those that increase the value of a person only within a specific task or sector/company) or **general** (those that increase the value of a person across the labor market and private life). While CVET (Continuing Vocational Education and Training) agencies, institutions and policy-makers work with a distinction between specific and general (or generic) skills, employers are more inclined to distinguish between **hard and soft skills**. (16)

- **Hard skills** – are the knowledge and skills needed to perform a specific job, such as foreign language skills and computer skills. They are easily observed, measured and trained.
- **Soft skills** – these are psychosocial skills, closely connected with personal attitudes which are intangible, such as communication, creativity, dynamic behavior, and flexibility. They are difficult to measure and develop.

Hard skills can be learnt, while some **soft skills** can be innate but with the ability to grow and expand throughout a lifetime. Worth mentioning is the difference between **Soft skills** from **Basic skills** which are used together in the European Framework for Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning to describe 8 key competences. **Basic skills** refer to literacy, numeracy, language and ICT, which are acquired during formal learning process.

1.4 Interconnection with other methods within the Visual Paths project

The aim of the Visual Paths project is to combine approaches to assessing, developing and verifying social skills in connection with learning, in order to support the promotion of social skills and to facilitate the professional and personal career path of young people.

With the "**Skills on Display**" approach, prerequisites and contexts are defined and learning paths are visualized digitally. The learner can see which activities/learning units

have already been completed and which still need to be completed in order to achieve the learning objective. This helps the learner to understand the meaning and context of each learning activity both in the context of acquiring individual skills and competences and as a part of the "big picture" of their personal learning journey.

The "**Development of Soft Skills**" approach draws learners and teachers attention to the development and promotion of soft skills. To do so it offers a tool for self-assessment and offers ways to have a discussion and development during the learning process, emphasizing the contribution of informal learning outcomes for the development of soft skills.

The "**Acknowledgement of Competencies**" approach deals with the collection and organization of learning evidence from different contexts (formal and informal learning), making competences visible and available. It can be used to support learning processes and afterwards, as a basis for the validation of learning outcomes or the preparation of the next career steps, such as job applications.

The **Web and Mobile Interfaces** are technical platforms for the integration and the practical application of the findings from the other developed outputs. Using it makes clear that the combined use of results of the developed learning contexts offers an extra value beyond a punctual use of an individual learning context.

All above-mentioned approaches are presented in separate handbooks giving more specific information on the topic.

2 The need of integration of soft skills into educational process

Soft skills refer to a group of personal characteristics that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people, personal attributes such as positive attitudes, communication skills, critical thinking, organization and planning, working in a team and more.

Soft skills are social and personal skills that people need to possess in order to be successful in a personal and professional life. Social skills identify a person as an individual, determine a person's behavior, personality, ability to perform tasks in a variety of situations. Assertiveness, emotional intelligence, creativity, leadership, self-confidence, time management – these are the skills that everybody possesses to a greater or lesser

degree. The task is to identify one's strengths and weaknesses and to work on their improvement and development.

Unlike hard skills, **soft skills are not measurable**. Until recently, these immeasurable skills have not been taken into consideration as much as today. It is this type of competence that nowadays employers increasingly appreciate.

Employers look for employees who are not simply able to do the specific job they apply for, but who do it better than others do. In a certain way, soft skills represent the working style of a person (the way in which s/he carries out the tasks assigned). It is the personal style, which makes any person unique, in spite of the fact that they have the same knowledge and qualifications (hard skills) (16).

Market research suggests that demand for soft skills is constantly increasing. It is thanks to the fact that soft skills are strategic. They can be applied in many different types of jobs, and also they can empower people (if aware of their own capabilities) to promote themselves in a proper way to find better jobs and positively contribute to the working organizations. It is not surprising why soft skills are also sometimes referred to as employability skills (16).

Although soft skills are referred to as immeasurable, there are ways to assess them. Such an assessment is usually performed for scientific, research or educational needs. In table one, there are some examples of measuring soft skills in educational institutions or workplaces:

Table 1. Three aspects of soft skills:

Aspect	Characteristics	Method of measurement
cognitive	ability to recognize social situations, cognitive empathy, knowledge of social rules, and ability to plan social behavior	social intelligence tests, questionnaires of intelligence, emotional, structured interviews
motivational	the tendency to take social risks and engage in social situations	questionnaires of certain personality characteristics that measure the ability of being initiative in social contacts
motoric	Possessing and using social skills	self-description, estimation, observation, structured simulation techniques in the natural environment

Employers use a variety of recruitment techniques to assess applicants' soft skills: from interviews to trial periods. Although not always explicitly stated, they generally have a

recruitment framework which incorporates a mixture of skills, qualifications, work experience and personal qualities, the mix of which is tailored to reflect the job's competencies and requirements (16). That is why a learner should be aware of the importance of soft skills for his/her future job in order to prepare appropriately for a job interview for a desired job.

