

# Proceedings

## GiLE4Youth

International Conference '21

The Development of Competences for Employability

29 April 2021



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## Proceedings

G4Y International Conference '21, The Development of Competencies for Employability

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Published by the [GiLE Journal of Skills Development](#)

ISBN: 978-615-01-2091-1

DOI: [10.56611/conf.proc.2021.1](https://doi.org/10.56611/conf.proc.2021.1)

Digital partner: **Howspace**

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Responsible Publisher: [GiLE Foundation](#)

Budapest, 2021

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Dear Readers,

It was our great pleasure to serve as conference chairs for the first [GiLE4Youth International Conference](#) (G4Y), organized by the GiLE Foundation and the editorial team of the [GiLE Journal of Skills Development](#) (GJSD).

At this first conference, we celebrated what we at GiLE, as a professional community, have achieved. In April 2021, we published the first issue of GJSD. The initial challenges that we faced were typical of the launch of a new scientific journal. We had to navigate through the many opportunities and obstacles on the road to publishing a successful scientific journal. Our enthusiastic and dedicated team had a vision to create even greater value and started to organise the G4Y conference in order to introduce the new journal and our vision as well as to exchange ideas on how to chart our journey forward to reach new heights. We aimed to create synergies between our GiLE Academy and our GiLE Journal by finding ways to providing authors, especially young scientists, with an opportunity to expose their research findings to an audience in an innovative and engaging way.

At the time the conference was formed, the third wave of Covid-19 hit the world and Hungary, so we were forced to move the conference online. We embraced the challenge and unlocked opportunities that were not possible at traditional in-person events and organised a virtual event that was geographically unconstrained and encouraged more attendees from all over the world. Speakers – academics, teachers, trainers and students - were able to join our virtual networking opportunities and connect with online audiences during the sessions and even before and after the conference on Howspace. We are grateful to Howspace who provided an AI-powered digital collaboration tool that offered a unique networking opportunity for the participants. At this platform, we could share recorded presentations, lecture slides, quizzes and related material, we could organise live video meetings, brainstorming sessions, and informal chats with the participants to explore current and future research directions and opportunities for collaboration.

Through expert keynote speakers and three complimenting training sessions, participants were given the opportunity to share and learn new ideas and feel reinvigorated with fresh thoughts. Our programme of the day included several sessions on each topic area of the conference and highlighted the role of developing character building, digital competencies and communication skills in boosting youth employability. We wholeheartedly recommend the Proceedings of the G4Y conference that contains a collection of papers presented at a conference. Upon request, we can connect you to our trainers, teachers and academics who did not disseminate their presentations in this book.

To put a conference of this magnitude together is not a small task. To that end, we would like to thank the organisers for their tireless efforts. We would like to thank all the partner organizations for providing their generous support, and we would like to thank all the conference participants for their valuable contributions.

We want to remain eager to interact with the participants, and to enjoy opportunities to discuss submissions, projects and ideas. We would be glad to be able to see many of you again at our next conferences where we can celebrate our past accomplishments, renew friendships and further expand our networks.

Dr. Andrea Tick and Dr. Judit Beke

Co-Chairs

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# Proceedings of the GiLE4Youth '21 Conference

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# Communication Competences

# Make your voice heard and tune your ears for a global orchestra

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## Abstract

Many people still think that sounding like a native speaker together with correct grammar and perfect vocabulary are the main elements of successful international communication. There have been countless situations when people did not speak up because they feared that their noticeable accent features could be considered as a low level of expertise and that this could result into social, educational, and professional disadvantages or even discrimination. How is English mostly used by international communication partners and what information about them is available? Who is responsible for misunderstandings or communication breakdown?

Based on secondary analysis of researchers in the areas of (business) English as a lingua franca and sociolinguistics, the relationship between accent and authenticity as well as identity and intelligibility will be clarified. Moreover, the Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR, 2001) and the CEFR Companion Volume (2020) can be regarded as an ideal framework for educators and employers to increase employability by developing a (B)ELF mindset. This will not only raise awareness of a person's plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire, but also challenge certain attitudes, beliefs, and intercultural appropriateness. Despite the close relationship between language and culture and its huge impact on constructing ourself and the other, accent prejudice and linguistic racism have often been neglected and should be added to the map of diversity and inclusion, as they are crucial for our sense of belonging and wellbeing.

**Keywords:** accent, identity, intercultural competence, mindset, prejudice

## 1. Introduction

The motto of the European Union “united in diversity”, which is used in the preamble to the Treaty, highlights the challenges of finding a balance in a fast-changing world (CVCE.EU by UNI.LU, 2016). While unity cannot be regarded as an end in itself because there is always the risk that too much standardisation could have a negative impact on the variety of identities, too much diversity could easily prevent achieving a common goal. The idea of giving equal importance to seemingly contrasting ideas will be a recurring topic in this article, which is also meant to highlight that language and culture as well as speaking and listening are inextricably linked, and why using (Business) English as a Lingua Franca will be useful for successful and reflective communication across cultures. Although the enormous increase in globalization and migration has intensified awareness of our linguistic and cultural diversity, finding an appropriate level of adaptability and authenticity, especially with English as the number one global language is highly affected by a person's attitude towards their own and other people's accents.



## 2. Linguistic diversity

A total number of about 7,000 living languages (Ethnologue, 2021) gives us an idea of the worldwide linguistic diversity. Nonetheless, more than 40% of the languages are at risk of disappearing. This development has been more accelerated by two facts: Firstly, only 23 languages represent half of the world's population. Secondly, no other language has ever been as important and dominant for global communication as English is now. While English finds itself in third position (370 million people) after Spanish and Mandarin Chinese when looking at so-called “native speakers”, it achieves an outstanding first position with about 1.5 billion speakers, when the focus is on the usage of English and “non-native speakers” are included. (As there has been a lot of criticism concerning these two terms they will be used with inverted commas in this article). The colonial influence of the British Empire, the US-American economic and cultural power and the use of the internet are given as main reasons for this development and are still deeply rooted in many people's attitudes and beliefs concerning the users and use of English.

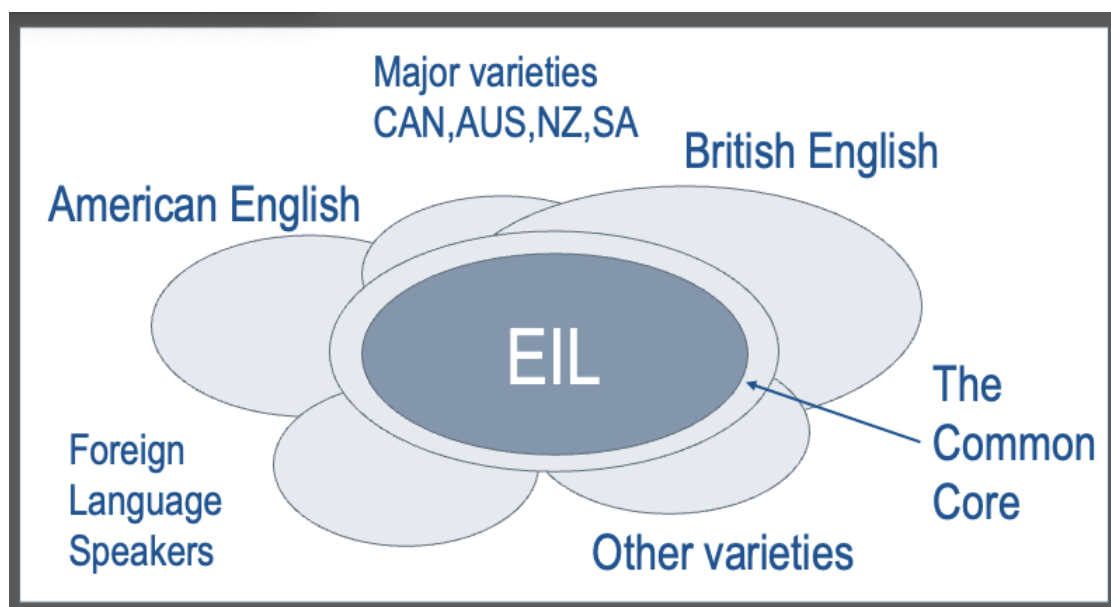
The British linguist David Crystal (2003) describes Kachru's (1988) “The Three Circles of English” as the most influential model of World Englishes. The “Inner Circle” stands for countries like the United Kingdom, the United States or Australia, where English is the primary language, but it accounts for only 10% of English users. These countries have a long tradition of being “norm-providing varieties” with regard to the English language. Many Commonwealth countries like for example India or Singapore belong to the “Outer Circle”. English is used as official first or second language and has often achieved a key role in a country's main institutions. While these are considered as “norm-developing varieties”, all the countries in the “Expanding Circle” (China, Russia, Germany) are “norm-dependent varieties”, because English is taught as a foreign language relying on standards developed by “native speakers”.

Guerra (2012) is of the opinion that all the stakeholders involved in learning, teaching, and assessing English will have to thoroughly question their attitudes and beliefs so that misconceptions about the use of English can be avoided referring to Kachru's (1992) “six fallacies about the users and uses of English”:

1. That in the Outer and Expanding Circles, English is essentially learned to interact with native speakers of the language.
2. That English is necessarily learned as a tool to understand and teach American or British cultural values, or what is generally termed the Judeo-Christian traditions.
3. That the goal of learning and teaching English is to adopt the native models of English (the Received Pronunciation or General American).
4. That the international non-native varieties of English are essentially “interlanguages” striving to achieve “native-like” character.
5. That the native speakers of English as teachers, academic administrators, and material developers provide a serious input in the global teaching of English, in policy formation and in determining the channels for the spread of the language.
6. That the diversity and variation in English is necessarily an indicator of linguistic decay; that restricting the decay is the responsibility of the native scholars of English and ESL programs (Kachru, 1992 in Guerra, 2012).

Crystal (1999) is far ahead of his times, as he predicts that “learners will have to adapt their British Standard English to an international norm – or perhaps vice versa, learning an international norm first, and modifying it to British (or US, etc.) English”. This is very similar to Modiano’s (1999) model of English as an international language (EIL) putting EIL as the “common core” at the centre, which could then be complemented by the necessary varieties in a specific context.

FIGURE 1. ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE (EIL)



Source: Modiano (1999)

According to Crystal (2013), the question of ownership of a language or whose English is to be spoken depends on the number of people using it and can, thus, clearly be answered when only looking at the ratio of four “non-native speakers” to one “native-speaker”. The people speaking a language have the power to change it so that it reflects their linguistic and cultural identities in their specific contexts. Moreover, Graddol (2006), who stresses the importance of English as a Lingua Franca, estimates that about 80% of international communication happens without any native speaker being present. What does that mean for the still dominating and mostly British and North American role models and their Anglo-American cultural norms? Would not most international users of English benefit more from moving away from a focus on “error” as a deviation from a “native-speaker” norm to functional appropriateness in a specific sociolinguistic context. Graddol (2006) is highly interested in the future of English. The subtitle of his book *Why global English may mean the end of ‘English as a Foreign Language’* already forecasts the paradigm shift officially confirmed by the publication of the CEFR Companion Volume (2020), which is supposed to be a complement to the first publication of the CEFR in 2001. The “native speaker” disappeared as idealized role model, intelligibility is the primary construct of phonological control and listening and speaking are equally important or as Hansen (2018) describes it: *2 Billion Voices: How to speak bad English perfectly*.

A further societal development has to be taken into consideration. Based on the New York Times/Qatar Foundation publication named after Joe Mortell (2020) globalization has also been responsible for a huge increase in multilingualism. It is estimated that 60% of the global population can speak two or more languages. Singapore and Sweden can even offer top



percentage figures of 100% and 97%, whereas the United Kingdom and the United States, so-called “native-speaker” countries, achieve only 35% and 25% (Mortell, 2020). Thus, it is very likely that when there are conversations with “native speakers” that they may have never been confronted with possible limitations of communicating in a language other than their mother tongue. Melo-Pfeiffer (2018) illustrates how this development at a societal level has had an impact on language education as the so-called multilingual turn. As the use of terminology does not always seem to be clear, she makes a difference between social and individual multilingualism and defines the latter as plurilingualism. Additionally, the CEFR Companion Volume (2020) further supports this paradigm shift away from the monolingual fallacy, which suggests that English can only be taught by strictly using English. The CEFR Companion Volume highlights that the learners/users have to become more aware of the richness of their linguistic and cultural heritage so that they can make use of it as a plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire:

“In an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language education, to promote the favourable development of the learner’s whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture.”  
(CEFR, 2001, p. 1.)

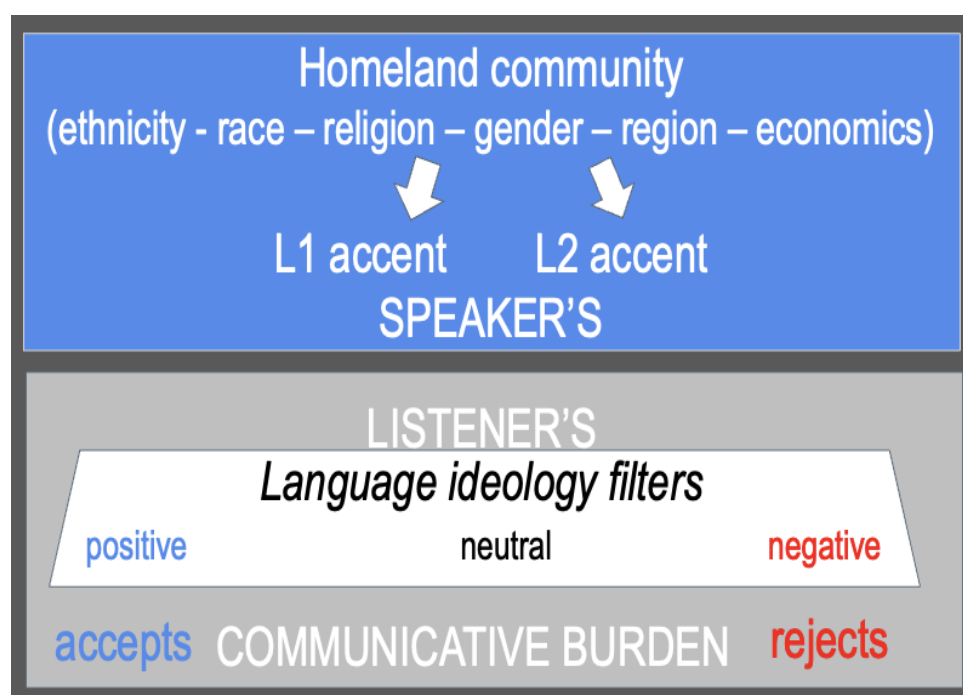
In spite of the close relationship between language and culture and its huge impact on constructing our self and the other, the so far mentioned and often deeply rooted attitudes and beliefs concerning users and the use of English can have a huge influence on a person’s ability to be proud of their English voice, to speak up in spite of having an accent, or to make other people heard in communication across cultures.

### **3. Accents and attitudes**

Crystal (2019) clarifies that everyone has an accent and that an accent should be “fostered” and “respected” as a crucial element of a person’s identity. Moreover, there has always been a tension between two opposing forces. A person’s authenticity may get in conflict with the intelligibility of their accent, which is mostly based on standard English as a norm. Crystal (2019) criticizes the “myth of the native speaker”, and Rosina Lippi-Green (2012), a US-American sociolinguist, adds the myth of standard English and of non-accent to this list. Myths are stories with general cultural significance, which are supposed to keep social order. Standard English is spoken and written by people with superior education, who are supposed to have “no regional accent”. Myths are at the core of an ideology and empower individuals and institutions.

Lippi-Green (2012) created a model that describes the mechanisms of “accepting or rejecting the communicative burden”. As a consequence of a speaker’s homeland community, which is highly influenced by factors like ethnicity, race, religion, gender, region or economics, a person develops an L1 or L2 accent. The listener carries out a subjective evaluation based on language ideology filters, which moves on a continuum from positive via neutral to negative. As a consequence, the listener weighs the pros and cons that may result from this conversation. May it be worth accepting the communicative burden like making use of active listening strategies? May it be better to reject it and to make the speaker take over all the responsibility for the success of this conversation by speaking with an intelligible accent?

FIGURE 2. ACCEPTING OR REJECTING THE COMMUNICATIVE BURDEN



Source: Lippi-Green (2012)

According to neuroscience, these language ideology filters are also called unconscious or implicit biases, or stereotypes. Knappitsch (2019) gives an overview of these nearly 200 filters, which are normally useful tools for our brain to deal with a constantly growing overload of information by organizing it according to certain categories. Unfortunately, these processes may also involve mostly unintentional (linguistic) prejudices. Lichterfeld (2020) illustrates that there have been numerous examples of discrimination based on both “non-standard” and “non-native” accents and that several researchers came to the conclusion that having a ‘prestige’ accent (e.g., ‘BBC English’ or ‘General American’) will provide people with a 20% higher income. Furthermore, Lippi-Green (2012) stresses frequent forms of accent discrimination in the judicial system, employment, and health care and that accentism is often used as a proxy for racism. In addition to this, she mentions that strengthening a person’s self-perception plays a crucial role when dealing with internalized racism by quoting Eleanor Roosevelt: “Nobody can make you inferior without your consent”. Lippi-Green also draws attention to the close relationship between accent, culture, and mindset:

“The whole concept of units of conversation in which two partners work toward mutual comprehension assumes a certain state of mind on the part of the participants, and to an extent the question of skill. Intercultural competence is as crucial to successful communication as underlying motivation, solidarity or hostility.”  
(Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 72.)

Although many institutions and companies have initiated unconscious bias training, especially after the Black Lives Matter movement, the topic of language and accents seems to have been overlooked and should be added to the map of diversity and inclusion (Lichterfeld, 2020). After a lot of criticism concerning the usefulness of unconscious bias training, some organization including the UK’s civil service cancelled their schemes. David Robson (2021) clarifies, however, that some of the researcher may not have been interpreted correctly. Diversity training

does not work as a one-hour “quick fix” but has to be implemented as the “foundation for broader organisational change” and as an on-going project. Moreover, it should be stressed that other intersecting forms of oppression (gender, class, nationality, skin colour, age, or sexuality) are equally important to prevent any form of discrimination or racism and all of them are necessary to achieve real systemic change. The French government (Willsher, 2020) demonstrated how this could look like by passing a law, which bans any form of regional accent prejudice or glottophobia. As a consequence, discrimination based on language use or characteristics of speech will be treated in the same way as racism or sexism.

The recent anti-racism movement has also started a long overdue discussion about the privileges of being white. The Canadian linguist Vijay Ramjattan (2019/2020) studies the intersection of language and race at work and highlights that “hearing accent means hearing race”. Standardized language is associated with a “native speaker”, which means that nativeness works as a proxy for whiteness. He highlights that raising awareness of accentism at a personal level is not enough and suggest striving for structural change. This could include engaging students in action research like interviewing employers about their hiring practices in their local communities, and thus achieving change at a micro level. Moreover, any form of workplace training (for example safety drills or computer courses) should include talking about different forms of oppression similar to the above-mentioned long-term diversity and inclusion projects. The linguist Kelly Wright (2019) focuses in her study on raciolinguistic profiling and suggests taking the following measures:

- a) Audit your organizational history, policies, and practices
- b) Co-create decolonialized teaching materials and texts
- c) Co-create products for the public good
- d) Advocate for linguistic justice in migrant and immigrant communities, in the legal and criminal justice systems, in healthcare.

