DEVELOPMENT OF "SOFT SKILLS" AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CAREER SOCIALISATION

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The objective of the study is to draw focus on the necessity of the development of the so called "soft skills" in higher education. Beyond knowledge development and the improvement of cognitive abilities, really successful education training programs are the ones that effectively improve the above mentioned skills – such as communication and negotiation skills, self-confidence, enforcement of rights and the ability to form interpersonal relationships (Tobin 2006). The specific outcome requirements of a given training program clearly set out the knowledge, skills and abilities to be achieved by the students by the end of their studies. In order to achieve to required goals, diverse educational methods can be used. Knowledge development, acquisition of new knowledge usually requires traditional methods in the framework of presentations and seminars. However, for the practical application of these, further skill development, preparation is indispensable, which, beyond formal educational methods, require the use of non-formal techniques in the form of exercises and trainings.

Nowadays, labour market competition is quite vigorous, as most of job applicants have almost identical basic training upon application for a given position. The successful candidate is the one, who also possesses more advanced interpersonal skills. Thus, applicants will prefer training locations, institutes granting the provision of professional knowledge, while also laying emphasis on the development of the so-called soft skills. In other words, both learning and experiencing are parts of the training program. The development of soft skills primarily requires practice of self-awareness, where the participants recognize, identify their abilities and characteristics, and then consciously shape them through experience-based learning and interactions (Seetha 2013). The appropriate framework for this is provided by diverse training exercises, as well as by the application of non-formal educational methods.

The spread of non-formal educational methods dates back to the 1960's and 70's. By that time, it was already recognized that extracurricular educational methods provide useful supplement for formal education, and it was also confirmed that non-formal education offers social and cultural development. Since then, it became accepted that

school is not the only institution to incorporate learning process. The term education is strongly connected to an institution, but learning continues beyond institutionalized borders, being an extracurricular activity, in the course of which students further improve and develop from their experiences (Hamadache 1991). Coombs et al. (1973) have defined the process of non-formal learning-teaching as: a) it means organized, structured activities; b) it is designed specifically for a target group; and further on c) it is organized with the objective of accomplishing specific learning objectives; and finally d) these non-institutionalized activities occur outside of the system of education. Contrary to this, traditional, formal education is standardized, institutionalized, and based on a specific curriculum. This kind of method of education is characterized by consistency, it is well-defined and predictable. Non-formal learning is materialized in different forms, it also has specific objectives, but at the same time it is characterized by a large extent of flexibility, self-sufficiency and involvement. It became a regular practice in the last couple of decades that non-formal methods are created in order to supplement institutionalized education, instead of trying to replace it (Hamadache 1991). Thus, in several countries, a model integrating non-formal education into formal was implemented, based on the complementing relationship of the two (Siurala 2006).

Labour market challenges of the 21st Century change fast. There is a need for a – constantly developing and competent – workforce, which is able to compete on global market. The new directions of the researches in pedagogic psychology also pursue to maintain lifelong learning attitude and the need for constant skill expansion as well as continuous development through motivation and the improvement of learning efficiency. The conception of life-long learning also receives special attention both from the direction of researchers and the business sector (McCombs 1991, Aspin–Chapman 2000). In the concept of life-long learning, non-formal methods have a definitive role, and beyond that, the development of soft skills is one of the most important sections. Soft skills also play a definitive role in the development of the personality of the individual (Schulz 2008). A report from one of the most influential British human resource development and market research company British Graduate Recruiter (AGR) gave an account that based on employer feedback, many job applicants with higher education degree lack such skills as the ability of teamwork or cooperation. According to their survey, job applicants usually have appropriate qualification and academic knowledge, but at the same time they lack such skills as effective communication, reasoning and critical thinking (AGR 2007).

English-language specialized literature distinguishes two categories, which they label as hard skills and soft skills. The former category means obtainable knowledge and cognitions, which are teachable, such as computer programming and foreign language communication. These are the elements of professional knowledge. In the cluster

of soft skills we find personal characteristics, with such qualities as for example empathy, or social skills. These are behavioural components, whose role is especially significant in interpersonal relationships. These are also applied during problem solving, in the processes of strategic thinking and planning, handling of conflicts and upon the application of negotiation techniques. These help to improve our personal efficiency; they include creativity and flexibility, but they also have several further characteristics that are also indispensable for cooperation (Seetha 2013).

The following is a non-exhaustive list about the main characteristics of soft skills, based on a work of Schulz (2008):

Communication skills	Responsibility
Critical and structured thinking	Etiquette and good manners
Problem-solving skills	Politeness
Creativity	Self-esteem
Teamwork, cooperation	Negotiation techniques
Sincerity	Self-management
Empathy	Time management
Work ethics	Conflict management
Project management	Cultural awareness
Business management	

Table 1: Characteristics of soft skills according to Schulz (2008)

According to the definition of soft skills and the above list, we can discern three skill categories: personal characteristics, interpersonal skills and further abilities or cognitions. According to specialized literature, the most important of these are communication skills, critical and structured thinking – both include problem-solving abilities – and creativity. These constitute the foundation for the efficient handling and management of the emerging problematic situations (Schulz 2008).

On the whole, we can assert that the development of soft skills is reasonable because it befits labour market needs and expectations, where good qualifications and appropriate vocational knowledge is not sufficient. Acquiring and polishing of soft skills improves competitiveness against other applicants. Beyond professional qualification, employers prefer applicants possessing and efficiently applying the above skills. It follows that the integration of soft skill development during the formation of the curriculum of a given

training is strongly suggested for higher education institutions. Since the introduction of Bologna-style education structure, higher education institutions pursue more and more to synchronize their training content with labour market needs, thus improving their efficiency and virtue (Teichler 2003, Elias–Purcell 2004). It is also obvious that it is not easy to adjust network plans and training content in order to fit the fast-changing needs of labour market. At the same time it is clear that development of soft skills deserves place in education – besides the development of professional knowledge.

Improvement of the students' personal competences and their personal development became a constant labour market need (Andrews–Higson 2010). Thus, it is important to raise awareness to the development of soft kills and to motivate pupils to participate in self-discovery, personality- and skill development courses. An opportunity for this is the introduction of a career-socialisation module during the formation of network plans. The module offers courses complementing each other through several semesters, whose introduction facilitates life-course planning, conscious preparation for the chosen profession, and establishment of further professional development in the framework of life-course development, at first by self-awareness, later by personality development and targeted skill development, followed by career motivation and -orientation training. While the basic courses of career socialisation module highlight a person's circle of interests, abilities, values, career orientation purposefully aims for forming a relationship with the chosen profession and for achievement of necessary skills and competences. Thus, by the end of higher education training, students reach maturity in their profession, which means that they are able to successfully persist in their chosen profession. That is when their phase of starting their profession begins (Szabó 1994).

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