2.1 The importance of soft skills in personal sphere

Human beings have been, are and will remain social beings, therefore interpersonal skills are crucial in people's life. They influence not only the professional sphere but, above all, the private life. Today the role of social skills is increasing. The basic soft competence is the ability to create and maintain interpersonal relationships with another person. It stimulates further skills and behaviors that significantly affect the well-being and mental health of an individual. People-to-people links provide a sense of security and belonging, which are one of the basic human needs mentioned in the Maslow Pyramid. In addition, using a mutual support network, people are less exposed to the negative effects of stress and are more adaptable to any type of environment change. The COVID-19 showed that social isolation had a negative effect on the mental and physical well-being of many people, especially those with less developed social relationships.

2.2 The importance of soft skills in education

The development of soft skills in education is extremely important as they help students achieve better results in tests and exams, which are an inevitable part of the educational process. Among the most useful competencies, we can name: time management, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and readiness to learn. These competencies play an important role in the academic process, as well as in daily social interactions. Students must, therefore, be aware of the importance and necessity of acquiring the above-mentioned competencies. A great number of scientific studies investigated and highlighted the growing importance of soft skills in education. Ideally, soft skills development programs or courses should be integrated in the curriculum so that students can see the applicability of certain soft skills in practice. Unfortunately, such a solution is

not always possible. That is why our project emphasizes the importance of integrating soft skills into the educational process.

2.3 The importance of soft skills in the workplace

According to recent studies of the labor market, soft skills are highly looked-for by employers who recruit new staff. (19) As soft skills refer to personality traits, attributes, qualities and personal behavior of individuals, they are crucially important and essential in every working environment. The most sought after are soft skills which include certain abilities such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, self-motivation, decision-making, critical thinking and time management skills.

Although it is now an undeniable fact that employers are putting stronger emphasis on soft skills, it is equally important that students should similarly appreciate the value of such skills and make considerate efforts to acquire these skills, as they are crucial for success on the career path.

2.4 Soft skills framework

Having done a wide research on the topic of soft skills and discussed it thoroughly with the project team, we've chosen several soft skills which are most frequently mentioned as valuable for education, future career and better social interactions. The assessment tool, which will be discussed later on, deals with the chosen soft skills.

The table 2 below presents the chosen skills which fall into three groups – *personal, social and methodological*.

Table 2. Soft skills framework

Personal	Social	Methodological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● self-motivation / positive attitude ● adaptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● teamwork ● communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● readiness to learn ● critical thinking

As for **personal skills** the most important are *self-motivation or positive attitude* towards oneself as well as *being able to adapt* to different situations. A person with a well-

developed ability to self-motivate and adapt to numerous surroundings feels satisfied and fulfilled. Moreover, showing a positive attitude and the initiative to work well without constant supervision is a significant soft skill for any employee.

Personal skills are all types of skills connected to a person:

- **self-motivation** - this is a way of motivating yourself which sometimes can be a much more difficult task than motivating someone else or being motivated by others. It requires a high degree of determination and persistence and, above all, a focus on positive values.
- **adaptability** - this is a capacity to accept changes as a new challenge and to adapt to the new situations and modify approaches if required by the context (16).

These personal soft skills are essential for every learner throughout the educational process that is why they have to be well developed.

In terms of social skills, the most important in a class and a workplace are *communication and teamwork*. Effective communication skills are valuable not only through the interview process but also in the future career overall. The ability to communicate involves knowing how to speak to others in different working settings. Finding a way to tactfully and expertly disagree with others without creating a conflict situation is an important skill that employers value immensely. As well as skillful communication, good teamwork involves a combination of a number of soft skills. Working in a team towards a common goal requires the intuition and interpersonal intelligence to see when to be a leader and when to become a listener. Good team players are observant, as well as open to the necessities and responsibilities of others.