Gerald, Ramjattan and Stillar (2021) are of the opinion that the topics of racism and whiteness should be added to language teacher training and that all the white language teachers should be encouraged to “examine their own Whiteness and how it affects their teaching”. This includes “re-envisioning classrooms” with regard to dismissing linguistic prescriptivism, which they compare to a “remnant of what some have called linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992)”. Merely focusing on descriptivism has been discussed for decades, thus, they are now in favour of “counterprescriptivism”. As negotiating meaning is comparable to negotiating power, “unstandardizing English” would mean covering the features of its standardization and the decision-making processes, why these features are valued higher than others. The students could also be empowered to move away from monolingual principles and be encouraged to “use the entirety of their translingual and cultural resources to aid the learning process”. A further step “rethinking intelligibility” could help students to move their attention to “critical listening”:

“By focusing their attention on developing listening, students would appreciate that certain racialized accents are not inherently unintelligible, but rather made unintelligible by ears conditioned by ideologies of White supremacy.”  
(Gerald, Ramjattan & Stillar, 2021)

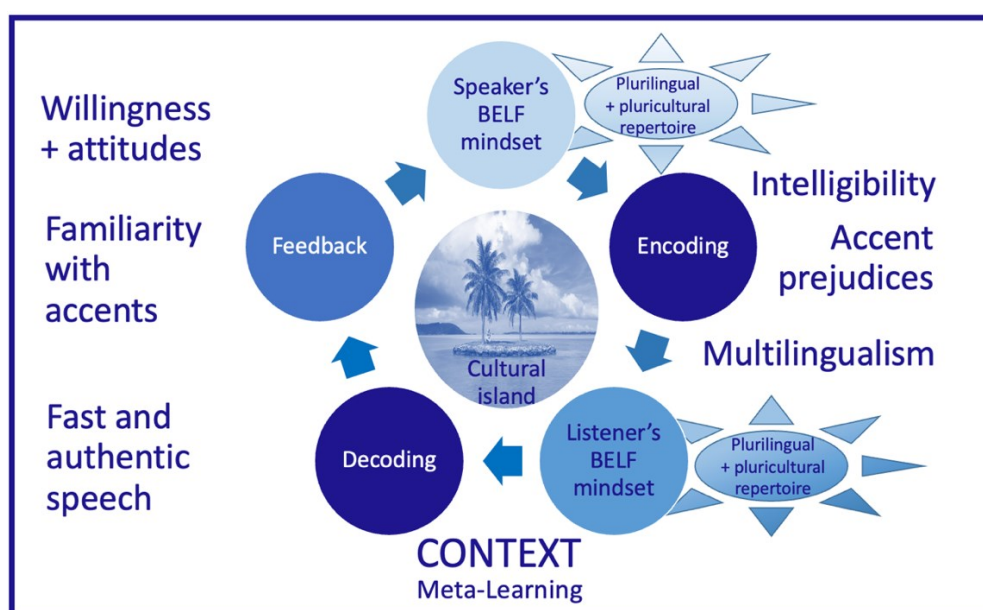
#### 4. Reflective communication with a (B)ELF mindset

After looking at the topics of linguistic diversity, multilingualism, accent prejudice and linguistic racism from different sociolinguistic perspectives, many valuable contributions can be added from the research areas of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Business English as a Lingua Franca. In 2000, the linguist Jennifer Jenkins discovered that communication breakdown was mostly caused by phonological transfer from the L1. Many consider her development of the Lingua Franca Core as the beginning of the research area ELF. According to Barbara Seidlhofer (2011), ELF is any use of English as means of communication chosen by speakers of different L1(s). Cogo (2018) describes ELF as an “open-source phenomenon”, which is constantly adapted by means of intelligibility and accommodation (Jenkins, 2000) and gives multilingualism as third characteristic feature. Researchers from a Finnish School of Business, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2018), stress the close relation between ELF and BELF. Professionals involved in international business focus on getting the job done and creating rapport. Moreover, Ehrenreich (2018) emphasises the key role of “communities of practice”, a concept originally developed by Wenger (1998). Their members are described as competent and confident users of BELF. Cogo (2018) clarifies that BELF is not a variety. You cannot teach it, but only adopt a BELF-oriented approach, which is characterized by three principles: The multilingual principle (English and learner’s L1(s)), the negotiation principle (effective communication combined with accommodation and intelligibility) and the intercultural principle (intercultural awareness and competence). A BELF-oriented approach will be a big change in mindset for all the stakeholders and needs flexible, aware, creative, and open-minded users of English. (Lichterfeld, 2019).

The CEFR Companion Volume (2020) takes the mentioned societal changes into consideration and supports the paradigm shifts in many research areas by putting the 21<sup>st</sup> century learners and their needs at the centre. They focus on developing character, skills, and knowledge with a growth mindset within the framework of the 4Cs (collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity) and meta-learning. The CEFR (2020) puts emphasis on the learner/user as social agents, who negotiate and co-construct meaning in a specific context to set up trustful relationships.

Furthermore, it completely moved away from the native speaker to intelligibility and inclusive ELF-oriented practices mobilizing general, plurilingual and pluricultural competences by means of interaction and the now even richer model of mediation based on Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory. Mediation creates bridges, has a positive impact on relationships, and creates a safe pluricultural space or a “cultural island” as Schein (2009) calls it. Derwing and Munro (2015) define intelligibility as “the extent to which a speaker’s message is actually understood by a listener”. Nevertheless, “just because an L2 accent feature is noticeable, doesn’t mean that it detracts from intelligibility”. It takes two to tango, as speaking and listening are inseparably connected. Thus, successful communication highly depends on listener factors like the ability of decoding authentic, fast, and spontaneous speech, familiarity with different accents and the listener’s attitudes or willingness to communicate (Piccardo, 2016).

FIGURE 3. ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION



Source: Udemý (2016), CEFR (2020) & Schein (2009)

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the CEFR (2001) and the CEFR Companion Volume (2020) can be regarded as an ideal framework for educators and employers to help future and current employees to raise awareness concerning uses and users of English as a Lingua Franca. Multilingual speakers have become the new norm and should be empowered to be proud of their English voice and the richness of their plurilingual and pluricultural heritage. A flexible and open-minded BELF-mindset will help to get the job done and to invest in trustful relationships without getting lost in linguistic perfection. Taking over responsibility as a speaker and listener will be necessary for successful communication across cultures. In spite of a willingness to share the communicative burden unconscious filters may still cause misunderstandings, unintentional accent prejudices or linguistic racism. Nonetheless, critical awareness of the close relationship between language and culture and the tension between identity and intelligibility will help to add these topics to the map of diversity and inclusion and to achieve a sense of belonging and wellbeing at an individual and above all at a societal level.

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# Working from home in 2020 – Lessons learned to leverage these learnings going forward as emerging leaders and a remote office workforce

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## Abstract

This paper summarises some of the data that has been collected and presented in various contemporary articles on the challenges organisations and office workers have faced while working from home (WFH). What Bernstein, Blunden, Brodsky, Sohn and Waber call the largest experiment in history has already produced initial sets of data about how productive the workforce was in their home offices, and how happy or unhappy employees were while working from home. Productivity and employee happiness have always been focal points in the discussion about working from home. Before the pandemic hit, one of the biggest fears in many organisations was that WFH would negatively impact employee productivity, and employees were likewise sceptical about how one could separate private and working life in a healthy manner while working from home. The scope of this paper is about how working from home or anywhere has impacted employees and organizations. The data collected to-date indicates a decline in wellbeing and engagement and highlights a need for leaders and office workers to become more adept in managing their needs to continue to thrive in the workplace. Coaching can be one means to support and enhance this learning and development process and help ease the transition into the workplace of the future.

**Keywords:** communication, leading, motivation, relationships, working-from-home, wellbeing, engagement, productivity

## 1. The working-from-home challenge in 2020

The 2020 working-from-home challenge, which was a consequence of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, will enter corporate history books as the most successful change initiative ever in the business world. Change in general is a daunting process, requires considerable communication and convincing, and still is often not carried out successfully or to the satisfaction of the change initiators (Musselwhite & Plouffe, 2011; Zhexembayeva, 2020). Furthermore, the loss of productivity and engagement are often reported as undesired, and yet not to be avoided, side effects of every change initiative (Kanter, 2009). In 2020 it was different in so many ways. The changes Covid-19 brought to our professional lives were unplanned, not communicated and explained by management in advance – it all simply happened and affected all of us significantly.

The **necessity** of the measures taken by management, namely, to ask staff to work from home wherever this was possible, were very rarely questioned—contrary to past experiences in the corporate world, where both staff and management had reservations around working from home scenarios for different reasons (Bartik et al., 2020; Desilver, 2020).

**Readiness**, as another important driver for every change initiative was fulfilled nearly instantly. The sceptics among staff and management budged under the huge economic pressure, paired with the need to ‘survive’, and so left no doubts about the **urgency** of the measures. It helped sceptics become, what might be described as Experi-Mentors of an experiment that is unprecedented.

Readiness, urgency, and the openness to the experiment – the impact of failure could not be worse than keeping the status quo – were perfect prerequisites for the launch of a successful change project. And yet, how successful has it been when looking at the long-term impact working-from home is making on both the workforce, management, and companies? How sustainable will the model of working-from-home become going forward? What have employees and companies learned and how would they like to continue in the future?

The first published research data from companies collected both early, mid, and late 2020 show mixed results (Bernstein et al., 2020; Velush, Sherman & Anderson, 2020; Campbell & Gretchen, 2021). On the one side, there was a lot of praise around how well workers and management were coping with the new ways of working. There was surprise among the sceptics how little productivity was lost, and how effective businesses remained with their every-day tasks. The toll that was paid for such high and smooth performance under challenging situations became visible only later in the year, when Campbell’s and Gretchen’s (2021) study found a reported 89 % decline in **workplace wellbeing**. The workforce was suffering in their home offices with feelings of disconnect, unsustainable workloads, **disengagement**, and a feeling of loss of control when it comes to their business and personal lives.

## **2. What happened to workplace wellbeing and engagement through the lens of staff?**

Research data collected so far is drawing different pictures of how well the workforce coped with the working-from-home experience. On the one hand, there are employees who really enjoy the new status quo and fear the day when they are asked to return to their offices (Bernstein et al., 2020). Those employees who benefitted from the new “normal”, were able to swiftly self-regulate and self-manage in such a way that they were able to design a new structure for their working day at home. It allowed for both: Focused time to work on project tasks – productive advancements in whatever way their jobs would involve – as well as meetings with project and team members in order to stay connected and aligned. The connections that were kept in those times, according to Bernstein et al. (2020), were primarily those that served an immediate purpose and were connection with a task at hand. What Bernstein et al. (2020) calls ‘weak ties’, were the ones that suffered and were neglected, such as informal encounters which were nearly completely eliminated during the pandemic.

Research confirms that self-determination, job satisfaction, and meaningful relationships have positive impacts on engagement and workplace wellbeing. People, who feel engaged, feel good about the work they do, and vice versa, the job satisfaction they experience, makes them feel good as an individual (Manganelli et al., 2018). Self-determination and autonomy, however, also require the ability and capability to self-organize and self-structure. Are these skills taken for granted across all functions and hierarchies?

**What if** not everyone in the workplace has those capabilities and skillsets? Self-management and self-organization are not a given for everyone – especially those that had been micro-

managed until Covid-19 hit. Regardless of the pandemic, how self-organized staff can work and proceed, depends on their work contexts, jobs, experiences, supervisors, and personality among others. Additionally, even for the very experienced workers in the workplace, the unprecedented circumstances in 2020 were more challenging than before the pandemic.

**What if** there are managers who have an issue with so much self-determination and have a feeling, they would like to claim back what used to be attached – in their opinion – to their role, status, and job description? What if they fall back into their habit to ‘manage’ and ‘organize’ their subordinates?

**What if** employees do not have the infrastructure at home to allow for this best-case scenario of a working-from-home environment?

Sharing a house or an apartment with family members, kids being home-schooled during the pandemic, spouses also working from home – factors which influence how easy or difficult it is to work from home. The lack of high-speed internet or the lack of a quiet room to work from – any of these can be stressors for those whose wellbeing suffered more during the pandemic and who are longing for the day when they can return to their offices. **What if** companies won’t offer that possibility anymore going forward? **What if** companies demand everyone back, also those that have settled in and organized their new way of working and living in a way that their wellbeing and engagement has increased?

### 3. What happened to wellbeing and engagement through the lens of companies?

Companies have observed with a huge relief how well and smoothly the transition from working in the office to working from home went – not in all areas and functions of their businesses of course, but at least in the majority of the direct and formerly known as white-collar work areas. Manufacturing and similar areas, such as prototyping, sample building, material handling and logistics will most likely remain classic on-site jobs, and employees in those areas will very likely have to return or have already returned to work on-site, whereas office jobs might sooner or later be replaced by co-working spaces, “hot-desking” arrangements and working-from-home, working-from-anywhere employment contracts (Bernstein et al., 2020). For companies and organizations there seem to be a potential for considerable savings when it comes to real estate costs and office space. “Hot-desking” and other “shift” models, where staff take turns coming into the office and working from home, have already been put into place for the transition period of moving some staff back to the office and will probably continue after the pandemic as well Bernstein et al. (2020); Velush et al. (2020).

What does this mean for staff? Especially for those who were suffering and are longing to return to their workplaces, either because they need the connection with their co-workers, or they do not have the perfect work situation at home? Who is going to decide where employees are going to work after the pandemic? Are these decisions company decisions and taken autocratically – neglecting the needs of their staff and risking a drop in engagement and wellbeing and thus in performance and identification (affiliation) with the company? Or are companies maximising this opportunity to co-create models around organizational and staff needs?

What is certain, is that after the pandemic, it will not be the same as before the pandemic, and changes are on the horizon when it comes to models of new or future work. Hence, human resources (HR) policies, processes, and work contracts will need to be adapted, as will training and upskilling for both those, who are working from home, managing from home, and

managing in and working with a hybrid workforce (Rothbard, 2020). Governments will be invited to re-consider tax regulations (Graupner, 2020). Multi-nationals will need to investigate what these new ways of working mean also when it comes to working across geographical borders and intercultural differences.

The difficulties companies, governments, and societies are facing with ‘policy’, ‘taxation’ and ‘contracts’ lie in the complexity and the individuality of the issues at hand. Blue collar workers have less of a choice than white collar workers in terms of equality and equity, when it comes to who can choose from where to work. For example, there is a diversity of options for the different employees in their different life situations and circumstances, such as: with family and without family; with good infrastructure such as internet bandwidth and a private room or office at home to work from, or not. These options will offer considerable room for discussions and conversations between the different stakeholders.

Companies, who will unilaterally decide for their workforce what they will offer, might face the loss of talented employees and a fluctuation in their workforce. Not everyone, asked to return to the office, will be open to do so. Other companies might offer more flexibility than their current employer. Companies are even thinking about adapting their payment schemes depending on whether the workplace is an “at home” or “in the office” workplace, and if it is at home the payment might even depend on the local costs of living. With it comes the danger of introducing new inequality and the devaluation of highly skilled workers (Bernstein et al., 2020).

For executives, managers, and staff alike it will be challenging to navigate and work with a hybrid work force. The most likely scenario of a hybrid is also the most challenging (Bernstein et al., 2020). Informal feedback loops, visibility of staff, recognition of accomplishments, talent and career management will all need to be re-thought and adapted to suit the new ways of working (Rothbard, 2020). Processes that had been well-established before the Covid-19 pandemic will need to be re-evaluated and adapted (Velush et al., 2020).

#### **4. Models to measure and monitor wellbeing and engagement in the workplace**

There are various models in the field of wellbeing and engagement. None are more respected than the other, according to Christian and Slaughter as cited in an integrative literature review by Shuck (2011).

Martin Seligman, who is well-known for his work in “Positive Psychology” uses the Acronym PERMA

1. **P**ositive Emotions
2. **E**ngagement
3. **R**elationships
4. **M**eaning
5. **A**ccomplishment

to refer to, what he calls, the elements that contribute to wellbeing. A study by Goodman et al. (2017) confirms that people who have at least one of the elements of the PERMA model have the other elements to a similar degree as well (Seligman, 2018). One element of the PERMA Model for wellbeing is engagement, and hence I would argue that that is an indicator for the

strong link between the two independent concepts of wellbeing and engagement. When there is engagement in the workplace, it is very likely that employees feel well about what they do at work as well; and vice versa, if they feel well because of one of the other dimensions of the PERMA model, e.g. relationships or accomplishment, it is likely that they also experience higher levels of engagement.

Shuck (2011) provides an overview of the well-researched **engagement** models such as Kahn's (1990) need-satisfying approach, Maslach et al.'s (2001) burnout-antithesis approach, Harter et al.'s (2002) satisfaction-engagement approach, and Saks's (2006) multidimensional approach (cognitive, emotional and behavioral elements) in his integrative literature review.

The areas in which wellbeing and engagement seem to overlap in the previously mentioned models are:

- a) Self-determination (having control over one's life and work) also referred to as job and task autonomy; and
- b) Relationship and connection, or affiliation.

For HR and Management to allow for conversations to happen about these topics in organizations – away from purely task-based conversations to conversations that humanize the workplace, and at the same time will have positive effects and will bring gains on the task side – is an area that needs more attention and skill development going forward.

Oades et al. (2021) highlight in their research the importance of becoming 'fluent' in the language of wellbeing. Concrete actions in how team leaders and management can create wellbeing experiences for their staff if literacy in the field of wellbeing is a given. Manganelli et al. (2018) suggest that managers structure the work environment in such a way that the job design, interpersonal relationships/leadership and compensation as elements to workplace wellbeing facilitate what they call need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness) and those could be linked to Kahn's needs satisfying approach in the realm of the engagement models. Bernstein et al. (2020) recommend that leaders substantially increase their communication effort and provide more clarity and less ambiguity for their staff. As they see it, the focus of management will shift towards more communicative actions and supportive actions than 'operational' and 'managerial activities around tasks'. Hence the skillset of a manager will morph even more towards leading than managing—more people-oriented than task-related.

What Kowalski and Loretto (2017) suggest by allowing more contextual approaches than 'best-practice' approaches to foster wellbeing in the workplace sounds like a very valid request. The differences in needs, both on the individual side of the employees as well on the side of the organizations and companies, demand a more distinguished and customized dialogue. How can such a dialogue be initiated?

## **5. Build literacy and develop skills for the future workplace**

Coaches and consultants, who work closely with employees from various backgrounds and across hierarchical levels, can confirm that a contextual approach – as also suggested by Oades et al. (2021) – would offer many benefits for staff and companies, and yet could also be seen as the opening of Pandora's box with the plurality and individuality of such complex constructs. When, however, a framework or a model can be used that guides the different stakeholders



through the process, reflecting together on learnings and best practices for their particular context, and then having HR and Management design the necessary policies and contracts around those, could help to re-establish wellbeing and engagement for this new remote or hybrid work environment.

## 6. The PPAS Maturity Model®

To support that process, the PPAS Maturity Model®, which looks at the dimensions of:

1. **People**
2. **Processes**
3. **Applications**
4. **Structure**

helps employees and managers alike to gain clarity around those dimensions both from a personal as well as from an organizational point of view (Figure 1). The PPAS Maturity Model® can be used at any stage of any change initiative to discover more about the status quo, plan next steps, and do a retrospective on the lessons learned. The model creates awareness and is fully customizable to best suit the context of the individual or the company.

By a coach-led and facilitated conversation on what has been working well in each dimension of the PPAS Maturity Model®; where there is room for improvement, and also acknowledging that maybe not each and every dimension requires the same level of sophistication and maturity in the company-specific or employee-specific context, may be a way to a healthier work culture, in which wellbeing and engagement is not taken as a given but revisited as needed, and re-adapted as the circumstances and the context for companies and employees change - in a remote as well as in an on-site work environment or in a hybrid constellation.

FIGURE 1. THE PPAS MATURITY MODEL®



Source: created by the author

The PPAS Maturity Model® supports the contextual approach suggested by Kowalski and Loretto (2017) - away from generalizations and one-size-fits all solutions to what works in a more specific manner in a very specific environment.

## 7. Conclusion

The plurality of interests—both for employees and companies – and the stakes in this field – the wellbeing and engagement levels of the workforce – demand a thorough and structured approach to these new workplace challenges if wellbeing and engagement levels are to be maintained and sustained. According to Kolb (1984), reflections around new learnings and new experiences are best done in a structured manner. Individuals and companies alike are invited to begin this dialogue now if they haven't already started it. According to Kowalski and Loretto (2017), literacy needs to be established in work settings to allow both managers and employees to have conversations around wellbeing and engagement—not only because of the new developments in our future work environment, but even more so because of them. There is no time to procrastinate these very important conversations.