Social skills refer to communication with other people:

- **teamwork** - a very important soft skill that is desirable for both work and private life. It includes the ability to work with others to reach a common goal, to operate within a group, to adopt specific group standards. The ability to work in a team is important in many professions, especially when working on projects, such as in an advertising agency. This is the ability to understand the benefits of working in a team in order to achieve results.
- verbal and non-verbal **communication** skills - a feature that involves the ability to establish and maintain a healthy, satisfying relationship with any typology of speakers (heads, colleagues, clients, etc.). This communication skill is valued in practically every profession, which requires cooperation with others, capacity to present information in a clear way, ability to understand and interpret data as well as support one's work effectively.

Without these skills, young people tend to make inappropriate choices related to important decisions such as whom to friendship, whom to follow, whom to like, what skills to develop, which school to choose and, finally, what career paths to follow.

Finally, last but not the least important group of soft skills – **methodological skills**. The pandemic period has shown the growing need for continuous learning and gaining new skills. On one hand, people had to adapt quite unexpectedly to the new circumstances of learning and working remotely. On the other hand, during this period, especially for young people, it was extremely important to be able to think critically, analyze and select the information needed while learning and working in an online environment.

The most important **methodological skills** which refer to lifelong learning are:

- **readiness to learn** - a person with this competence is aware of lifelong learning. Such a person feels the responsibility for his/her self-development, sets learning objectives and looks for opportunities to gain them e.g., in traditional and online courses, studies, or volunteering. Moreover, the person is persistent in learning and knows that the result depends on his/her involvement.
- **critical thinking** - this is a capacity to analyze information and make reasoned judgments about it as well as accept constructive criticism without feeling offended.

These **methodological soft skills** are oriented on achieving results, continuing self-development and constant self-improving. Since these skills are related to the ability to turn ideas into actions, they belong to the so-called "entrepreneurial skills"(17). Therefore, these skills feature the tendency towards actions, oriented more at task accomplishments than impact on other people.

2.5 Formal and informal learning and soft skills

If we reflect upon a person's development, the years of schooling immediately appear before our eyes and always with the connection of assessments of academic skills or professional qualifications. However, the question arises whether a person learns or acquires competences only by studying at a school desk? What about other situations such as everyday situations where young people have to manage tasks successfully, interact with other people showing them respect etc.? These situations are also good ways to learn new skills, get experience and they are even more important for development of a responsible citizen and a satisfied person. It is believed that over a half of a person's knowledge and skills derive from informal learning. Unfortunately, that way of learning is not documented in any way. That is why it was decided in this method to emphasize the importance of informal learning from the point of view of personal development. It is seen as a beneficial element of education, which can enrich formal academic or professional learning. In the project Visual Path an innovative approach was developed bringing together digitalization of education and the possibility of personal development.

In many European countries, the emphasis lay on formal learning as well as on digitalization in education especially after the period of on-line learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, informal learning is as important as formal. These two forms of learning can mutually contribute from each other with the help of digitalization in the form of the app. The app enables learners to collect digital evidence of their informal learning and upload them in Archive such as documents, photos or videos etc., which are accessible on a learner's mobile device. Moreover, a learner pays attention to the development of his/her soft skills as s/he is collecting the visual evidence of informal learning.

Overall, it is strongly believed that combining formal, informal learning and soft skills with a digital support is an innovative approach, which will help educators and learners to succeed in the process of education and personal development.

3 Soft skills assessment tool

The role of an educator or a tutor is immensely important as s/he can be the first person who notices a learner's stronger or weaker skills or competencies. It is the teacher who can encourage and inspire learners to improve their soft skills. There are numerous ways of motivating learners' development of their soft skills starting from praising learners for even small achievements to conducting group activities or assigning tasks engaging learners' soft skills. In the Visual Paths project, the focus is on supporting a learner in the individual process of personal development.

3.1 Soft skills assessment tools - to check learner's basic knowledge about soft skills

At the beginning of the course, the tutor discusses with the learners the importance of personal development, which is gaining elevated relevance with the digital transition of society and education and with it more flexible conditions for learning, work and life. It is important to highlight that today learners must be prepared to adapt to changing work surroundings and different ways of working. They should be able to adjust their knowledge, skills and competences of professional learning to the rapidly changing world. This requires, along with formal learning, the development of transversal skills or soft skills, which focus on social, personal and methodological learning. Afterwards, the tutor

emphasizes the difference between soft skills and hard skills, which were presented above in this handbook. Following that, learners are asked to do a short questionnaire where they define which of the skills on the list are soft skills by ticking the answer in a Yes/No column as presented in table one:

Table 1. Assessment of learner knowledge of soft skills

<i>Do you agree that the below-listed skills are soft skills?</i>		
1. Communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Self-motivation	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Adaptability	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Teamwork	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Critical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
6. Readiness to learn	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
7. Speaking different languages	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
8. Math skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
9. Computer skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Key to the Table 1 - On the list there are six soft skills, which fall into three groups of soft skills:

- personal soft skills - self-motivation and adaptability,
- social - teamwork and communication,
- methodological - readiness to learn and critical thinking.