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# Communication problems and solutions faced by Chinese college students entering the workplace

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## Abstract

Communication skills are one of the key competences for employability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that contribute freshly graduates' successful career at the workplace. Furthermore, effective communication is one of the necessary competences for interpersonal communication and modern business management. For college students initially entering the workplace, the skills how to convey information and how to achieve actionable results at work are part of the key competences for communication and cooperation with colleagues and superiors at the workplace. It is a prerequisite and basis for decision making, a tool for unifying thoughts and actions, the key to establishing good interpersonal relationships and an important cornerstone for achieving harmonious development of the enterprise. This paper focuses on Chinese graduates entering the workplace as the research object and explores the communication barriers that hinder effective communication when entering the labor market. The quantitative research revealed that besides the problems resulted from the lack of communication awareness, ineffective and poor communication between fresh graduates and superiors at workplace might be the consequence of the inconsistency of thoughts with the communication targets and of poor communication skills. By detecting the above communication problems, this paper proposes communication management actions to mitigate the impacts at the workplace and improve Chinese students' communication competences for employability.

**Keywords:** college students, communication barriers, fresh graduates, internal communication, workplace communication skills

## 1. Introduction

Communication is handled differently in different cultures and by different generations. Communication skills acquired through upbringing and education contribute significantly to the success at workplace and to career building. Next to hard skills and professional knowledge, personal soft skills like communication skills for employability are becoming more and more important. Communicating with classmates in school or with colleagues at the workplace after graduation depends greatly on skill development throughout the years of education. The lack of interpersonal communication skills is a common problem for graduates with different cultural and educational background all around the world. It is especially true in China, where

the culture of communication is determined and heavily dependent on the societal pattern and system. Communication culture is inherited throughout generations and the openness and internationalization of organizational structures require changed communication attitude and behavior from freshly graduates at workplaces. Consequently, due to its relevance and urgency, it is valuable to study the issue based on its broad applicability.

University students first encounter interpersonal communication problems and challenges when they enter the labor market first, find their first full-time job, which presumably happens during university studies or after graduation. On leaving university and entering the workplace, seniors become employees from students, and they are required to learn to change roles. However, having been accustomed to non-standardised nature of online chatting, most 'freshers' encounter barriers since they have not been systematically taught the skills of communication. A lot of students lack the systematic education and training of effective interpersonal communication with colleagues or supervisors, the right handling of emotion, the correct tone of voice and the decent logic of words. Communication skills are part of the labor market soft skills-based competency measurement system that rates four focus areas including: (1) relationship management, (2) psychology, (3) self-management, and (4) communication and numerical skills. The complexity of the measurement system proves that communication skills have become an integral component of the soft skills necessary for success at the workplace and employees with good communication skills have a better chance to bridge communication gap and mitigate problems occurring from communication misunderstanding (Tóth, Lendvai, & Beke, 2021). Newly recruited freshmen might raise the question whether the supervisor understands what they are saying in communication sensitive situations and a freshman well-trained in personal skills will have proper communication skills to resolve the situation. In the course of the research, a questionnaire was developed based on the existing situation to understand the difficulties encountered by fresh graduates entering the Chinese labor market and their expectations of resolution of communication problems. This paper presents the findings of the survey, gives the characteristics of today's university students, the problematic communication situations, the modes of mitigation of such situations with the aim of helping new graduates to improve on communication competences and provide best practices to become an efficient and successful communicator at the workplace.

## **2. Research questions and aims**

The main research focuses on the following questions and aims to find answers to the following: (1) what the biggest communication problems are that Chinese college students face when entering the workplace; (2) whether personality differences affect communication fluency; (3) whether communication awareness plays an important role in mitigation of communication conflicts; and finally (4) whether communication skills need to be taken into account by companies when training new employees. The research aims to help Chinese graduates entering the workplace to identify their own communication problems, find suitable solutions and responsive techniques while improving their communication skills.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 3 presents the literature review, Section 4 characterizes the students in the survey, Section 5 calls attention to the communication skills deficiencies of the Chinese students in the survey while Section 6 and 7 outline some recommendations and draw conclusions.

### 3. Literature review

The importance of communication in the workplace cannot be overstated, many scholars have conducted in-depth investigations and studies on this area. Fitsimmons (Fitsimmon, 2014) defined the elements of the communication process, showed the most likely problem points in the communication process, and discussed what good communication practices look like. The results show that (1) the key to good communication practices is a strong relationship of trust between communicators, that (2) good communication habits affect productivity, which in turn affects the bottom line, and that (3) workplace relationships affect the quality of workplace communication. Chan, Yedder and Vipulakom (Chan, Yedder, & Vipulakom, 2020) had surveyed 795 college students from China, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates, and explored the relationship between college students' work values, job quality expectations and work communication environment. The results showed that work values had a significant effect on the job quality expectations and workplace communication environment, highlighting the importance of job quality and workplace communication environment as important motivators in the workplace. Masatsugu, Chihiro, Yurio et al. (Masatsugu, et al., 2020) also pointed out that well-managed workplace communication can promote good mental health of employees while only communication with supervisors or managers in the workplace can lead to lower psychological stress, even after drastic changes in the workplace.

It is well known that communication in the workplace is very important, but when looking at the global workplace, it seems that there are problems with communication that cannot be ignored. Jelani and Nordin (Nordin & Jelani, 2019) interviewed 41 employees in a Malaysian company and concluded that the respondents agreed that language barriers such as not understanding or being unfamiliar with the terms or jargon used by another individual, and the physical environment such as nearby sounds interrupting the respondents' concentration during communication can lead to miscommunication in the workplace. Jenifer and Raman (Jenifer & Raman, 2015) describe five common communication barriers in the cross-cultural workplace, the first being misunderstandings in communication due to differences in values and beliefs and cultural backgrounds. The second is the lack of understanding due to different definitions of norms and roles in different cultures. The third is the inability to communicate effectively because of a lack of understanding of each other's beliefs and values. The fourth is communication barriers due to stereotypes and lack of understanding of each other's culture. The fifth is anxiety due to ethnocentrism, which leads to miscommunication. Meanwhile, Wilczewski, Söderberg and Gut (Wilczewski, Söderberg, & Gut, 2018) point out that in multinational companies, expatriates' low proficiency in the host language is a serious obstacle to their expatriate socialization, which also leads to exclusion and social isolation in the workplace, thus these lead to stress, frustration, and a negative attitude toward working with local personnel. In addition, language barriers prevent expatriates from receiving information from their supervisors, understanding team issues, and participating in decision-making.

When confronted with communication issues, there are often major differences in the communication cultures displayed by the West and China. Yang (Yang, 2014) found that the level of emotional arousal in Chinese and Western cultures is quite different. Western cultures will directly express their own opinions and try to influence others, while eastern cultures will adjust to others in order to express respect and politeness. Chen (Chen M.-J. , 2015) believes that in Western cultures managers view business communication as an exchange of information



that often ends when the transaction is completed. The Chinese, on the other hand, view communication as an integral part of building and maintaining long-term relationships.

Although there are cultural differences in communication between China and the West, communication problems at the workplace arise within the same culture but between different generations. Regardless of culture, when college students first enter the workplace all over the world, they might encounter internal communication problems that are a hurdle they cannot overcome in their careers. Since this research focuses on Chinese college students, more literature was reviewed narrowing down the population.

Using newly employed college students in China as the study population, Bai Yanhong (Bai, 2019) found that they often lack expression ability and argument skills. The lack of communication skills also leads to the problem of internal communication when college students enter the workplace. Liu Wei (Liu, 2020) created the employment pressure scale, combined with four aspects of psychology, family, lack of help, frustration experience, more comprehensively considered the factors affecting the communication problems of contemporary college students, making the data more real. With the continuous development and strengthening of enterprise management system, the role of effective communication in enterprises is highlighted. Qu (Qu, 2011) believes that due to the time and family factors, contemporary college students may be self-centered and have shallow team consciousness. Li (Li D. , 2017) also believes that the main reason for communication barriers is that contemporary college students pay more attention to themselves and emphasize the awareness of personal rights and interests. Chen and Chen (Chen & Chen, 2010) proposed that college students who have just entered the workplace will have a sense of occupational insecurity because they do not understand the organization and other members, which also causes internal communication barriers to a certain extent. Zhai and Guo (Zhai & Guo, 2014) believe that the traditional Chinese family education and the old school education mode make children's thoughts and expression always in a state of being suppressed. This makes it appropriate for students to enter the workplace due to the lack of awareness of active communication and cause internal communication barriers. Li and Tang (Li & Tang, 2017) and others analyzed the meaning and importance of management communication, found out the causes of ineffective communication in enterprises, and put forward corresponding countermeasures. Liang (Liang, 2012) analyzed the living environment, era background, ideological characteristics and behaviors patterns of contemporary college students. On how to improve the effective communication with contemporary college students, in order to better promote the development of enterprises, this paper puts forward corresponding opinions and suggestions to the enterprise management. Li (Li J. , 2017) put forward the corresponding management countermeasures by analyzing the problems existing in the current enterprise management communication in China. The purpose is to achieve the unity of enterprise strategic objectives, improve employee satisfaction and sense of belonging.

### **3.1. Data and Methods**

The adequately chosen research method can make twice the result with half the effort, better reflect the characteristics of the data, more clearly analyze the fluctuations caused by the data and explain the causes in conjunction with relevant professional theories. Through a survey of Chinese and foreign literature, information has been obtained in order to have a comprehensive and correct understanding of the issues to be studied. The relevant information on

communication barriers has been collected, compared, analyzed and summarized. The research used quantitative analysis with the use of an online questionnaire. Self-administered online questionnaire was developed to collect data of Chinese and international students. The questionnaire was developed in Chinese and in English. Questionnaires are a tool used in social surveys to measure respondents' behavior, attitudes, social characteristics or to collect other information. A pilot test of the survey was run to confirm the validity of the questionnaire, using several random university students from China. The questions were revised after the pilot testing was completed. The targeted respondents received the online questionnaire via wjx.cn – a Chinese online questionnaire design tool called ‘sojump’, - and were asked to spend from 5 to 7 minutes answering the questions. Apart from single and multiple-choice questions, the survey tool of Likert scale ranging from 1-5 was applied. The online questionnaire data collection resulted on 201 responses, 190 of them were valid responses from Chinese students. Due to the scarce number of responses from international students, they were excluded from the analysis. The research applied convenient type sampling via social media, email, and online apps, which failed to ensure representativeness, but the number of responses allowed the researchers to draw conclusions on the sample of Chinese students. Due to the limitations in the research, it has not allowed generalizations about the Chinese population of students, but it gives ground to further research in international field.

Quantitative analysis was conducted to analyze the collected data, applying descriptive statistics, mainly percentages to show the most important factors of inefficient communication and self-assessment. The quantitative analysis can provide some assurance of the authenticity of the data. Inductive reasoning method has been used to reveal common characteristics and common problems that can result from inadequate and scarce communication skill development. The method applied helps the authors to give recommendations and outline best practices to overcome communication problems at the workplace.

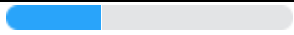
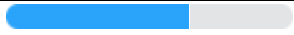
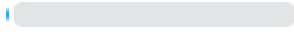
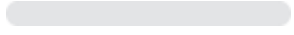
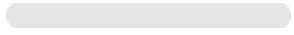
## 4. Characteristics of Contemporary College Students in China

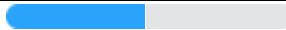

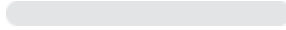
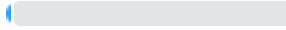


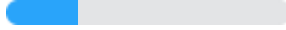
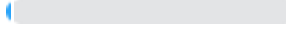
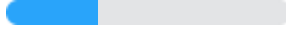
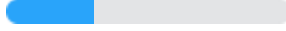
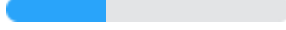
### 4.1. Demographic profile of students

With the progress of society and the development of science and technology, contemporary college students get more opportunities for higher quality education. Among the 190 students in this survey, two-thirds of the respondents were female (64.74%), 94.22% of them have bachelor's degree or above, and their majors are related to various fields such as natural sciences (32.63%), humanities and social sciences (31.58%), medical, engineering and so on (Table 1).

Students in the survey are evenly distributed between the age group 18-23 and 24-29 so the respondents are either university students or young adults in the labor market. 66.32% of them finished undergraduate studies and 25.78% of them graduated with master's degree.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

<i>Gender</i>		<b>Proportion (%)</b>
Male	64	 33.68%
Female	123	 64.74%
Non-binary	2	 1.05%
Does not wish to say	1	 0.53%
<i>Age</i>		
<18	0	 0%

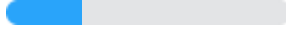
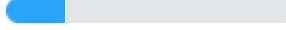

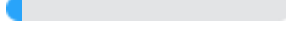
18-23	93		48.95%
24-29	92		48.42%
30-35	1		0.53%
>35	4		2.11%
<i>Highest qualification</i>			
Post-secondary education	11		5.79%
Undergraduate	126		66.32%
Master	49		25.79%
Doctor or above	4		2.11%
<i>Major</i>			
Natural Science	62		32.63%
Humanities and Social Sciences	60		31.58%
Other (please specify)	68		35.79%
Total	190		

Source: wxj output

## 4.2. Self-assessment of personality

The living environment of contemporary college students is more superior. They have become the center of their families since they were born, and they are used to paying more attention to themselves (Qu, 2011). They prefer to emphasize subjective feelings and individual consciousness, and it is difficult for them to objectively accept other people's criticism and suggestions. Almost half of the student respondents (46.32%) assess themselves as having an open personality – both introvert and extrovert personality – assuming that their communication skill have improved (Table 2). However, one quarter of the Chinese students are introvert (26.84%) and one quarter of them are extrovert (21.05%).

TABLE 2. RESPONDENTS' PERSONALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

Personality assessment		Proportion (%)
Introvert	51	 26.84%
Extrovert	40	 21.05%
Both inside and outside	88	 46.32%
I don't know	11	 5.79%
Total	190	

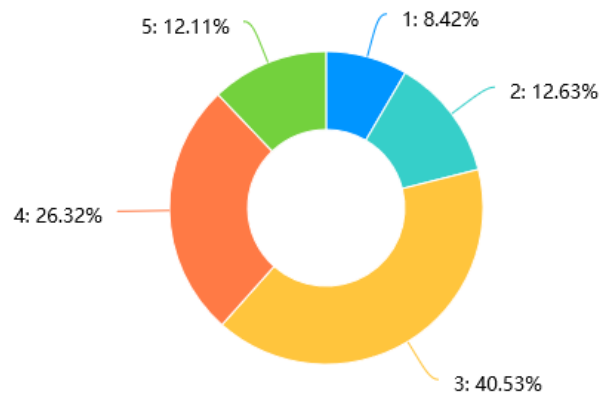
Source: wxj output

In this survey, students were asked to rate how they react to constructive criticism on a Likert scale from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”. 38.43% of the students agreed that they sometimes ignored or contradicted the constructive opinions or criticisms given by others (Figure 2) thus causing poor communication. Only 21.05% disagreed with the statement while the majority 40.53% could not decide (marked “neutral”). They don't like dogmatic indoctrination and rigid teaching methods.

They like to show their ideas freely, pursuit independent thinking, form opinions through argument and collision. But because they are too self-centered, lack of team consciousness, interpersonal coping ability and psychological endurance are relatively weak. 42.11% of the students have said when there is a certain prejudice against certain people or things, it will lead to ineffective communication (Source: wxj output

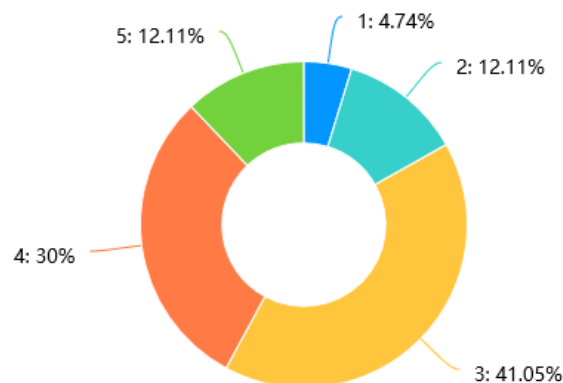
Figure 3), while only 16.85% disagree. 41.05% did not consider preconceptions as a cause of poor communication.

FIGURE 2. RESPONSES TO “SOMETIMES IGNORE OR RESIST THE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM GIVEN BY OTHERS” ON A LIKERT SCALE WHERE 1 MEANS “TOTALLY DISAGREE” AND 5 EQUALS “TOTALLY AGREE”



Source: wjx output

FIGURE 3. RESPONSES TO “SOME PEOPLE OR SOME THINGS HAVE CERTAIN PREJUDICES RESULTING IN POOR COMMUNICATION WITH EACH OTHER.” ON A LIKERT SCALE WHERE 1 MEANS “TOTALLY DISAGREE” AND 5 MEANS “TOTALLY AGREE”



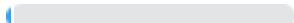
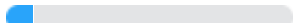
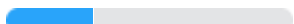


Source: wjx output

The two figures with the relatively high percentage of “neutral” answer reflect to the even distribution of introvert and extrovert personalities with a double share of responses claiming a mixed personality of introvert and extrovert.

#### 4.3. Self-assessment on communication skills

Students were asked whether they attach importance to communication skills. The responses ranged from “I don’t value communication skills at all,” to “I place great importance on communication skills”. More than half of the respondents (57.89%) place importance to communication skills while 30.53% of them are indifferent, and only 11.58% of the respondents do not consider communication skills valuable (Table 3).

TABLE 3. RESPONSES TO THE VALUE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Do you think you attach importance to communication skills?		Proportion (%)
I don't value communication skills at all.	4	 2.11%
I value communication skills to a small degree.	18	 9.47%
Communication skills are indifferent for me.	58	 30.53%
I place some importance on communication skills.	59	 31.05%
I place great importance on communication skills.	51	 26.84%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output

Students think that conversation content (63.68%), expressions (87.37%), the tone of voice (72.63%) and other details of action are all important aspects of good communication and 45.26% of them think that their communication skills are general, 27.89% and 4.74% of them consider themselves as good and very good communicators and 15.79% of them think their communication skills could be improved. Almost three quarters of the students faced inability to communication equally due to lack of self-confidence (72.63%).




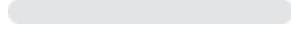
#### 4.4. Anxiety factor of communication

The network age is the main characteristic of the living environment of people. The convenience of the network makes them obtain information more quickly, have more rich knowledge, broader vision and more active thinking. Among them, 26.84% and 21.05% of them are either introverted or extroverted, respectively, and most of them are both introverted and extroverted (Table 2). On the other hand, due to excessive dependence on the Internet, they have a sense of emptiness while knowing a lot of information. They either indulge in online chat or games to seek spiritual sustenance or escape from society and family because they can't get a sense of identity in real life (Liang, 2012). In this survey, 93.68% of the students will feel psychological anxiety because of poor communication, within which 37.89% often and 28.42% regularly feel anxiety due to poor communication. Moreover, 30.53% of the students said they would only confide their thoughts and secrets to those friends who had been together for a long time and thought they were reliable.

### 5. Problems with internal communication

The following chapter focuses on communication problems that freshly graduated students in China face at workplaces. The chapter examines what barriers and factors students are aware of that could hinder effective communication. Furthermore, the lack of awareness and poor communication skills will also be studied based on the responses. The barriers listed by the students included (1) different attitude personalities or positions of the parties in communication, i.e., the inconsistency of thoughts, (2) the lack of communication awareness as well as the lack of comfortable communication atmosphere and (3) the inefficient communication skills (Table 4).

TABLE 4. IN THE PROCESS OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION, THE MAIN REASON THAT CAUSES COMMUNICATION BARRIERS ARE...