The rest are hard skills, which learners can learn and master in the course of formal education.

Moreover, tutors need to find out whether their students at the beginning of the course are aware of the necessity and importance of soft skills in education and in their future career. For that purpose, students are asked to answer a set of questions showing their knowledge in the field of soft skills. The questionnaire is presented in table two:

Table 2. Student questionnaire for induction assessment

<i>Do you agree that:</i>		
1. Soft skills are important in education and employment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Hard to tell	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
2. Soft skills are the most desired skills by employers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Hard to tell	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
3. Soft skills are necessary to get a better job		
<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Hard to tell	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
4. Soft skills are harder to learn comparing to professional skills		

<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Hard to tell	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
5. Soft skills can be learnt only through practice		
<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Hard to tell	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree

Key to Table 2 – all the correct answers are “Strongly agree”.

After completing the questionnaire, the tutor draws learners’ attention to the necessity of developing personal competences beyond professional expertise. It is important to highlight that soft skills are important in the process of education and employment. In numerous researches these skills are proved to be the most desired by employers, but at the same time, they are harder to learn than professional skills. These competences are frequently underestimated and neglected in the process of formal learning as being intangible and abstract, that is why learners are often unaware of them. The role of a tutor is to highlight aforementioned soft skills and the ways in which they can be developed and improved.

3.2 Soft skills assessment tool for educators and learners

With the aim to identify and measure the learner’s level of soft skills an assessment tool is suggested. This tool is available in the app, which both the tutor and the learner can upload onto their smartphones and have easy access to. In this assessment tool, six soft skills were taken into consideration. They were described previously in the handbook as the most desirable during the learning process and for improving employability. While preparing this tool, the tutor and learner point of view were taken into account. That is why tutors and learners have a similar set of questions to respond to which they can fill in and then compare.

The traffic light system of assessment is proposed in this assessment tool as it is not punishing learners for not having a certain skill but it gives orientation on which skills are to be improved. The aim is to acknowledge the learners' efforts and achievements rather than punish them for their mistakes; therefore, the traffic light system is the most suitable for encouraging and motivating learners in their pursuit to improve. The teacher should emphasize that learners have to answer the questions honestly.

The system of calculating the score is simple as the aim is to give directions for tutors and learners of the necessary development of soft skills in the process of formal learning. It is

worth remembering that the results of the assessment should be read individually taking a close look at the learner's personality, learning achievements and experience.

For each answer "Yes" the learner gets 2 points, for the answer "hard to tell" 1 point, for the answer "No" 0 point. After completing the questionnaire for each soft skill, the learner sums up his/her points. The maximum score is 12 points.

Table 3. Soft skills assessment tool for tutors and learners

I			SELF MOTIVATION		
	LEARNER		TUTOR		
1	I can motivate myself to achieve my goals 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		A learner can motivate him/herself to achieve goals 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		
2	I set myself deadlines so I can focus on my goals 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		A learner sets deadlines and focuses on goals 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		
3	I learn from my mistakes and improve myself 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		A learner learns from his/her mistakes and improves his/her personality 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		
4	Positive feedback makes me more efficient and effective 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		Positive feedback makes learner's efforts more efficient and effective 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		
5	I set myself ambitious goals and I am satisfied with my decisions 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		A learner sets ambitious goals and is satisfied with his/her decisions 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		
6	I always treat new task as a positive challenge 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		A learner treats new task as a positive challenge 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		

Score:

12p - 10p - *it means that this skill is well developed*

9p - 6p - *it means that the skill should be improved*

5p - 0p - *it means that the learner should work hard on the skills*

II			ADAPTABILITY		
	LEARNER		TUTOR		
1	I accept changes as a new challenge 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		A learner accepts changes with a positive attitude 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no		