The main reason that causes communication barriers		Proportion (%)
1. different attitudes, personalities or positions of both parties (inconsistency of thoughts)	141	 74.21%
2. no communication awareness as well as communication atmosphere, feel no need, too lazy to communicate	122	 64.21%
3. communication skills are not high	90	 47.37%
other (please specify)	1	 0.53%
Total	190	


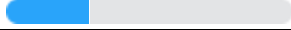



Source: wjx output

### 5.1. Inconsistency of thoughts between communicating parties at workplace

According to the survey questionnaire, the biggest communication problem faced by college students who have just entered the workplace is the inconsistency of their ideas with the people they communicate with. Contemporary college students are advanced and independent in their thinking. Growing up in the era of collision of cultural trends, Chinese college students pay more attention to themselves, which is manifested by having the right to self-decision, attaching importance to personal privacy, strong awareness of personal rights and interests, and having a deeper understanding of themselves (Li D. , 2017). The vast majority of the respondents advocate individualized thinking and lifestyle, as shown in Table 4. Error! Reference source not found., according to the results 74.21% of the respondents have responded that they have obvious communication barriers when facing people with different personalities and attitudes from themselves.

College students who are new to the workplace are still in the exploratory stage of their own careers, and as such they can develop career insecurity because they do not understand their situation toward the organization and other members (Chen & Chen, 2010). The psychological disconnection caused by the different status of organization members is a relatively common communication barrier, which is also known as Status Differential Effect (SDE) (Li Y. , 2014), and college students entering the workplace are more likely to have inferiority complex, fear and obedience psychology toward their superiors. In addition, at the beginning of their careers, freshly graduated have not yet established a basic mutual trust relationship with their peers, and they carry psychological defences in the process of communication with their peers. This fear of superiors and mistrust among peers lead to the problem of communication barriers arising from inconsistent ideas with the communication targets, which is especially prominent when they face leaders and peers. As shown in Table 5. 66.32% of the respondents facing their superiors and 47.37% of the respondents facing members of the same level are easily hindered by communication due to different levels or ideological differences, values and other reasons.

TABLE 5. WHO IS THE HARDEST TO COMMUNICATE WITH




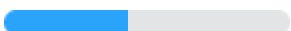
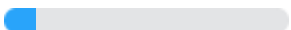
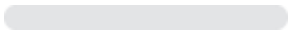
Who is the hardest to communicate with		Proportion (%)
The superior leadership	126	 66.32%
Subordinate colleagues	56	 29.47%
Colleagues at the same level in the department, peers	90	 47.37%
Other departments	87	 45.79%
Other (please specify)	2	 1.05%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output



In case of communication with the superiors, according to the responses over 50% of the starting workers faced situations in which the work guidance given by the superior was not quite in line with the actual situation of the work and it was difficult to follow the guidance and also over 50% of the respondents did not know how to finish the work assigned by the superior and were afraid to ask the superiors. In 43.68% superiors asked for adjustments and modifications after the job was done properly (Table 6).



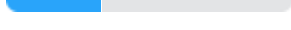
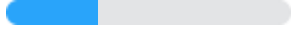
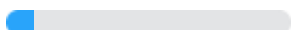

TABLE 6. AMBIGUOUS COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS WITH SUPERIORS

Communication situations		Proportion (%)
My suggestions are not easy to be accepted.	47	 24.74%
I don't know how to finish the work assigned by my superiors, but I am afraid to ask my superiors.	97	 51.05%
The work guidance given by my superior is not quite in line with the actual situation of my work, and it is difficult to implement according to the guidance.	108	 56.84%
After doing something well according to the superior's requirements, the superior asked me to make repeated adjustments and modifications.	83	 43.68%
None of the above.	22	 11.58%
Other (please specify)	1	 0.53%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output

Regarding communication situations with peers, over 50% of the respondents found that the work requirements by colleagues from other departments were not clear and consistent, and 46.32% of them found deadlines unmeetable and approximately the same percentage of respondents could rarely have the opportunity to communicate across departments while when there was a dispute the solution was difficult to reach (Table 7Table 7).

TABLE 7. AMBIGUOUS COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS WITH PEERS

Options		Proportion (%)
Colleagues in other departments with the completion of the work often cannot be completed as scheduled or cannot achieve the expected results.	88	 46.32%
The work requirements given by colleagues in other departments are not very clear and consistent.	110	 57.89%
Rarely have the opportunity to communicate across departments.	63	 33.16%
Communication process when there is a dispute, the solution is difficult to reach agreement.	62	 32.63%
None of the above situations have occurred.	19	 10%
Other (please specify)	1	 0.53%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output

As responses show several ambiguous communication situations freshly graduates observe and perceive, however, they cannot always resolve and mitigate these situations due to lack of communication awareness and/or lack of effective communication skills. The following subchapters discuss these issues.

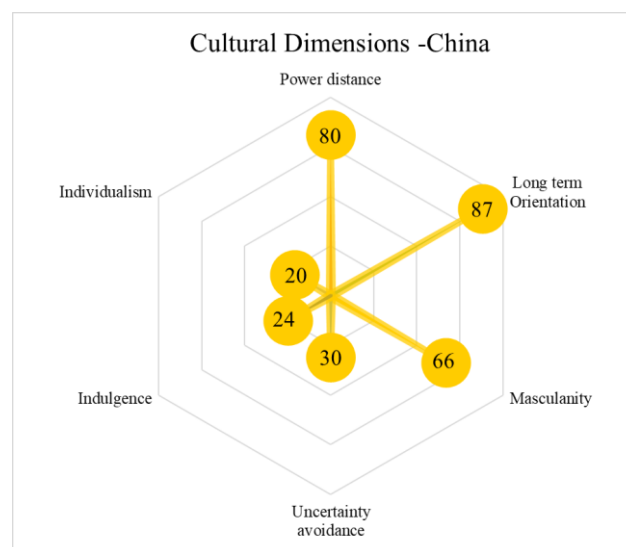
## 5.2. No awareness of communication

The second major communication problem faced by college students who have just entered the workplace nowadays is that most of college students have no communication consciousness.

Traditional Chinese family education and the old indoctrination education mode in primary and secondary schools have to a certain extent lead to and resulted in the current situation, namely that college students have little communication awareness. In today's Chinese family, although parents care about their children a lot and even consider children upbringing as the only important commitment in their lives, majority of parents find themselves in difficulties in getting along with their children equally in terms of ideas and beliefs, and most of them still stand up for the traditional education mode. As a result, children's thoughts and expressions are always suppressed. In primary and secondary education, quality education is often not really implemented, and indoctrination education is still the mode of education adopted by most schools at this stage, with schools and parents still focusing on academic performance, and students generally do not have their own independent thoughts, which eventually leads to the loss of active communication (Zhai & Guo, 2014). In this educational environment, students are often afraid of making mistakes, and some students may even mistakenly believe that they are humiliated and useless because of a communication failure, such as being ridiculed by their classmates, and lose their so-called “self-esteem”, thus considering themselves as people that others do not want to accept. Over time, introverted students and students who lack self-confidence develop the habit of “not wanting to communicate” (Zhou & Wang, 2013).

The communication problems at workplaces between freshly graduates entering the labour market and the superiors at workplaces can be justified by China's high power distance (80), high Long-term orientation (87) and high Masculinity (66) cultural dimension score, in contrast with low Individualism (20), low Uncertainty Avoidance (30) and low Indulgence (24) scores (HofstedeInsights, 2021) as seen on Figure 4. China's high power distance score implies that hierarchy is respected, subordinate-superior distance is high, formal authority is accepted. Due to high long-term orientation score in China “people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time” (HofstedeInsights, 2021).

FIGURE 4. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS - CHINA



Source: (HofstedeInsights, 2021)




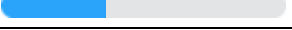
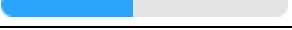

Moreover, high masculinity calls for a success -oriented and -driven society. Young graduated Chinese care a lot about their success, they have the motivation to become successful at work, which can be achieved through better communication with superiors and peers thus the communication awareness must be improved. Due to the low score in individualism young employees are brought up to act and communicate in the interest of the groups which does not require as much communication awareness for young workers to communicate for themselves. Low uncertainty avoidance enforces ambiguity in which Chinese are comfortable with, the Chinese language uses complex expressions and pictographs/ideograms with ambiguous meanings that can lead to misunderstandings in communication. As Indulgence concerned the low score assumes that China is a restrained society in which the control over the gratification of desires is present (HofstedeInsights, 2021).

On the other hand, many college students who are starting to enter the workplace begin to awaken their self-awareness, they pay more attention to subjective feelings but lack the awareness of communication, they are too lazy to communicate or even avoid communication, and as a result, they can avoid internal communication. Table 4 presents that the proportion of Chinese college students who have initially entered the workplace without communication awareness is as high as 64.21%.

### 5.3. Poor communication skills

Good communication skills often enable both sides to communicate better to transmit and receive information, thus making the communication effect twice as effective with half the effort, so good communication skills are indispensable in the workplace. However, as shown in Table 4, according to the survey data, 47.37% of college students who have just started their careers have communication problems due to their poor communication skills. They lack effective expression skills and proper arguing skills, etc. (Bai, 2019). Three options of the great difficulties they can encounter in internal communication were selected by over 55% of the respondents (1) properly resolve objections in communication, (2) accurately understand the views of others, (3) correctly and clearly state their views while 45.79% find difficult to communicate with people of different personalities and 37.37% of them have difficulties to persuade and influence other (Table 8).

TABLE 8. DIFFICULTIES MET IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Difficulties encountered in internal communication...		Proportion (%)
correctly and clearly state their views	106	 55.79%
accurately understand the views of others	115	 60.53%
properly resolve objections in communication	123	 64.74%
persuade and influence others	71	 37.37%
communicate with people of different personalities	87	 45.79%
other (please specify)	0	 0%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output

## 6. Solutions and suggestions to the communication problems

With more and more graduates entering the workplace, a new generation of young people have become the main force of the industry and enterprises in China. Consequently, HR concerns have arisen, and human resource managers need to find alternative ways to adopt to the changed






situation. In order to make graduates better adapt to the workplace environment after graduation, this paper gives the following suggestions to improve communication skills and help more effective communication at workplaces.

## 6.1. Student perspectives

### 6.1.1. Higher attention to self-communication, clear self-positioning

New employees in the workplace should pay attention to modest communication in their study. The survey found that some graduates think they have accumulated a lot of social experience in the university and have good communication skills, but in the process of communication in the actual work, they often cause unnecessary misunderstanding. Therefore, graduates should interact with their superiors and colleagues and participate in group activities to build the same values as the members of the organization. There are also some students who are over modest and prudent, they lack self-confidence and think they have poor communication skills. In the process of communication, they are too nervous and anxious (Gao & Hu, 2021). Therefore, graduates should have a correct self-positioning, peace of mind, to maintain polite respect for the elders to ask questions. And graduates should also make sure that they do not make excuses for mistakes and accept the criticism and suggestions of the leaders with an open mind (Table 9). 40% of the students expect more training to increase knowledge on communication.

TABLE 9. EFFECTIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION


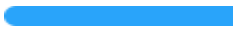


Effective ways to improve internal communication		Proportion (%)
Emphasis on self-communication clear self-positioning. Make yourself able to use the appropriate communication methods to achieve the purpose of communication.	122	 64.21%
Communicate more with superiors and colleagues and participate in collective activities to build the same values as members of the organization.	140	 73.68%
Attend more seminars and trainings on the topic of communication to develop communication knowledge.	114	 60%
Attend more lectures and training about Communication Science to increase knowledge of communication.	77	 40.53%
Other (please specify)	1	 0.53%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output

### 6.1.2. Listening and emotional sensitivity and clarification

On the other hand, to build rapport with the superiors and peers, students believe that listening carefully to different views, to emotional reactions of the parties and completely clear the facts in the situation are all important for effective communication at workplace (Table 10) that should be followed.


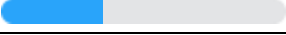




TABLE 10. IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION

Important aspects of communication to express		Proportion (%)
Completely clear the facts of the situation	110	 57.89%
Listen carefully to the different views of the communication parties	151	 79.47%
Take care of the emotional reactions of the communication parties	131	 68.95%
Trying to understand the different values that appear in the communication	73	 38.42%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output

However, next to face-to-face communication (74.21%) the second most preferable form of communication of the respondents is SMS/QQ/MSN/microblogging and other instant communication which allows for self-expressions and self-assurance, helps to improve self-confidence and self-esteem but does not allow for careful listening and better understanding of emotional reactions (Table 11).

TABLE 11. PREFERRED INTERNAL COMMUNICATION FORMS

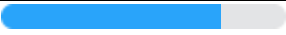


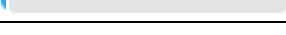
Preferred internal communication forms		Proportion (%)
Face-to-face communication	141	 74.21%
E-mail communication	69	 36.32%
SMS / QQ / MSN / microblogging and other instant communication	135	 71.05%
Telephone communication	105	 55.26%
Meeting communication	45	 23.68%
Other (please specify)	2	 1.05%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output

### 6.1.3. Communication skills expected to be trained

Even though the survey showed that freshly graduates need better listening skills and empathy in the course of internal communication only half of the respondents would like to get more training on listening skills as well as arguing skills. However, 77.89% of them would like to be trained more in how to express themselves (Table 12). Students mention persuasive abilities and some training on handling communication situations without becoming nervous as well.

TABLE 12. PREFERRED TYPES OF COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Types of communication skills preferred to be trained		Proportion (%)
Expression skills	148	 77.89%
Arguing skills	98	 51.58%
Listening skills	100	 52.63%
Other (please specify)	4	 2.11%
Total	190	

Source: wjx output

## 6.2. Enterprise perspective

### 6.2.1. Better understanding of college students

Many people regard that college students only think of their personality, strong self-awareness, no team spirit, difficult to manage. But in fact, it is not comprehensive to look at them from this perspective. They can quickly accept new things, and have strong learning ability, active thinking and rich creativity, which cannot be ignored. Therefore, in order to have a good communication with contemporary college students and improve their communication ability, enterprises must change the stereotype of them and if necessary, enterprises should also hold communication-themed related lectures and relevant trainings to improve college students' communication skills while taking the opportunity to have a correct and comprehensive understanding of this generation (Li & Tang, 2017).

### 6.2.2. *Changed management style*

News about the high turnover rate of contemporary college students has emerged in recent years (Li D. , 2017). Employers should analyze the essential reasons. After all, more and more young people will become the backbone of the workplace. Because most of them have received systematic education, have certain professional skills, and they are eager for innovation, so the authoritative leadership will make them feel bound. Therefore, when facing them, enterprises should abandon the rigid management system, pay attention to the communication and exchange with employees, listen to their real ideas and suggestions, and enhance the sense of belonging of employees (Li J. , 2017).

## 7. Conclusion

This paper focuses on internal communication problems at the workplace where freshly graduated workers are employed. The research conducted among Chinese college students collected 190 responses and aimed to reveal the causes of inefficient communication problems at workplaces and strives to recommend some solutions being either attitude change or communication skill trainings.

This paper adopts quantitative research method by means of a questionnaire survey to discover and summarize the characteristics of contemporary college students who are highly educated and have high learning ability, but are too much in pursuit of independent thinking, lack of team consciousness, and lack of confidence in communicating with the outside world although they easily accept new things. The paper analyses the problems faced by the contemporary college students in internal communication, such as inconsistency with the communication target, lack of communication awareness and lack of communication skills. Finally, according to the above internal communication problems faced by college students, this paper suggests some solutions to them.

Firstly, college students should give themselves a clear position in the enterprise and cultivate communication awareness, communicate moderately, and build the same values as the organization members; secondly, enterprises should change the stereotypes of college students, discover the advantages of college students, take the initiative to communicate with college students, and if necessary, hold communication-themed related lectures and relevant trainings to improve the communication skills of college students. Finally, the leaders of enterprises should try to avoid rigid management system and adopt more personalized management to understand the inner thoughts of college students and avoid communication barriers to the greatest extent.

With more and more young people entering the workplace, effective communication between enterprises and employees is particularly important. Employers should correctly recognize the unique way of thinking and personality characteristics of contemporary college students and recognize their advantages. At the same time, contemporary college students should also form a correct self-positioning in the workplace, find a suitable way of communication, so as to achieve the purpose of effective communication and ensure the steady development of enterprises (Wang, 2017).



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## Hate speech toward youngsters in online media

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### Abstract

The 21st century has come and is ahead of us, presenting fast changes in people's ways to interact while witnessing massive progress in media and communication. Generation Z, born in 1995, has by now become part of our societies' young workers force at a time when the internet was already well installed. Their progeny, the alpha generation (born after 2010), is part of an ultra-connected world, their parents have been documenting their lives from early birth. In 2020, when the mondial pandemia started spreading, it became a worldwide urge and need to communicate online. To confront the massive societal transformations, education may be getting late raising voices about these virtual relationships and interactions. How does hate speech appear and spread in these conditions? Where to set boundaries when the “ghost is in the wire” and may remain anonymous? Who should we turn to, who is responsible for social media? What are the consequences of mental health? Eventually, which solutions can we, youth workers, implement to support youngsters and prevent hate speech from raising? Those are the questions we wish to investigate.

**Keywords:** education, hate speech, online media, transformations, youngsters

### 1. Introduction

Starting from the beginning of the 21st century, the internet has drastically changed modern communication and culture. Its main idea and decentralized nature make it an excellent place for any person to share their knowledge, ideas, beliefs and worldviews. Nowadays, many youngsters have constant access to the internet, and most of them are active on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok and the like. According to the European Union's Kids Online Study, 82 percentage of adolescents aged 15 up to 16 have a profile on social networking websites (Wachs et al., 2021).

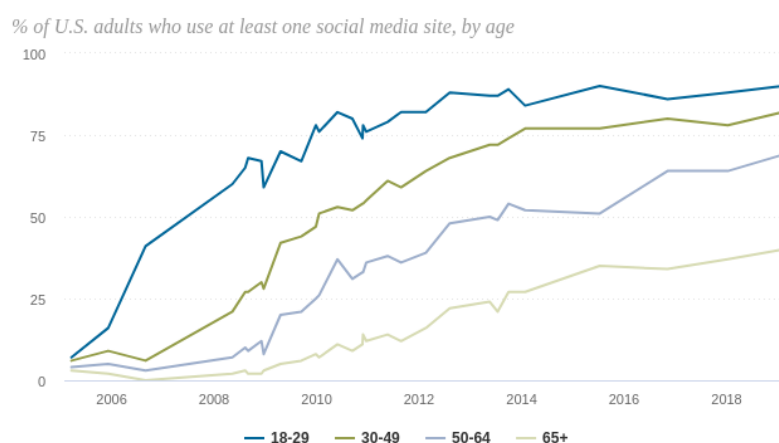
Even though all social media platforms have a leading role in connecting people and generate many interactions, unfortunately, these popular websites are full of harmful and often hateful content. It starts from disinformation, goes to fierce political debates and ends with hate towards

minorities or aggressive behaviour in the comment section. Nevertheless, those most prominent and most influential social media companies, such as Facebook, Google or Twitter, have policies concerning whether or not hateful content forms are allowed on their page. Quite often, these rules are performed inconsistently and oftentimes are vague and ambiguous. They could be hard to understand for regular users. In addition, most of the hate content is not being filtered. There are special moderators, who look for inappropriate content, tend to filter or ban hostile users. Unfortunately, it is still far from being enough. Solutions might emerge from reaching a level of sophisticated AI that automatically screens most of the content. Since then, education and prevention might be a fair start.

As depicted on the following chart, based on the data gathered from 2015 to 2019, the most active group on social media are youngsters (Shenton & Dixon, 2004). In a highly fragile age, this media consumption makes them the primary audience and target of hate speech online.

FIGURE 1. SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY AGE

### Social media use by age



Source: Pew Research Center, 2021

## 2. Ins and outs

Exposure to online hate among young social media users is a valid concern. The collective identity generated by social media through the world is being shown as a welcoming place for the individuals with common interests, giving them opportunities to become part of a bigger network and community to belong to. However, one big issue with social media is the unnamed, unrecovered position, which creates a space where hate speech spreads easily, without consequences (Paz, Montero-Díaz & Moreno-Delgado, 2020).