2	I can adjust easily to a new timetable/schedule ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner can adjust to new routine ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
3	I am comfortable in a new place (e.g school, workplace) ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner feels comfortable in new circumstances ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
4	I make contacts with new people without any problem ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner makes contacts with new people without any problem ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
5	I am able to manage my emotions according to the situation ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner can manage his/her emotions according to the situation ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
6	I can modify priority of tasks depending on the deadline ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner can modify priority of tasks depending on the deadline ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no

Score:

12p - 10p - *it means that this skill is well developed*

9p - 6p - *it means that the skill should be improved*

5p - 0p - *it means that the learner should work hard on the skills*

III	TEAMWORK	
	LEARNER	TUTOR
1	I can cooperate in a group to solve problems ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner can cooperate in a group to solve problems. ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
2	I motivate the group where I work. ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner motivates the group where s/he works. ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
3	I keep my teammates informed of my work and share important information ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner keeps his teammates informed of the work done and shares important information . ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
4	I can easily find my place in a team. ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner can find his place in a team. ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
5	I use my strengths for the common good ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner uses his/her strengths for the common good ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no
6	I often participate actively in group discussions ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no	A learner participates actively in group discussions ☺yes 🌀hard to tell ☹no

yes	hard to tell	no	yes	hard to tell	no
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Score:

12p - 10p - *it means that this skill is well developed*9p - 6p - *it means that the skill should be improved*5p - 0p - *it means that the learner should work hard on the skills*

IV		COMMUNICATION	
	LEARNER	TUTOR	
1	I communicate clearly what I want to express. yes hard to tell no	A learner communicates his/her messages clearly and effectively. yes hard to tell no	
2	Before I communicate, I think about what to say and what the person needs to know. yes hard to tell no	A learner plans and designs messages, considers the content and the audience yes hard to tell no	
3	When I listen to a person talking to me, I think about what to say next and think about the questions to ask. yes hard to tell no	A learner pays attention to what is being said and asks questions. yes hard to tell no	
4	I listen to what other people need to say without interrupting. yes hard to tell no	A learner listens actively, refrains from interrupting. yes hard to tell no	
5	I pay attention to non-verbal communication: gestures, facial expression, tone of voice and eye contact. yes hard to tell no	A learner uses non-verbal communication while talking. yes hard to tell no	
6	I ask questions to show my interest in the conversation. yes hard to tell no	A learner asks questions and shows interest. yes hard to tell no	

Score:

12p - 10p - *it means that this skill is well developed*9p - 6p - *it means that the skill should be improved*5p - 0p - *it means that the learner should work hard on the skills*

V		READINESS TO LEARN	
	LEARNER	TUTOR	

1	I want to attend extra classes where I can develop my skills 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner expresses desire to attend extra classes to develop his/her skills 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no
2	I understand which knowledge/skills I need to improve in order to be competitive in the labor market 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner understands which knowledge /skills needs to be improved in order to be competitive in the labor market 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no
3	I understand which learning achievements are important for my success in the labor market. 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner understands which learning achievements are important for his/her success in the labor market. 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no
4	I plan my learning activities for the period of time (e.g. week, term) 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner plans his/her learning activities for the period of time 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no
5	I want to take up a new hobby/sport to develop my interests/skills 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner expresses desire to take up a new hobby/sport to develop his/her interests/skills 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no
6	I want to do voluntary work just to get experience 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner agrees to do voluntary work to gain experience 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no

Score:

12p - 10p - *it means that this skill is well developed*

9p - 6p - *it means that the skill should be improved*

5p - 0p - *it means that the learner should work hard on the skills*

VI	CRITICAL THINKING	
	LEARNER	TUTOR
1	I can take rational and reasonable decisions 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner can take rational and reasonable decisions 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no
2	I can solve simple everyday problems. 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner can solve simple problems. 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no
3	I analyze my experiences in the labor market and can draw simple conclusions 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no	A learner analyses his/her experiences in the labor market and draws conclusions 😊yes 🌀hard to tell 😞no

4	I can take constructive criticism. yes hard to tell no	A learner can take constructive criticism. yes hard to tell no
5	I listen to and accept the opinions of others. yes hard to tell no	A learner accepts opinions of others. yes hard to tell no
6	I can evaluate situations from different points of view. yes hard to tell no	A learner can evaluate situations from different points of view. yes hard to tell no

Score:

12p - 10p - *it means that this skill is well developed*

9p - 6p - *it means that the skill should be improved*

5p - 0p - *it means that the learner should work hard on the skills*

After getting the results, the tutor and the learner compare their results, discuss them either in a classroom or via the app and set the action points as to which of the learner's soft skills should be developed, strengthened or improved and which of them are satisfactory. The learner has a period of a course (depending on the type of schooling s/he gets) during which s/he collects the evidence of formal and informal learning showing his/her work to develop his personal skills.