A psychological process, called online disinhibition, is the lack of restraint one feels when communicating online compared to speaking in person. That has results to increase toxicity and lower empathy among online users. Academics, authors and influential people nowadays discuss the presence and consequences of hatred on the internet. Most of the research conducted has been mainly focused on the long-term results of hateful content, depicting that it could reinforce discriminatory views. Data show that access to aggressive and hateful speeches may heavily influence the probability of users engaging in violent or malicious behaviour. However,

it would be interesting to investigate further the factors that may bring an exposed individual taking hateful actions and the substantial damages of such exposure.

### **3. How hate speech affects youngsters**

One in ten British children aged between 8 up to 11 testify they had seen nasty or worrying content online, when one-third aged between 12 up to 15 have encountered sexist, racist or discriminatory contents (Eisen, Matthews & Jirout, 2021; Meherali et al., 2021).

Hate speech in social media may have heavy and long-term impacts on people's mental health, especially if one is a direct victim, not just an observer. However, it is hard to judge an objective severity of different situations on the internet, as the initial psychological and physical well-being may change the results of observations drastically.

Some of the most common health problems encountered by youngsters experiencing or witnessing online hate regularly may be low self-esteem, insomnia, high anxiety, fears and insecurities (Oh et al., 2019; Gale, 2020).

Victims may develop a sense of loneliness or isolation. More potential outcomes could be feelings of depression, social anxiety, self-doubt, and lack of confidence identified in psychological well-being (Selma, 2019).

Additionally, teenagers who observe online hate speech may feel the violation of their dignity without seeing themselves as good, corresponding to some socio-cultural norms in society.

Physical harms that may occur in those circumstances go from self-depreciation to self-harm, such as mutilation and dramatic suicides.

Although youngsters understand that they might need support in difficult situations and identify sources of support - may it be their parents, friends or teachers - sometimes, they cannot seek help. That is due to the fear of being misunderstood or even of being rejected, denied. They might also feel deeply ashamed or embarrassed. Consequently, they usually prefer to handle those incidents on their own, enclosing themselves from external support.

Besides the fact that hate speech affects each youngster differently and individually, it also has a significant impact on society. Regular hate may lead to a disguised norm in our communities and increase intolerance, discrimination and hateful behaviours in daily life. This problem also lower teenager's freedom of speech, which may stop sharing their opinions, influencing relationships and democracies (Costello & Hawdon, 2020).

In addition, online hate may also make our society more anxious, fearful and xenophobic. That may lead to hostility and raise prejudices towards nations when people get offended. Instead of deconstructing those preconceptions, it may reinforce them (Schoenbeck et al., 2021).

The most visible intervention of online hate speech is cyberbullying. Fifty-nine percent of U.S. teens, one out of two, give testimonies of being bullied or harassed online. Most of those experiences are happening on Instagram, more than on any other platform.

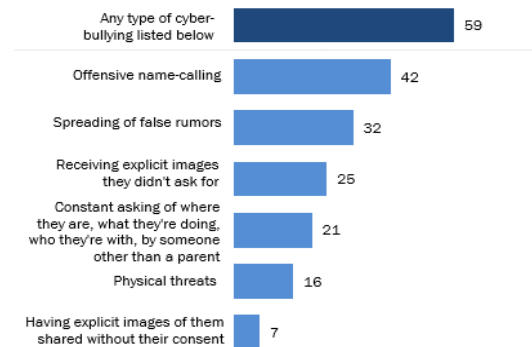
One out of five youngsters happened to skip school because they were victims of cyberbullying. It has been linked to teen depression and can even result in increased vulnerability and depression into adulthood (Anderson, 2018).



FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF TEENS EXPERIENCED OF CYBERBULLYING

**A majority of teens have been the target of cyberbullying, with name-calling and rumor-spreading being the most common forms of harassment**

*% of U.S. teens who say they have experienced \_\_\_ online or on their cellphone*



Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple options. Those who did not give an answer or gave other response are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 7–April 10, 2018.

"A Majority of Teens Have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Anderson, 2018

A significant amount of cyberbullying is motivated by hate toward sexual orientation or genders: LGBT+ youth are almost twice as likely to report being bullied online (Pappas, 2015; Pickles, 2019). At the same time, young women are twice as likely to have been sexually harassed online as young men (Duggan, 2017).

A common form of cyberbullying is called “doxxing”, which is the act of publishing a victim’s home address, phone, email or any other personal information to encourage other hateful people to harass the victim (Hua, 2017). Consequently, this may result in less freedom of speech because of fear, influencing individuals and communities.

However, most situations should always be understood from both sides - sometimes, what one person thinks is acceptable may offend another person. Therefore, before making a new post online, you should question yourself – may this harm or offend anyone? Education has a significant role to play in self-respect and recognizing others’ boundaries (Onah & Alexander, 2020; Windisch & Olaghere, 2020).

#### 4. What we can do to prevent hate speech online

Getting aware of the hate speech issue in our society, we searched for concrete suggestions of solutions. The first step would be to recognize and raise awareness on this topic. Teens are a prime target for hate because many of them are looking for some belonging. Some patterns can be observed:

1. Hate speech has been described as an expression – for instance, employing speech, images, videos or online activity – that can raise hatred against a person or people due to the characteristic they experience or a group to which they relate.
2. The “glorious past:” the idea that the author’s group has fallen from a once-glorious past. The fall from glory is often attributed to the “other.” For example, extreme political groups may convey unsubstantial stereotypes, such as immigrants arriving in country, local citizens were more affluent, had better jobs, and enjoyed a more lavish lifestyle.

3. “Victimhood:” when hate groups portray themselves as victims at the hands of the “other.”/stranger. Groups may promote the idea that immigrants are “stealing” their jobs or such stereotypes (Gabay et al., 2020).

Even if the online hate is successfully recognized, it is essential to understand the most appropriate solution to support the "victim". Of course, one should never be indifferent, but one should not immediately throw in a sharp exchange of words to exacerbate the situation. One way we can fight hate speech is by speaking up about equality, inclusivity and diversity. Some refer to this method as counter speech. The more we can undermine hate speech with loving words, logical arguments, and truth-telling, the more hate speech will begin to lose its power.

Another method that can fight hate speech is education, particularly media literacy. When it comes to bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, and hate crimes, the more people are educated on these issues, the more we can prevent them in the future.

Here are some advice and tips you can do to help young people recognize and respond to online hate:

1. **Teach** empathy and emotional literacy.
2. Use everyday moments to teach young people to notice, be sensitive to and label other people’s emotions.
3. Promote respect for diversity as a social norm. Address hurtful and offensive comments when they happen. As a parent/caregiver, you have the power to influence how a young person behaves toward others. Model tolerance and empathy for them.
4. **Talk** about the existence and impacts of hate.
5. Young people benefit from learning about hate speech from a trusted adult, rather than being exposed to it on their own.
6. You can facilitate dialogue by being prepared. This includes identifying ahead of time concerns that may arise when a kid encounters hate-motivated content.
7. Be aware of news events or events in the community that may lead a young person to express hatred toward others.
8. **Acknowledge** the emotional costs and be supportive.
9. Being the target of online hate speech can be distressing and painful.
10. Let young people know you are aware of the emotional impacts and willing to listen to how this exposure affects them.
11. **Digital/media literacy.**
12. You can teach young people critical thinking skills. Ask them to consider the ways in which media are created by people, and therefore represent those people’s values and perspectives.
13. Show young people how to verify sources. Many online hate websites go to great lengths to make their sites/pages look legitimate.

**14. Reporting hate.**

- 15. Encourage the kids in your life to report hate speech when they encounter it online. This can be done by reporting the content to the site administrator or internet provider.
- 16. Getting support after experiencing hate is essential. Preparing a report is one way to obtain an assistant. You can reclaim hate speech, hate crimes or threats of violence in the following ways: even anonymously.
- 17. Contacting the police.

**18. Be there.**

- 19. Witnessing hate speech can be upsetting. Encourage the young people in your life to reach out to you, or a resource like Kids Help Phone, when they feel uncomfortable with anything they have seen online (Gruwell, 2017; Robinson & Graham, 2020; Keen & Georgescu, 2020).

**20. Active/ passive listening.****5. Conclusion**

There are possible measures against online hate speech in this article, and their implementation in youth work was discussed. The goal is to identify the best practice models that youth and social workers can adapt and implement in their daily work to foster young people's digital media literacy and contribute to preventing online hate speech. Because of the rapid changes that our society faces due to digitalization, promoting children and youngsters' media and Internet literacy is essential. Additionally, more thought needs to be given to raising a more nuanced approach to the concept of what constitutes a 'public' space on the Internet. Thorough consideration needs to be paid to the fact that online interactions among individuals can sustain hate movements. The pervasiveness of online hatred on massively used websites, such as online newspapers, may influence certain groups and affect their ability to enjoy the Internet. Youngsters sensitized to this issue and using digital media with care can curb hate speech on the Internet and advocate for actively observing Human Rights. Awareness raising between young people for hate speech contributes to combat hate, racism, sexism and discrimination on the Internet. Youngsters should be strengthened in their dedication to democracy and Human Rights – this is the first step to make the Internet a more welcoming place in the future.

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# Character Building



# Analysis of gap between competencies developed by higher education and required by employers in Hungary

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## Abstract

Several researches are focusing on education and competency-management (Tran, 2018; Herbert et al., 2020) refer to a „skill gap” between the acquired skills of graduated students and workforce skills required by the industry. The current Hungarian higher-educational system and regulations do not fully support the competency-based view of education. According to employers and reports of future work competencies (WEF, 2020) higher education programs are supposed to meet the requirements of work skills connecting to personal qualities of students. Therefore, the character building of graduates needs to be emphasized by universities. The aim of the research is to analyse the required skills of Human Resource Management graduated students from various aspects: from the point of view of the higher education training and outcome requirements defined by Ministry of National Resources; from the perspective of employers, and from the angle looking at future competency expectations. In order to reveal and compare these different aspects, based on the triangulation approach, document-analysis and focus-group interviews were carried out, and a case study method was applied in order to represent the outcome of the research. Our study indicates that competency based educational programs need to focus on the development of the personality and essential skills in parallel in order to provide professionals fit to employers’ expectations and future trends.

**Keywords:** character building, competency-based higher education, workforce skills

## 1. Introduction

It is evident that a competency gap exists between employer needs and the skill sets of university graduates (Conrad & Newberry 2012; Everson 2014; Adrian, 2017). However, we have limited knowledge (Clardy, 2008; Kormanik, Lehner & Winnick, 2009; Hirudayaraj & Baker, 2018) about the competency gap between the Hungarian employer needs and the skill sets of university graduates in the case of Human Resource (HR) educational programs. Therefore the aim of this research is to analyse and identify the competency gap between employer needs and the skill sets of HR university graduates in Hungary from multiple perspectives.

## 2. Literature review (framing the problem)

Employers usually perceive the insufficiency of skills among the employees (Mourshed, Farrell & Barton, 2012). Moreover, studies consistently report that higher education graduates are increasingly unable to perform work duties effectively (Tran, 2018).

Higher education institutions often fail to capture the need for skills in the labour market, therefore they cannot develop relevant employability skills for students (Harman, Hayden & Pham, 2010). “Employability skills are the personal attributes enabling the people to get a job and support an individual’s career life more easily” (Fajaryati et al., 2020, p. 600.). Yorke & Knight (2003, p. 8.) define employability as “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”. Beside the higher educational program, the level of skills that each graduate or employee possesses, depends on their effort. Students should understand the requirements of a targeted profession and invest efforts to develop relevant employability skills (Jackson, 2016).

“From a human resource supply perspective, understanding the trends in the field and the knowledge and the skill requirements of employers is important for educational programs to adequately prepare professionals to enter and thrive in the field” (Hirudayaraj & Baker, 2018, p. 578.). Although other occupational areas are consistently analysed (Frankenfeld, 2017; Meyer, 2017), there is limited knowledge (Jamshidi, Rasli & Yusof, 2012; Hirudayaraj & Baker, 2018) about the skill gap in the field of Human Resources.

### 2.1 Competency gap defined

The following chapter summarizes the theoretical background of the competency gap. First, the definition of competence is assigned, as the fundamental determination of the research. Following that the elements of the competence are explained, in order to be able to clarify and separate the various competences.

Competency is defined by the Education Policy Committee (Taguma (OECD) & Rychen, 2016, p. 3.) as follows: „a competence is defined as the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values”.

According to this definition, competency is based on three pillars, namely knowledge, skills and attitudes and values that are defined hereinafter:

„Knowledge includes theoretical concepts and ideas as well as practical understanding based on the experience of having performed certain tasks... disciplinary, interdisciplinary, epistemic and procedural.” (Speiser & Lang, 2018, p. 72.)

„Skills are the ability and capacity to carry out processes and be able to use one’s knowledge in a responsible way to achieve a goal... cognitive and meta- cognitive skills; social and emotional skills; and physical and practical skills.” (Speiser & Lang, 2018, p. 85.)

„Attitudes and values ...refer to the principles and beliefs that influence one’s choices, judgements, behaviours and actions on the path towards individual, societal and environmental well-being.” (Speiser & Lang, 2018, p. 101.)

We applied this competency definition during the research because the Education and Outcome Requirements defined by the Ministry of National Resources includes the qualification standards. Qualification standards do not only include the name and level of a qualification, the professional qualification and its outcome features, but also several other elements are included, for example the main knowledge areas to be covered by the program furthermore, other criteria such as the skills, and attitudes too. This definition is based on the Hungarian Qualification Framework and contains the same definition as applied by OECD.

Researchers often employ different perspectives to examine the skills gap in the workforce (Tran, 2018). In the current research we applied the following one: skills mismatch „is an encompassing term which refers to various types of imbalances between skills offered and skills needed in the world of work” (ILO, 2014, p. 6.). One type of the skills mismatch is the competency gap which is defined by several authors (Shah & Burke, 2005; ATD, 2015). The present research applied the following definition: “Competency gap can be defined as the difference between the market’s need (demand) and the current skills supplied by local education institutes (supply)” (Alsafadi & Abunafesa, 2012, p. 285.).

### 3. Context of the study

The Human Resources Bachelor program is available at 12 different universities and in 5 different regions in Hungary. The research is connected to the University of Pannonia, Veszprém, the only university with an HR Bachelor program in the western and central region (Transdanubia) of Hungary. It means that the university has a key role in the education of HR students. Based on the DPR AAE Career Orientation Support Module 2020 (Diplomán túl, 2020) we found that 56% of the graduated HR students had a job position in the last year of their studies, 40% of these students got a job in the location (therefore the country retention has a key role), 46.2 % of the graduated HR students had a position with the requirement of BSc and the graduate earnings premium was 128% in the case of the graduated HR students. Altogether we can state that the well-graduating HR students had a strategic role in this region, therefore the continuous development of the educational programs and the engagement in the needs of different actors regarding this educational program is essential.

#### 3.1 Research questions, design and data collection method

Despite the unique role of the University of Pannonia in the Transdanubian Region, the competition in higher education is significant. Based on the literature review and the feedbacks from the university’s industry partners, the following research questions were formulated:

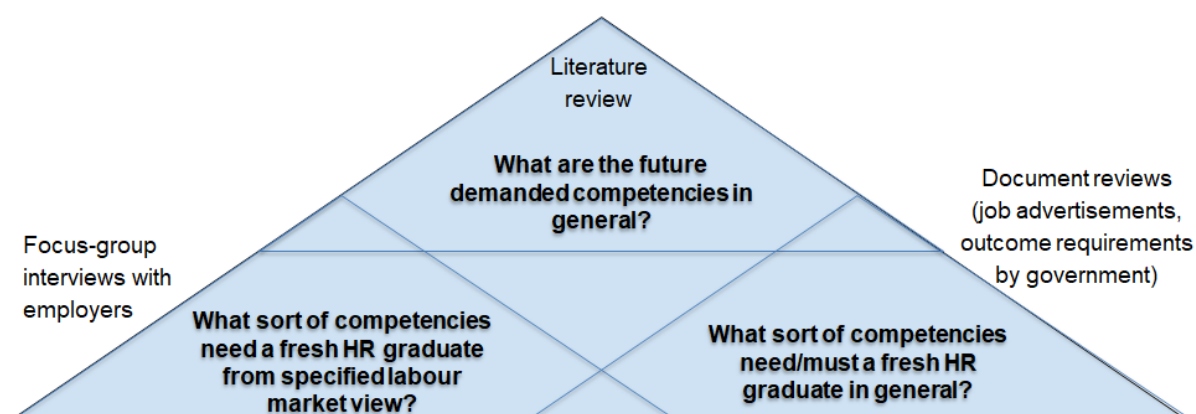
RQ1: What sort of competency gap can be identified between employer needs and the skill sets of university HR graduates?

RQ2: How will future competency demand influence this gap?

Analysing the job advertisements is a commonly used method to study the skill gap on workforce, but employer surveys and interviews are the most common means of forecasting skills requirements and future trends within an industry (Hirudayaraj & Baker, 2018). However, these do not always provide reliable representations of actual needs of employers (Wilson, 2008). Predicting solely on employers' expectations could be problematic because the forecasts based on the industry aspects are sometimes too idealistic, and it is hard to predict the exact demand for the future (Wilson, 2008; Lanier, 2009). Offsetting the disadvantages of these type of predictions, adopting primary and secondary data sources during the data collection process

can be effective. According to Senge (2000) triangular approach allows us to study the problem from multiple perspective using qualitative and quantitative data, in order to provide a useful way of addressing the problem. Therefore, to get reliable answers to the research questions we used a triangulation approach (Senge, 2000; Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012) during the data collection process, and a case study method was applied so as to understand and represent the outcome of the research. Figure 1 presents the triangulation approach that was used during the data collection process. Regarding the data analyses, we accomplished comparison analyses in order to find the differences between the approaches, whereby we analysed the keywords (competencies) from all aspects. The content analyses of the different aspects need to be considered as well in the future.

FIGURE 1. TRIANGULATION APPROACH USED DURING THE DATA COLLECTION



Source: created by the authors

Relevant literature was reviewed in order to reveal the *future demanded competencies* for HR graduates and professionals. General competency reviews (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011; Bakhshi et al., 2017; Speise & Lang, 2018; Fajaryati et al., 2020; WEF, 2020) as well as HR specific literature (Donkor et al., 2017; JazzHR, 2021) were collected. Based on the reviews the most important future demanded competencies as keywords were listed in general.

Four focus-group interviews were conducted with the focus of what sort of competencies are necessary for graduated HR students. Altogether 13 HR representatives from different sectors were invited to the interviews: manufacturing companies (23%), service sector (23%), public sector (31%) as well as self-employed HR managers (23%). The general interview protocol of the focus groups was the following: short representation of the applied definitions, clarification of job requirements (HR jobs without experience or maximum 1 year experience; should connect to one or more HR function) to which the competencies were collected, defining competencies (definition and examples) highlighted by the participants, discussing consequences of the lack of certain competencies. Based on the interviews, the demanded competencies as keywords were listed in a transcript and definition of all competencies was added in order to find the similarities and differences between keywords.

Job advertisements were analysed in order to establish a list of *demanded competencies* of graduated HR students. Job advertisements were extracted from several Hungarian websites between January and April of 2021, whereby altogether 992 job advertisements were collected. Based on the investigation of the content the demanded competencies were listed. It was important to make a comparison between the demanded competencies according to the job

advertisements and focus group interviews. The training and outcome requirements by the ministry were also analysed in order to list the *obligatory competencies as keywords*. Altogether 143 competencies as keywords were listed and analysed in order to find the gaps between the different approaches (obligatory, demanded and future demanded competencies).