At the end of the course the tutor and the learner complete the same soft skill assessment tool, compare the results and discuss whether there was an improvement of the learner's soft skills or not. If not, the learner has to reflect on the reasons why and in what way they can be improved and discuss them with the tutor. The learner collects the evidence of improving the necessary skill and makes them visible by uploading it to the Archive. There are many possibilities to collect evidence of developing soft skills such as participating in sporting events or clubs, organizing school or social events, working on a group or individual projects. A learner can upload photos, films or other documents of his/her activities which demonstrate his/her mastering of soft skills. Afterwards the learner discusses his/her achievements with the educator.

4 Soft skills integrated in the app

Soft skills are an important part of personal development, good employability and satisfactory lifestyle. Nonetheless, they are often neglected in the process of formal

learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic a number of educational platforms appeared which offered different possibilities of formal learning. However, none of them combined formal learning with informal learning and soft skills development. That is why it is decided to integrate these three forms of development within one app. It enables a learner to document evidence of informal learning which proves that his/her soft skills are also developing.

4.1 Monitoring learner's development of soft skills through the app

The learner can collect different types of evidence which s/he can upload into the archive in the app. These can be documents, presentations, videos or audio files etc.

Below we present examples of evidences, which a learner can collect in order to develop soft skills:

To show the development of **personal soft skills** a learner can upload:

- A certificate of participation or winning an individual or group competition/contest.

This is a good evidence that a learner improved his/her

- a) **Self-motivation** by participating, achieving a result and succeeding in a competition;
- b) **Adaptability** by entering the competition and agreeing to fulfill its rules; by communicating with people of different backgrounds, gender, age.

To show the development of **social soft skills** a learner can upload:

- A certificate, essay, formal letters, CV or other proof of working on a group project and completing it successfully.

This is a good evidence that a learner improved his/her

- a) **Teamwork** by working as a part of a team, performing certain roles or tasks, solving problems, discussing urgent topics;
- b) **Communication** by interacting with teammates in order to accomplish a set task or to achieve a goal; by communicating in written form with educators or employers.

To show the development of **methodological soft skills** a learner can upload:

- A certificate, a diploma of passed exams, obtained qualifications, more advanced level of foreign languages and other documents showing learner's participation in workshops, internships or training.

This is a good evidence that a learner improved his/her

- a) *Readiness to learn* by engaging in a process of learning and preparing for exams, participating in different forms of trainings, showing his/her readiness to face new challenges;
- b) *Critical thinking* by eliciting the most essential and useful information regarding the type of qualification, courses, training which can be the most relevant to the current state of the labor market and its possible future trends.

As learners upload the evidence of their work into the app, a tutor has a notification of that activity and can observe the learners' development. Systematically, either in person or via the app, tutors and learners discuss the learner's progress and his collected evidence. A number of meetings can differentiate depending on the individual need of a learner e.g. 4 to 6 times during the course. A learner should be aware that the collected evidence reflects his/her engagement and constant work upon his/her soft skills and, therefore, that s/he is responsible for his/her personal development. A tutor's role is to monitor, give directions and comments regarding the relevance, level and quality of uploaded evidence.

Conclusions

The handbook describes an innovative approach that emphasizes the importance of fostering soft skills for a learner's personal development. The approach consists of the regular assessment of desired competencies using a traffic light system and the evaluation thereof. Between assessments, work is done to improve these skills, for example with the help of digital flashcards. Assessments and tasks can be carried out either by the teacher, by the learner or by both.

The approach can be tailored to personal needs, such as career aspirations, but can also exist as part of a set curriculum. It can be used as an individual instrument in the teaching

and learning process. However, as part of the Visual Paths project, two manuals for the visualization of learning paths, a manual for the recognition and cataloging of soft skills and an eLearning platform and an app that implement this content in an online learning environment were also developed. Used in combination, they form a powerful overall tool that represents the assessment, development and verification of competencies.

They enable the learner to be in control of their personal development. They understand the connections between learning and social skills better, they become more aware of their skills and they know how to improve them. With their smartphones, learners can easily upload any kind of evidence to the app to document their personal development process.

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