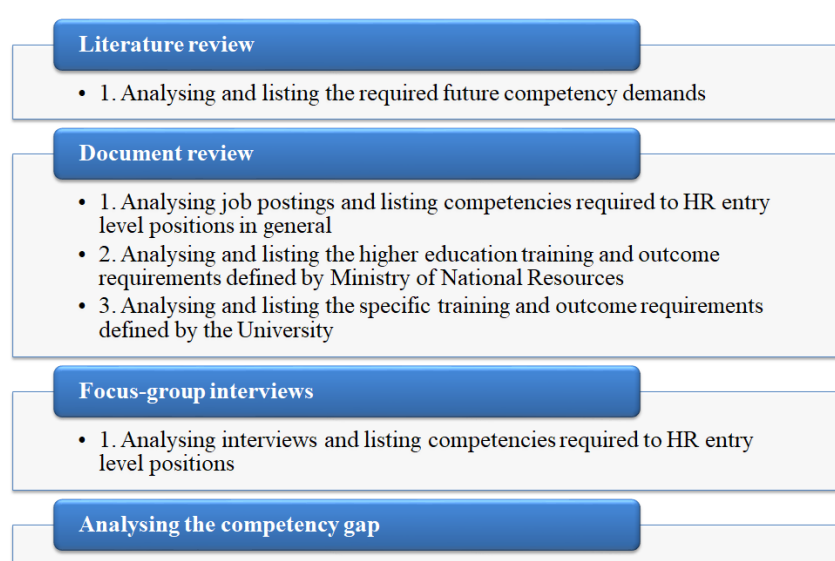
## 4. Case study and results

The case study will reveal how to analyse a competency gap with the use of triangulation approach with the aim of getting reliable results with the consideration of the present (*obligatory*) and the *currently demanded competencies* as well as *future demands*. The case study concentrates on the process of the identification, and then the results based on the analyses of the competency gap will be presented.

### 4.1 The detailed process of the competency gap analysis

In order to obtain a full overview based on the requirements (obligatory, currently demanded and future demands) of the educational stakeholders it is important to map competencies. Mapping competencies can be made as a reference for educators in order to improve the quality of learning and education, and moreover it helps to identify the competency gaps of an educational program. Figure 2 presents the process of the identification of the competency gap.

FIGURE 2. THE PROCESS OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF COMPETENCY GAPS



Source: created by the authors

In case of the present research, the first step was to analyse the *future demands in terms of* competencies based on the literature review, whereby general competency reviews and HR specific literature were reviewed. The literature review revealed 49 different *future competency demands*. In order to list the *obligatory competencies*, we analysed the training and outcome requirements by the Ministry of National Resources and altogether 29 different *obligatory competencies* were listed. The next step was to analyse the *currently demanded competencies* by the labour market, therefore first we collected and studied several job advertisements. Based on the job advertisements we listed the most important *demanded competencies* in case of fresh HR graduates. Moreover, to assess the *demanded competencies*, we conducted four focus group interviews where the key representatives of the labour market expressed their opinion. The main focus of the interviews was to find the most important *demanded competencies* and to define

these competencies in case of an entry level HR position. Altogether we identified 65 different *demand competencies* during these interviews and based on the collected job advertisements.

Based on the above mentioned points of view numerous competencies were listed, we compared these lists in order to find the competency gaps.

## 4.2 Results of the identification of the competency gaps

Competency gaps will be presented according to the previously defined competency categories by the OECD, but it is important to note that knowledge, skills, attitude and values are interrelated systems together. Despite the fact that we present these parts separately, the elements of competency are both interconnected and mutually reinforcing. First, we list the *obligatory competencies* which are containing the required competency elements determined by the government. *Competency gap 1* contains the differences between obligatory and *demand competencies*, which are defined by the focus group interviews, and based on the job advertisements. In the overlapping section of competency gap 1 and 2 those competencies were listed, that are considered as a crucial competency for the currently demanded and in the future demanded views as well. These skills are the ones which are both essential now in the labor market and will be important in the future too. *Competency gap 2* includes differences between obligatory and *future competency demands*, which were defined based on the literature review.

TABLE 1. IDENTIFIED COMPETENCY GAPS

KNOWLEDGE	<b>Competency Gap 2 (Future competency demand)</b>	New-media literacy, Transdisciplinarity approach, Predictive data analytics
	<b>Overlap between competency gap 1 and 2 (Current &amp; future competency demand)</b>	-
	<b>Competency Gap 1 (Current competency demand)</b>	-
	<b>Obligatory competencies</b>	Basic Micro and Macro Economics, Informatics, Maths, Statistics, Project and team management, Ethical behaviour, Human Resource Management related knowledge, HR legal aspects
SKILLS	<b>Competency Gap 2 (Future competency demand)</b>	New technological skills, Active learning, Sense-making, Novel & adaptive thinking
	<b>Overlap between competency gap 1 and 2 (Current &amp; future competency demand)</b>	Prioritization and time management, Critical thinking and analysis, Troubleshooting and user experience, Logical, system and process thinking
	<b>Competency Gap 1 (Current competency demand)</b>	Stress management, Administrative skills



	<b>Obligatory competencies</b>	Communication, Problem solving, HR leadership and management skills (such as organizational and change management, planning, controlling), application of knowledge, team work
<b>ATTITUDE, VALUES</b>	<b>Competency Gap 2 (Future competency demand)</b>	
	<b>Overlap between competency gap 1 and 2 (Current &amp; future competency demand)</b>	Resilience, Creativity, Originality and Proactivity, Adaptability, Emotional Intelligence
	<b>Competency Gap 1 (Current competency demand)</b>	Positive attitude, Self-assertive approach, Commitment, Hardworking attitude, Patience, Kindness, Practical approach, Dynamic attitude
	<b>Obligatory competencies</b>	Proactivity, cooperative skills, supportive attitude, professionalism, empathy, social intelligence, responsibility, open-mindedness, cross-cultural competency, precision, reliability, developing ability, leadership and social influence, reflectivity

Source: created by the authors

In the case of the knowledge element we found that the knowledge requirements defined by the government are very extensive, in this case there is no gap between the obligatory and currently demanded knowledge. Furthermore, we investigated the gap between the demanded and future demanded competencies, and we found three knowledge elements which are expected to be relevant in the future.

The first is the new-media literacy which is based on the understanding of mass media tools, and the digital media (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011), since forthcoming communication tools will require new media literacies. The next important knowledge element is the transdisciplinary approach that is the knowledge in concepts across multiple disciplines (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011). It means in the future the ideal employee will have a deep understanding of at least one field, but also will have “the capacity to converse in the language of a broader range of disciplines” (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011, p. 9.). Another important competency in the future will be the predictive data analytics, which contains the knowledge about the data analytics, predictive modelling and programming in order to be able to use people-related data to make predictions about dynamics in the workforce (Donkor et al., 2017).

Regarding the skill gap we found a mismatch in the terms of new technological skills, containing a sort of competencies, such as the use of technology, monitoring and control, data-gathering skills, data-analytics skills, research skills, predictive data analytics, tech-savviness, digital HR, visual-presentation skills, digital employability, virtualization and so on (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011; Donkor et al., 2017; Fajaryati et al., 2020; WEF, 2020; JazzHR, 2021).

Moreover, active learning will be an important skill in the future: understanding the implications of new information both for current and future problem solving and decision making (WEF, 2020).

Besides learning in an active way, sense-making will be crucial as well as smart machines take over routine manufacturing and services jobs, so “there will be an increasing demand for the kinds of skills machines are not good at. These are higher level thinking skills that cannot be codified” (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011, p. 8.). Sense making skill is helping us to create a unique insight to critical decision making. Alongside the above skills, novel and adaptive thinking is a forthcoming considerable competency, which means “the proficiency at thinking and coming up with solutions and responses beyond that which is rote or rule-based” (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011, p. 9.).

With regard to the skills, the overlapping competencies are prioritization and time management, critical thinking and analysis, troubleshooting and user experience, logical, system and process thinking.

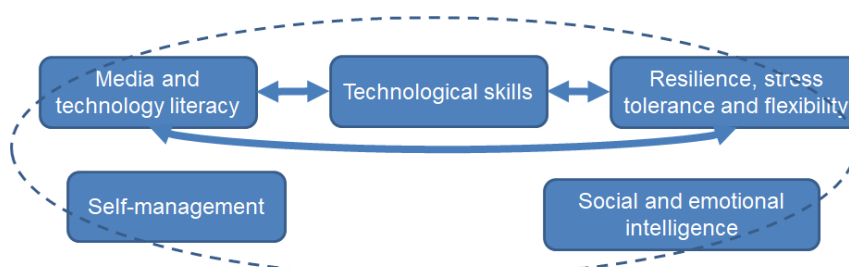
Concerning attitude and values, we also found gaps between the currently demanded competencies and future requirements. The importance of having resilience, emotional intelligence, and a positive attitude is growing. “The maturity, flexibility and restraint to cope with pressure, stress, criticism, setbacks, personal and work-related problems” (WEF, 2020, p. 156.) could be an attitude which will need to be developed by educational institutions. In the case of an HR job it could be an essential requirement to be open to changes (positive or negative) and to show considerable variety in a workplace.

### 4.3 Synthesis of case study

The triangulation approach used during the process of data collection could be a good basis to find differences between obligatory competencies and those required by the industry (now and in the future) from fresh graduates. Knowledge, skills as well as attitude and values are both interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The case study pointed at the existing shortage regarding knowledge, however it is important to analyse the level of the required knowledge (moreover the level of the required skills, and attitudes too). To answer the research questions, we can state that competency gaps can be identified in case of obligatory and demanded skills, attitude and values, and future demanded competencies will be influenced by the obligatory knowledge in the future, moreover the obligatory and the demanded skills, attitudes and values need to be think over according the future demand expectations too.

One of the competency gap is focussed on the consideration of how to adapt knowledge, skills and attitude elements in connection with technological changes (See on Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. INTERCONNECTED COMPETENCIES IN CASE OF IDENTIFIED COMPETENCY GAPS



Source: created by the authors

In case of knowledge it will be essential to consider media and technology literacy, in connection with these technological skills, as well as the development of students' resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility, as these need to form a major part in the curriculum

development. However, not just the technological part is missing from the educational program, but also the development of self-management of students needs to be built into the educational program. The development of willingness to take on responsibilities and challenges, the understanding of the implications of new information, dependability, commitment to do the job correctly and carefully, being trustworthy and accountable and paying attention to details should be an integral part of HR education. Emotional and social intelligence will be a key competency for HR graduates in the future: to develop capacities used to work with people to achieve goals and being friendly, cooperative, sensitive to others, easy to get along with and enjoying work with people (WEF, 2020, p. 156.). Furthermore, the ability to connect to others in a deep and direct way, to sense and stimulate reactions and desired interactions are also crucial (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011, p. 6.).

Altogether we can state that higher educational institutions are increasingly investigating efforts in developing graduate attitudes and skills to match the demands of the 21st century. These competencies are necessary for the Industry 4.0 approach. In order to fulfil this goal of the higher educational institutions, it is important to highlight that solely focusing on knowledge and skills is not enough to achieve the aims, which could be the value that employers and students are seeking.

## **5. Discussion, future directions and limitations**

Our research is a work in progress, and the applied triangulation approach does not allow us to make generalization in terms of HR competencies, however the results create a good basis to further improvements in the competency development process at the university and in the future research process. Our long-term goal is to develop a competency map regarding HR graduates. Therefore, we need to create competency sets, and to define the competency categories as well as the expected level of the required competencies. On the basis of the redefinition of competency outcome requirements, the most important and large-scale challenge is to find new directions of competency-development which are forming not just the skills but values and attitudes of graduates as well. Analysis of the competency gap between expectations of the labour market, future demands and outcome requirements of university programs have outlined the main areas of future development. Usage of information and communication technological assets, methods and opportunities will be essential skills for future employees. Because of the rapidly changing expectations, working environment and procedures, existing knowledge becomes forfeited, and competencies related to problem solving (creativity, critical thinking & analysis, process thinking, etc.) and active learning (adaptability, open mind, sense-making, etc.) come to the fore. On the other hand, we need to take into consideration that companies require more self-dependence, proactivity and responsibility from their employees who need to work together with several different and unknown people. Competency development of graduates needs to cover aspects of self-management, like confidence, time and stress management, as well as areas of emotional and social intelligence. Beside lectures and seminars, in the frame of elaboration of development methods we should define the most appropriate further opportunities of competency development, such as tutorship, soft skill training, volunteering, and corporate projects. The analysis and identification of competency gaps is only the first step in the process that has established our further research direction and developmental process considerably. If we aim to train competent graduates, we cannot ignore the fact that requirements of employers have changed significantly, and future trends advance more rapidly and complex changes in the future of jobs are expected.

## Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the financial support of Széchenyi 2020 under the EFOP-3.6.1-16-2016-00015.

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# Studying time management of young generations

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## Abstract

Nowadays, due to the impacts of the digital trends and globalisation, we live in a fast-paced and stressful world where it is getting more and more difficult for us to maintain the balance between our work and private life, moreover we have less and less time for recreation and relaxation. The rush and the compulsion to conform have an impact on our mental health and exercise psychological pressure on us, therefore, the role of time management is becoming increasingly important. This study looks at the main trends that affect time management from a theoretical perspective. Using primary data collection methods, I examine the time management of the young generations, and I look at whether they use digital time management application tools to optimise their time and how consciously they deal with time management. As a method of data analysis, I apply statistical indicators related to frequency distribution, cross tabulation techniques and correlation analysis in order to get a deeper understanding of the time management trends of young generations and in order to explore possible deficiencies, issues and the factors that should be improved.

**Keywords:** consciousness, young generation, success, time management, time management methods

## 1. Introduction

Since my childhood I have sensed the rush that my family members used to struggle day to day. Through the way of becoming adult, I also was having more and more programs and tasks besides my school activities. As I have been competing in sports for 12 years so trainings and other developmental courses took up a lot of time, so I had to learn to schedule my time really well. Therefore, in that time I really liked reading books from authors on this topic that provided me with several information and practices in connection with time management. Currently, as a dual education student I feel the pressure of the time not only on myself but also on my colleagues and company leaders. Procrastination, searching for excuses, feeling overwhelmed are not uncommon phenomena, especially for the younger generation. Plus, it is written in several literature that this age group cannot really manage their time in a conscious way.

Therefore, in my research I look for the answer what are the main trends that effect time management in theoretical approach. Moreover, I want to examine the time management of the young generation, whether they use digital time planning application tools to optimise their time and how consciously they deal with time management nowadays and how they are willing to develop their knowledge in connection with it.

## 2. Time management in theoretical approach

### 2.1. The impact of trends of time management – under the pressure of the fast-paced world

We feel increasingly more intensely that the world around us has become more interconnected than before due to the effect of the internet, the technical solutions and the globalisation. Therefore, we are provided with several information faster plus we are better informed, make our decisions quicker, so we unperceivedly get into that “rat race” where we become more stressful and with this we force our environment to do the same. So, this accelerated world changes not only us but also all the people in the world. Thereinafter, I show the most important factors from the point of view of the topic.

#### Changed people

Under the pressure of time we are also spinning even more. We become more impatient, want everything straight away as we do not like waiting. Furthermore, the “I want it right now” customer types are appearing more and more intensively who expect the fact that they live their life without interruption and with full of experience (Tisza, 2019). The time affects our social and work relationships, as well as our purchases, resorted services and consumer decisions. The automatized processes and smart devices perform a lot of tasks instead of us or solve them quicker but we do not feel the increased free time because we want to be everywhere either in person or online. This is the so called FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) phenomenon, the essentials of which are that we do not feel that our free time is robbed if we can associate experiences with a given activity, be it shopping, entertainment or other activities (KPMG, 2018). It is no coincidence as we live in an era of experience economy, compared to Maslow’s pyramid model, people are “starving” for more and more experiences. It is confirmed by the fact that we can encounter many solutions in practice that aim at saving our time such as the EXIT strategy, knowledge quickly, housework outsourced from a smartphone, queuing optimised, etc.

### 2.2. The definition and concept of time management

#### 2.2.1. Definition of time management

Time management means that we preside over our time and work and they do not control us (Seiwert, 2017). Otherwise, time management is in a sense decision-making which is connected to the disposable time as well as providing time to complete our critical tasks and managing and making available related documents and information (Király, 2019). If we want to have a successful life, we have to have a well-thought-out time and life plan in order to achieve both our professional and personal goals (Seiwert, 2017). Therefore, time planning is the main element: “Planning is the preparation of achieving our goals. The better we plan our time, the more we can use it to achieve our personal and professional goals” (Seiwert, 2017, p. 39.). In addition, the effective time management can guarantee the following benefits. On the one hand, we can do our task with less efforts and achieve better results, on the other hand, we have more time and make fewer mistakes.

#### 2.2.2. Basic laws of time management

Time management has nine basic laws which are the following. The first is the *Pareto principle*, the essence of which is that 20% of our results come from 80% of our activities and 20% of our activities bring 80% of our results. The second one is the *Parkinson law* which illustrates that

work will tightly use up 100% of the time allotted, which means we will do the task during in exactly that amount of time that is at our disposal. The *law of the plug* shows that in order to reach goals that we have not achieved so far we would have needed skills that we have not possessed yet. Until we do not pull out the plug, our performance will be limited. However, to do this, we need to step out of our comfort zone and develop our abilities and sharpen the ax. The fourth one is *elephant's law* which means that we must always break down each task into subtasks. The *law of frogs* emphasizes that you should do the most important task of the day in the morning. It means that you should always accomplish the most difficult and time-consuming task of all first. According to *the second fourth law*, we define a time zone every day when we deal with our responsibilities in this quarter (important but not urgent). The seventh law of time management is the *law of paper*. The essence of it is if we learn to think on paper, can increase our efficiency by an order of magnitude. The *law of increasing efficiency* expresses if we are experienced in doing the task, then we can reduce the spent time with this activity to the minimal. The *law of habit* shows that 90% of our success or failure depends on our habits. The last law is the increasing efficiency law which claims that it will take a fraction of time to complete a task if we are experienced enough in doing it (Nagy, 2016).

### 2.2.3. Methods of time management

The first method is the *ABCDE rule*, the essence of which is to write the letters A, B, C, D, E next to each task on our list, where A means activities that we have to do because its completion or non-completion is likely to be serious and come with huge consequences. These are our most important tasks every day. They are followed by activities marked B, C and so on (Tracy, 2017). The second method is the *Eisenhower matrix*, based on that we can arrange each of our tasks in order of urgency and importance. The following method is the *mind map* which helps us to organise ideas in a transparent way and to process thematically (Seiwert, 2017). The fourth method is the *GTD method*. It is a designed task management system that aims to get our tasks done as stress-free as possible with its five steps of recording, clarifying, organizing, reflecting, and taking action (Allen, 2015). The fifth one is the *Ivy Lee method* which means to write down the six things that are the most important tasks the following day and sort them in order of importance. And we always start the next day with the most important task, if we fail to complete a task on that day, we also move it to the next day and start it with that activity. The sixth time management method is the *two-minute technique*, the essence of which is that if we can do something in two minutes, we should do it immediately (Szendrei, online). The last method can be said to be really innovative; it is called *digital time management* which is the most efficient solution to optimize our time. Nowadays, various electronic and mobile time management software products (toogle, asana) and applications appear from time to time. Their use is extremely beneficial, as they support, supplement or even replace traditional appointment logs and manual scheduling logs. Furthermore, these applications are controlled by modern technology that can already separate important and insignificant things and tasks. They can also organize our records, keep track of deadlines, and manage our data. In addition, they provide access to emails and the internet at any time as mobile management programs (Seiwert, 2017).

## 3. Time management of young generations

### 3.1. Aim of the research

1. How effective is the time management of the young generation?
2. Whether they use apps that optimize their time?

3. How consciously do they deal with time management nowadays?
4. How willing are they to improve their knowledge in this regard?

### 3.2. Method of the research

The research came true with quantitative technique, including online survey asking. At this method, the data can be quantified and are suitable for performing statistical analyses. For the sake of transparency, I illustrated the structure of my research with the following figure:

TABLE 13. THE STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

Method and survey asking technique	Quantitative research/self-administered online questionnaire survey
Method of sampling	Sampling in Hungary came true with an arbitrary or snowball method
Sample size	246 people
Interval of the sampling	From 16 <sup>th</sup> of October 2020 to 2 <sup>nd</sup> of November 2020
Aim field of the research	Hungary
Target group of the research	Young generation (generation Z and Y)

Source: created by the author

**Method of data collection:** the questionnaires were completed by the survey participants in an online survey (246). I recorded the questions of the compiled questionnaire on kerdoivem.hu. Respondents answered to the questions in the form of a self-administered questionnaire. In the questionnaire I listed both closed and open questions, so the respondents could choose the most suitable one from the answer alternatives, or they could mark their thoughts, opinions, feelings and experiences on a seven-point scale. The complete questionnaire template is available at the following link:

- a) Questionnaire: <http://kerdoivem.hu/kerdoiv/1056621294/>

**Analysis technique:** the answers to the questions were quantified by statistical methods, examining ratios and distributions with the help of the Excel program. To present the results in a transparent and illustrative way, I created graphs and charts using Microsoft Excel. Further analyses were made with the help of SPSS statistical program version 24.0 using the following methods: cross-tabulation techniques, cluster analysis and factor analysis.

### 3.3. The results of the research

In terms of demographics, 63.4% of respondents were female while 36.6% were male. Based on the distribution of age, 72.8% of respondents are related to Generation Y, while 27.2% belong to Generation Z. According to the distribution of the highest level of education, more than 55% of the respondents have a college/university degree, they are followed by people who have a school leaving exam, they represent about 40%. In addition, 3,6% of the respondents have a National Training Registry Qualification while only 1% of the people marked the MBA as their highest level of qualification. Regarding the current positions held by the respondents, the majority of the respondents are either university students or students. However, we may also encounter those people who are already full-time workers or dual training students: they represent about 10%. There are also a relatively small number (around 7%) of young people who are already middle managers or entrepreneurs. More than half of the respondents do not use digital time management tools and only 20% of them use a sort of digital time optimization solution, but it is definitely encouraging that almost 30% of the younger generation would be

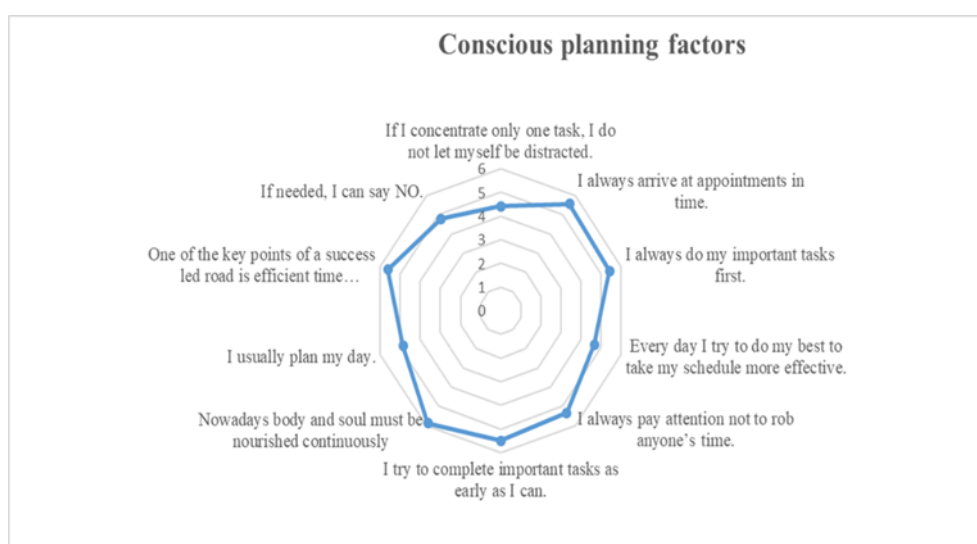
ready to try such an application. In the case of the statement about participation in a time management course, I observed similar trends. The question measuring the efficiency of time management was valued at 4.67, while the question measuring conscious time management was rated at 4.37 on a scale of 7 by the respondents, which is definitely positive. The results of the research also showed that the majority of the respondents are able to keep the deadlines. After presenting the basic data of the respondents, let us see the further results of my research.

During the research, I also did a factor analysis. During the analysis, the Kaiser-Meier-Olkin criterion is 0,824, which indicates that the database is suitable for principal component analysis (Bartlett test p-value 0,000). The elbow rule for the whole sample indicates that the use of the first three principal components explaining 39.5% of the total variance is sufficient, although the eigenvalues of three additional principal components are above one and the first six principal components together can explain 57.1% of the variance. Since the results suggest retaining more than one principal component, I rotated the original principal components by Varimax rotation to obtain factors that could be better interpreted. During the rotation, 3 factors were separated, which are as follows:

b) Under the pressure of the time, Conscious planning, Balance and recreation

As the time runs faster and faster, *Under time pressure I will be stressed, I often feel overwhelmed* factors were given a particularly high average in the pressure of the time factor. The statements (*At the end of the day I always feel energy lost, there is no day when I do not forget something, I always devote time to myself*) were valued averagely by the respondents. The statements *I mostly finish my tasks with extra time* and *I do not have a day when I can do all of my planned tasks* were also evaluated similarly. The most critical factor with regard to under the pressure of the time factor was that *I am not able to manage time* factor. Regarding conscious planning factors, I made the following figure:

FIGURE 5. CONSCIOUS PLANNING FACTORS



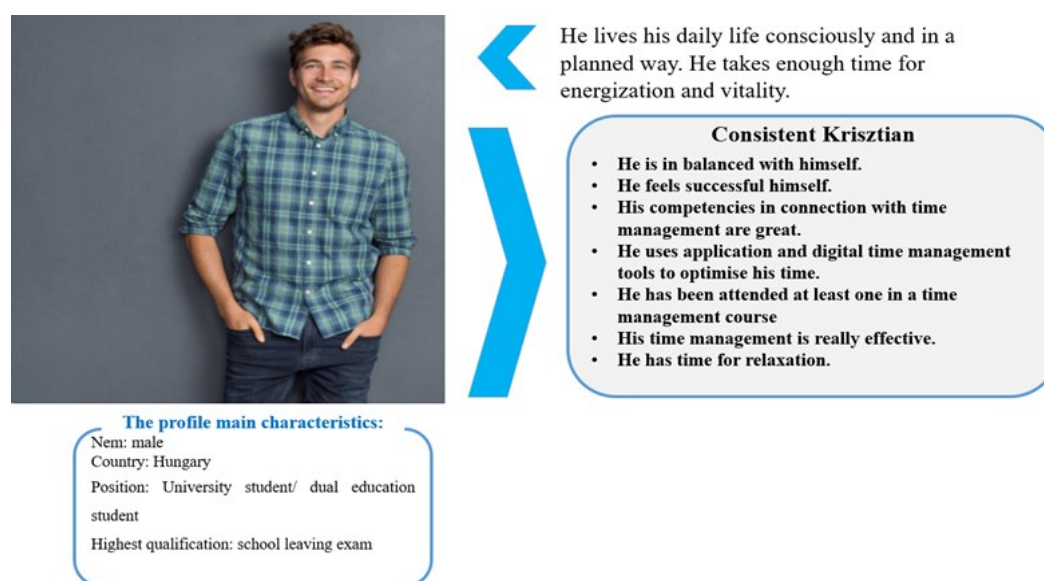
Source: created by the author based on primary research

It can be well seen that each statement was rated above 5 by respondents, which is particularly good as it shows that the majority of the younger generation is consciously trying to plan their daily lives. The only exception to *If I concentrate on only one task, I don't let myself be distracted* is that respondents often allow themselves to be distracted while working. Regarding



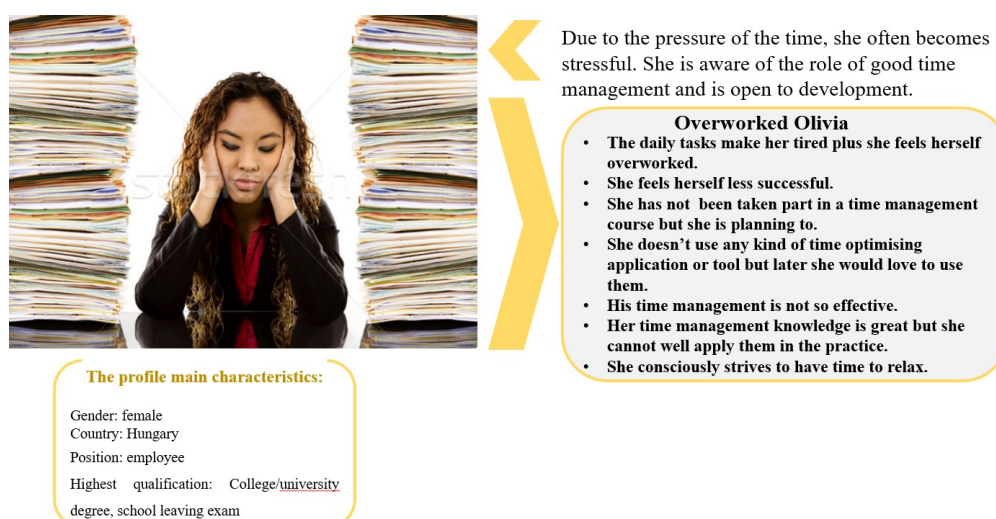
the recreation and balance factor, the respondents highly valued the importance of programs spent with the family, the balance between school and work and private life, and the importance of sports. The claims about having a lot of friends and participating in a number of parties and entertainment programs were less important. While I always try to have some me-time and I really like my work so I consider it as relaxation statements are valued moderately good on a scale of 7, which is not bad. After that, I performed a K-key cluster analysis, in that I managed to separate two clusters. One contains 134 observations and the other 112 observations. I present the obtained results with a personal design technique.

FIGURE 6. PERSON IN CONNECTION WITH CONSCIOUS PLANNING



Source: created by the author based on primary research

FIGURE 7. PERSON IN CONNECTION WITH STRESS AND OVERWORKING



Source: created by the author based on primary research



## 4. Conclusion

To sum up, I can say that the young generation keeps deadlines really well and consciously deals with time management nowadays. The received results from the factor analysis highlight similar tendencies, results as the factors in connection with conscious planning were highly valued by the respondents. Nevertheless, they cannot still cope with the pressure of the time plus do not really use time optimising application so in this case they definitely need to improve. In this, it can be a huge help for them to participate in some type of time management course. In addition, it would be great as well if this generation would use some traditional time management methods and technics to achieve a higher level of conscious time management.

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# Digital Competences

# Enhancing students' digital competencies within the Employability module of the University of Europe's skills-based curricula

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## Abstract

The onset of the coronavirus has catalyzed an acceleration in the adoption of digital teaching practices that have been trending in Higher Education for over a decade. The most obvious of these has been the abrupt switch to online training. Given the speed at which this transition from in-person instruction has taken place, many instructors' natural first inclination has been to maintain teaching styles as similar as possible to those employed in person, including the traditional lecture format.

However, a growing body of research is confirming what instructors across the educational spectrum are observing: namely, that student behaviour, the psychological effect of the medium, participation levels, attention span and learning outcomes online can vary widely from those demonstrated in traditional classroom settings. It is becoming increasingly clear that conditions such as "Zoom fatigue" are very real, and that, if teaching is to be effective, different methodologies based on digital learning experiences should be added to educators' repertoires that take the particular challenges and new opportunities of the online environment into consideration.

This paper will examine how some of these new online-based methodologies and digital tools are being developed and introduced at the University of Europe within the undergraduate students' Employability module to enhance the student online experience as well as learning outcomes. The module spans three semesters; here the authors will focus on implementations within the first semester, Employability I: English and the second semester, Employability II: Soft Skills to nurture relevant skills and to ensure that learning environments remain fit-for-purpose for the digital age.

**Keywords:** employability, digital skills, soft skills, critical thinking skills, online teaching methodology, higher education

## 1. Introduction: The 2020 Anomaly and The Digcompedu Framework

With the rapid change to virtual teaching catalyzed by the COVID-19 virus, teachers were required to boost their digital competencies quickly at the start of 2020. As a response to the growing "ubiquity of digital devices," the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators, or Digcompedu framework (Punie & Redecker, 2017), was created and published by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre to provide instructors support in developing their digital competencies, an obvious prerequisite to teaching online.

This case study will delineate and analyze the implementation of digital collaboration tools used in the Employability I: English and Employability II: Soft Skills modules taught during the second and third COVID-19 semesters of 2020-2021 at the University of Europe. The courses were taught exclusively online at two campus locations, in the German cities of Berlin and Iserlohn; the four groups taught by the authors of this article are hereby analyzed according to the Digcompedu framework (Figure 1) provides a roadmap for enhancing student's digital competencies and information and communications technology (ICT) tools use within skills-based curricula.

FIGURE 1. THE DIGCOMPEDU FRAMEWORK - EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR THE DIGITAL COMPETENCE OF EDUCATORS BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE (JRC).



Source: Punie & Redecker, 2017

Coming to terms with the “new normal” requires, first and foremost, a mindset about learning for both instructors and students that sees it as a continuous rather than finite exercise, given that digital tools themselves are constantly evolving. While the concept of “lifelong learning” is nothing new, the speed at which technological advancements both occur and have had to be adopted since 2020 adds an extra layer of both humility and urgency to the process of updating course material, methods, and resources employed on a regular basis. Those who embrace the challenges involved can, however, find new opportunities for innovation. Instructors can enhance and assess learning outcomes via a variety of ICT tools to translate real life qualification assessment practices (Makhachashvili et al., 2021) into a blended or exclusively online format.

## 2. Why Create Skills-Based Curricula?

A skills-based curriculum focuses on building students' abilities to apply rather than repeat what they have learned, particularly within an interdisciplinary context. The popularity of this format has increased alongside the awareness that future employability will depend more on how adeptly a person can make use of widely available knowledge to achieve innovative results rather than the acquisition and retention of knowledge alone. Ever since the global financial crisis, awareness of the interdependencies and complexity in international markets has risen sharply, aspects “subsumed by the term VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity)”. Fostering innovative attitudes in the classroom is not only popular; it is a key

mindset for future employers. Research indicates that 83% of companies regard innovations as either important or essential to survival in the global marketplace. In fact, over the course of three years, the top 20% of innovative companies grew at a rate that was almost 16% faster than that of those peers classified as least innovative (Burgartz & Krämer, 2016). Given the speed at which knowledge, practices and products become obsolete in a VUCA world, it is imperative for students to build their creative muscle while at school, developing skills that will help them adapt to changing circumstances.

Soft skills, including highly developed social skills, are critical to helping students succeed and are determinant for academic behaviours in online education (Cazarez, 2021) as the 21st century economy shifts from generating wealth via individualistic creativity to creativity that is “effectively fostered through collaboration” (Larson & Miller, 2011).

Skills-oriented teaching is trending in higher education curricula as a part of the competencies concept that is defined as an integration of “knowledge, skills and attitudes which are aligned to a professional context” (Kelder & Walls, 2017). A curriculum based on 21st century skills supports project-based learning to familiarize students with new technologies as constructive media for synthesis and creation (Chu et al. 2017). The transition from knowledge- to competencies-based teaching is also connected to preparing students for the demands of a VUCA world’s jobs market being “confronted by global higher education” (Waller et al., 2019).

The connection to Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning (Anderson & Bloom, 2001) is clear, in which higher order thinking skills such as understanding, analysis, application, evaluation and creation, all built upon memorization, are consciously developed. A number of corporate studies, such as those conducted by LinkedIn Research (2019) and the World Economic Forum (WEF 2015 and 2020), indicate that the trend toward, and need for, a more competence-based curricula will be amplified in the coming years, and that employer demand has already shifted towards staff with a wide array of interdisciplinary skills.

### 3. Skills-based Curricula at the University of Europe

In the official Guideline for the Formulation of Qualification Objectives for Study Programs and Modules at the University of Europe, the importance of skills-based curricula is made clear in the first section, entitled “Introduction: Qualifications and competence-oriented learning outcomes”:

*...A central concept of the Bologna reform is competence orientation, which...primarily refers to the didactic turn in university teaching away from input orientation toward output orientation. For lecturers, competencies are thus the central starting point and target variable for content-related and methodological considerations in teaching. The competencies to be acquired in the teaching/learning context are described and planned via learning outcomes. Learning outcomes formulated in a competence-oriented manner support students in evaluating their own learning and thus in taking responsibility for their own learning.*

*The design of the module examinations as well as the recognition of external achievements are based on the competence-oriented learning outcomes. Competency-based learning outcomes express the level actually aimed at the university and are therefore an important instrument for controlling recognition processes (Translated from German with [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator)).*

Additional emphasis on the importance of skills-based learning is seen in the University of Europe website at: <https://www.ue-germany.com/en/university/>, which notes:

*“The university promotes the **future-oriented development of skills** and interdisciplinary teaching formats in step with actual practice and according to the highest international standards. Through the interaction between **creative, entrepreneurial and digital thinking**, as well as an international perspective, the various fields of study mutually enrich each other and offer new approaches in teaching and research tailored to the **requirements of Job Market 4.0**.*

#### ***Our Vision and Mission***

*At the University of Europe for Applied Sciences (UE) we are committed to providing our graduates with lasting and successful studies and training for jobs in the digital age. As a state-accredited university of applied sciences under private ownership, we promote especially **independent entrepreneurial-creative thinking and acting**. We provide the relevant specialist, decision-making and social skills through **modern pedagogical concepts**.” (Author emphasis)*

These assertions indicate the degree to which the University of Europe is aware of the changing demands of its students’ future employers. In every module, qualification objectives are to be focused on what the student will be able to do by the end of the semester in terms of the creative application of a wide range of higher order thinking skills. Thus, course developers are encouraged not only to see the delivery of knowledge as an end in itself, but as a means to empower students to think critically, communicate effectively and work collaboratively so as to achieve innovative results in “independent entrepreneurial-creative thinking and acting” to fit the “requirements of Job Market 4.0.”

## **4. The University of Europe Employability Modules**

Based on recommendations of the state accreditation board, the Employability I: English and Employability II: Soft Skills modules have been designed to expose students to current concepts and trends in business and economics, and foster the formation and informed, articulate defense of diverse opinions about them. Rather than present the business world as a stagnant entity with set truths, students are encouraged to embrace its dynamic nature. Rather than just memorize and apply terms learned, tasks are designed to guide students on a journey, step by step, all the way up Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning (Anderson & Bloom, 2001).

Throughout the courses, the authors encourage students to take an active role in evaluating their needs and expectations from a future career environment. For example, by studying Employability I topics such as metacognition and cognitive bias, participants explore how mastering the skills discussed can increase their chances of meeting the evolving requirements of interviewers as well as their long-term professional success in the VUCA world. At the end of the semester, students demonstrate the highest order thinking skill, creativity, by designing and presenting on a topic of their choosing and demonstrating how it relates to topics covered during the course.



According to the UE website, courses are aimed to prepare students to “successfully establish themselves in the digital job market of the future and to reach their personal and professional goals – anywhere in the world”. The Employability I: English module encourages students to take an active role in shaping their personal futures through the creative use of various online tools to evaluate key trending topics such as VUCA, disruption, ethics, regenerative design, and the paradigm shifts proposed in the “doughnut economics” of Kate Raworth, which are emerging as “a compass for humanity's 21st century progress” (Raworth, 2017).

The Employability course contains consecutive modules over the first three semesters of the Bachelors’ Degree programme across several majors. The first semester concentrates on business English communication skills, designed for students with the minimum requirement of B2+-C1 level proficiency in English. The second focuses on soft skills for the workplace in the 21st century, and the third module on design thinking. Out of the Employability I courses offered, the authors of this paper taught a total of 56 teaching units for each of four groups during the second online semester:

- Two courses of predominantly German-speaking students at the Iserlohn Campus (roughly 30 students per group),
- Two courses of international students with English as first and second language from approximately fifteen countries of origin (roughly 60 students).

In both the first and second Employability modules, use of post-meeting summaries were employed to assist students in building upon their knowledge from one class to the next, and to provide updates to those that did not attend the previous lecture. According to the Employability Module I learning objectives (University of Europe, 2020), upon completion of Employability modules, UE students should be able to accomplish the following in English:

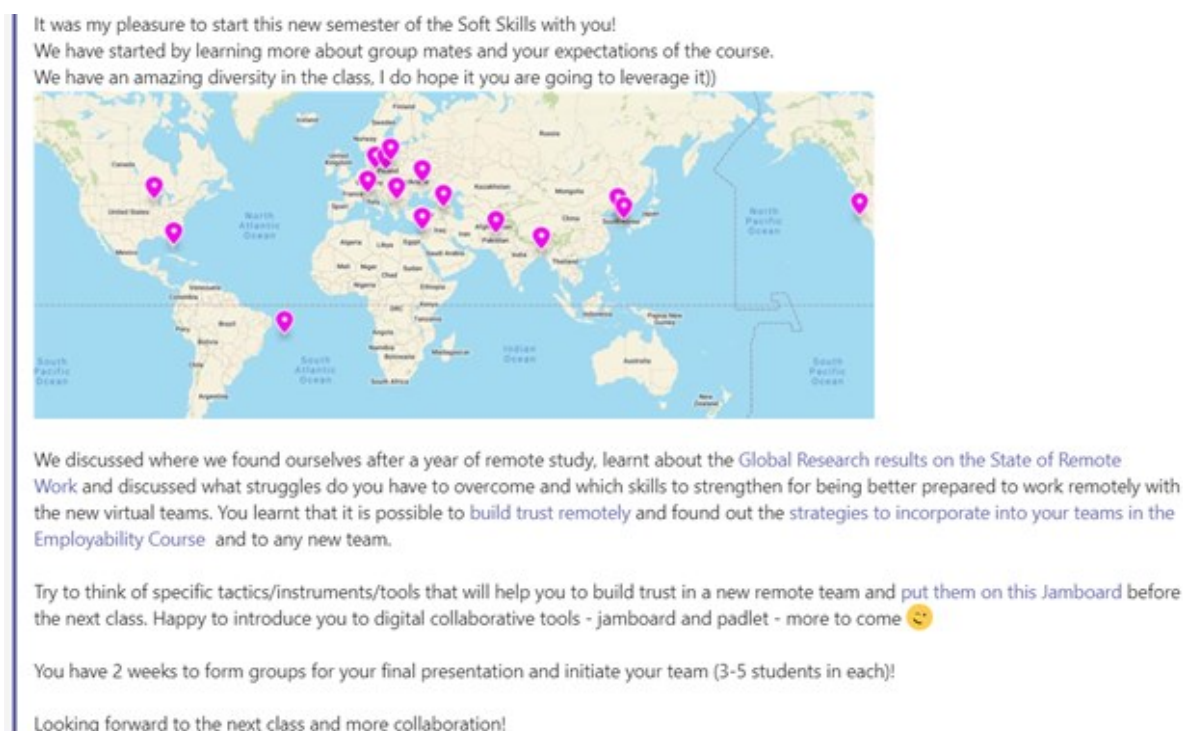
- Recognize and master the stylistic forms tested in standardized examinations such as the TOEFL and IELTS.
- Understand and utilize professional terminology such as that relating to key economic concepts.
- Explain what a paradigm shift is, and key paradigm shifts currently affecting businesses.
- Summarize video and other content from a variety of business media.
- Identify and employ HOTS (higher order thinking skills) in written and spoken assignments.
- Apply assessment tools to analyze current ethical issues in business.
- Illustrate how strategies studied could be applied in original ways to address current economic challenges.
- Critically evaluate classical and contemporary economic theories.
- Design and discuss the results of online surveys.
- Create and conduct presentations in teams utilizing digital tools.

In order to make sure students performed critical evaluations of the materials covered, skills-oriented activities were incorporated using digital collaboration tools. The competencies gained reflect the skills delineated in Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning (Anderson & Bloom, 2001). In the following section the methodology used to achieve these goals will be discussed.

## 5. Adjustments for Online Teaching

Written after-training reviews assist students in reviewing what was learned during the class asynchronously. The summaries are also provided to help those who missed class or experienced an unstable connection to help them keep up with proceedings. Most importantly, they provide a consistently updated roadmap of the individual and collaborative learning journey. As Employability: Soft Skills is a conversation/discussion-based class rather than lecture-based, no video recordings are made. Pride of place is given to the process of live collaboration in the breakout rooms and that of debriefing immediately thereafter, in which the outcomes and key takeaways of the same are discussed with the whole class.

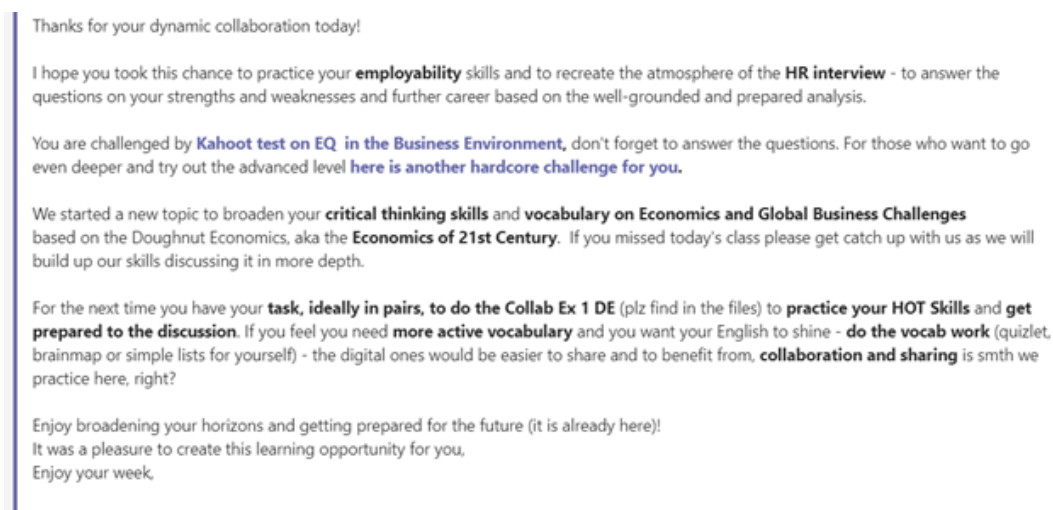
FIGURE 2. POST-CLASS SUMMARY-GUIDANCE FOR ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING  
POSTED IN THE MS TEAMS CHANNEL



Source: Shtaltovna MS Teams Channel Summaries, 2021

Post-class summaries such as those pictured here (Figure 2 and Figure 2a) provide a bird's eye view of the learning roadmap and motivate students by highlighting their achievements. They are skills-based, detailing what they are able to do after a given day of class. These summaries build self-awareness and add an asynchronous, autonomous aspect to the course. Students can choose when to read them, and they provide links to digital exercises so those who wish to develop their abilities in specific areas further can do so at their own pace.

FIGURE 2A. POST-CLASS SUMMARY-GUIDANCE FOR ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING  
POSTED IN THE MS TEAMS CHANNEL



Source: Shtaltovna MS Teams Channel Summaries, 2021

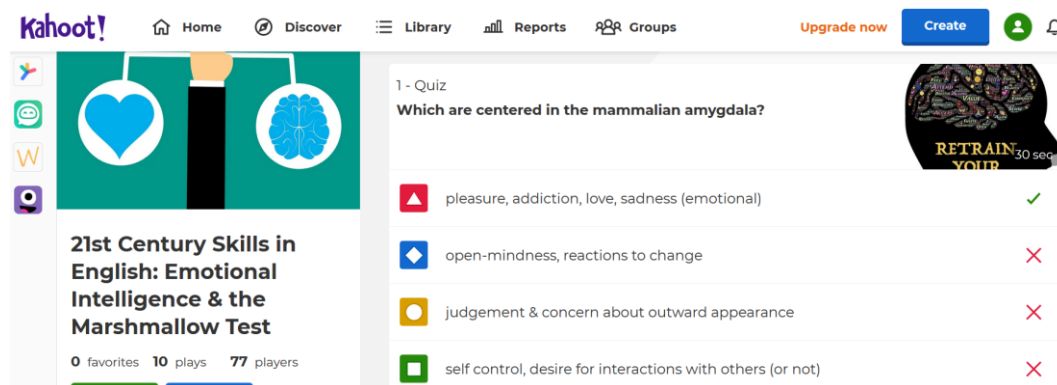
Another example of how students' learning outcomes can be enhanced through the use of digital tools can be seen with Kahoot quiz games. This tool offers the benefits of gamification in that it encourages student engagement with its competitive infrastructure, in which the points of top players are shown to all as they are accumulated and the winners are celebrated at the end of the game. It can be played individually online from disparate locations, providing ease of use. Students also receive encouraging messages after each attempt, whether correct or false, to keep them engaged. Being used both as a synchronous and asynchronous digital tool, for both individual and group answers, Kahoot quizzes helped students learn the material, while sharpening their critical thinking skills and collaboration techniques when designing their own as well.

Initially, students participated in instructor-created games on curriculum topics such as metacognition and doughnut economics, so building their skills in using a new digital tool while reviewing key points. Once students gained an understanding of how the game works, they were asked to design their own Kahoot activities. In groups, they were given a selection to read from Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 2012), and asked to create a Kahoot together about it for the rest of the class. For the presentation on a topic of their choice, students were asked to create and include an interactive review session for their classmates. For this, many groups chose Kahoot as their digital interactive review tool of choice.

Students brainstormed, strengthened their visual communication skills by pairing images with questions, collaborated to decide on questions and answers and improved their ability to write concisely thanks to the application's strict wording limits. Students reported satisfaction from learning and choosing "new, exciting facts and ideas," formulating them into the engaging and concise questions and thinking of misleading answer options based on their own prejudices before learning the topic. Another aspect noted in the students' feedback was the pleasure of seeing their work published in Kahoot, making it visible and accessible to users throughout the world. In contrast to a comprehension-type task like answering questions after reading a text, by creating their own Kahoots (Figure 3) where they employed all the higher order thinking skills in Bloom's taxonomy, from remembering to creation.

Those students who showed persistence in creating and practicing Kahoot! quizzes reported more self-confidence before the exam. The voluntary, asynchronous nature of being able to practice at their own pace and as many times as desired fostered a sense of individual responsibility and time management.

FIGURE 3. EXAMPLE OF KAHOOT! STUDENT-CREATED QUIZ  
USED FOR UE EMPLOYABILITY: ENGLISH COURSE



Source: Muzzu & Shtaltovna Kahoot! Collection, 2021

In a similar manner, EU Employability I: English students were first introduced to Microsoft Forms and Quizzes by being given an instructor-created version, taught how to take it from within the Microsoft Teams after some lecture segments as a review of the material, and then encouraged to develop full mastery of the tool by creating their own for each other. Microsoft Forms and Surveys allows students to receive instant feedback, as well as compare their answers with that of their classmates anonymously after responses have been sent. Showing the results of the group answers immediately after a quiz was taken prompted further discussions and exposed them to different perspectives within their peer group. Within the breakout discussions that followed, students practiced emotional intelligence competencies by learning to express and ask for opinions in a respectful way.

Microsoft Forms and Surveys were also used to break down reading selections into shorter paragraphs, after which students answered comprehension and analysis questions in either closed or open styles. Using these digital tools helped to increase the readability of the articles and keep students focused on manageable segments. Compared with using other tools for online reading where a rather advanced level text fills the screen and the questions are all at the end, so that much scrolling back and forth is required each time an answer must be checked, overall user experience satisfaction and task completion increased when Forms were used, even for the texts with significant complexity. When used asynchronously, these tasks again helped to increase engagement and eased time management issues for students, many of which were feeling overwhelmed with the first pandemic semester and trying to adapt to it.

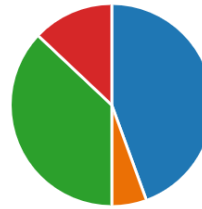
Students had an opportunity to take the same quizzes, either in Kahoot! or Forms (Figure 4) more than once, and reported a surge in motivation as they saw their speed increase and results improve, measurable proof of their progress that improved their confidence. In both cases, key soft skills such as creativity, responsibility, initiative and teamwork were developed when students built upon their knowledge of the content and the format to move from being as quiz takers to quiz makers, be it to review course segments or as their digital tool of choice for the interactive review requirement of their final presentations.

FIGURE 4. EXAMPLES OF MS FORMS QUIZZES USED IN UE EMPLOYABILITY: ENGLISH

## 2. 21st century skills are:

49% der Antwortenden (17 von 35) haben diese Frage richtig beantwortet.

AI-resistant – not easily replac...	24	✓
developed when you can me...	3	
reflected in your ability to han...	20	✓
All of the above	7	



## 3. Three areas of foundational literacies – the ways you apply core skills to everyday tasks – are:

31% der Antwortenden (11 von 35) haben diese Frage richtig beantwortet.

Persistence	17	
Numeracy	28	✓
Information and communicati...	25	✓
Necromancy	4	
Cultural	22	✓



Source: Muzzu &amp; Shtaltovna MS Forms Collection, 2021

Wordwall classifying and quiz activities were used extensively throughout the semester, often first discussing topic-related exercises in breakout groups and then comparing results. Sometimes these were timed warm-up activities, and sometimes these were given without a timer to promote deeper discussions about which answer fit best, to produce valid arguments and to decide on one option as a team. This tool reduces time spent on working out the in-class exercises significantly, as most of the answers that puzzle students can be solved with the knowledge in the mini-group. After debriefing the breakout experience, the instructor can offer correction where needed and answer remaining questions. As students still have the access to the links and are shown that they can themselves change the mode of such activity from matching exercise to quiz and vice versa, they can further practice as many times as any individual might find useful and appropriate. Some students value the asynchronous access to the exercise as they can conduct additional research on concepts, vocabulary and the topic categories featured. A sampling of categorization exercises in Wordwall related to emotional intelligence and logical fallacies can be seen in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5. SOME EXAMPLES OF WORDWALL ACTIVITIES USED FOR EMPLOYABILITY: SOFT SKILLS COURSE PRACTICE AND TESTING



Source: Shtaltovna Wordwall collection, 2021



## 6. The concept of enhanced digital learning

An overarching concept informing the Employability I: English and Employability II: Soft Skills course designs is that of self-determination theory (Jeno, Danielsen & Raaheim, 2018; Hsu & Wang, 2019) which posits that for deep engagement and the ensuing long-term learning to occur, three prerequisites must be met. Firstly, the competence the task will strengthen must be clearly understood and desired by the student. Secondly, the task must allow a certain level of autonomy, or creative freedom, in terms of how it can be carried out. Thirdly, it must offer relatedness, which in the current situation in which social contact has been and still is limited, means not only that students must see how the topic relates to their lives, but also, ideally, that the activity design should allow for students to build relatedness to the instructor and more importantly, to each other while they are completing it. A mnemonic device to assist in remembering the key points is to think that every young person wants a HOT CAR: higher-order thinking skills used towards developing competence, autonomy and relatedness (Watson-Brown, Scott-Parke & Senserrick, 2021).

Four additional principles were adopted to enhance learning outcomes in the digital environment, namely:

- **Connection before Cognition:** designing class structure with increased attention to the emotional and social needs of students.
- **More Visuals, Less Verbiage:** understanding and expanding the tasks to include visual cues as an important aspect of communication.
- **Takers to Makers Mindset:** ensuring course flow moves students from “takers” of information and quizzes, etc. to “makers” of their own course-content-based online creations.
- **Ask the Right Questions:** maintaining a user-centered approach focused on inquiring how to provide opportunities for students to give attention to actively creating something based on their own interests within the realms of the topics covered rather than how to achieve passive student attention to instructor-led lectures.

In the initial stages of universities’ COVID-related disruptions in 2020, taking the emotional and social needs of students into account and creating a safe and secure environment to make meaningful connections in their groups became crucial as students suddenly found themselves learning alone online and having to collaborate with a group of strangers. Stewart et. al. note that in his 1966 tract “The Idea of a University,” John Henry Newman stressed

*“the need for the personal touch to provide the understanding and contextualization required for effective personal learning. The artisan, if not the artist, is the key to providing the real essentials of a tertiary education....[it is crucial to] address the holistic needs of the individual...Virtual realms have yet to replicate the richness of in-person on-site instruction...the in situ mode is not mainly based on listening to an instructor deliver from a platform...but the social experience of being with focused fellow learners. The commonality of purpose creates relationships that provide stimulus and support to the members of the particular learner community.” (Stewart et. al., 2016, p. 247-248.)*

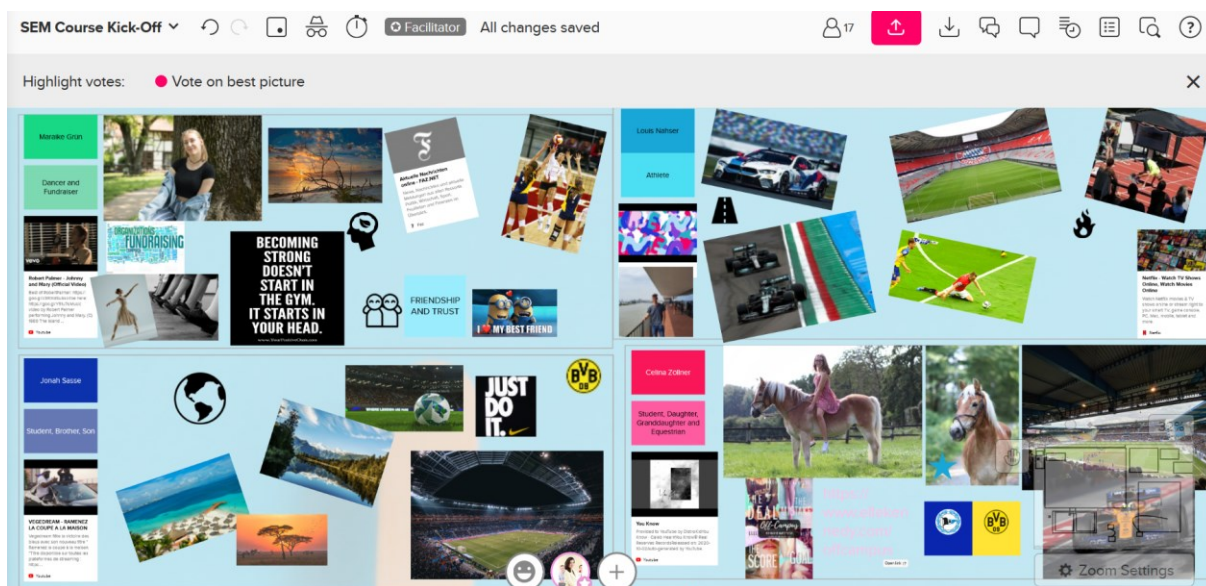
One of the key challenges involved in teaching the Employability module was creating precisely this sense of a “personal touch” as well as of a “commonality of purpose” amongst the students within the online environment.



The authors found that applying the first principle, **Connection before Cognition** by, for example, attributing more time for a meaningful digital warm-up activity increasingly helped students quicker develop a sense of safety, and of connection to their classmates which increased their motivation to engage with each other and the material. Rather than allow attendees to slide into a passive “School: The TV Show” mentality, their participation was activated immediately to ensure each class was a live social experience.

Kick-off or energizer activities created in digital collaboration tools like Padlet and Mural increased students’ competencies in using ICT while allowing them to express themselves creatively and get to know each other. For example, one warm-up involved showing where on a world map they were currently located, thus discovering both the rich diversity of the global contingent in Berlin as well as points in common. The Iserlohn cohorts “took” a “Class Selfie” with a Mural template (Figure 6) in which each filled their area with links they like, a picture of themselves and/or activities they are interested in, and other personal details they chose to share with each other. While many attendees did not feel comfortable having their cameras on throughout an entire meeting, with such an activity, they enjoyed being able to show themselves as they wished to be seen. In both Berlin and Iserlohn, the time dedicated to these activities has led to high levels of student participation and positive feedback in creating emotional bonds between students who only knew each other from virtual classrooms.

FIGURE 6. CLASS SELFIE – PORTION OF A MURAL ACTIVITY  
FOR BUILDING TRUST AND PERSONAL CONNECTION



Source: Muzzu, 2021

The second principle, **Less Verbiage and More Visuals**, is also part of a user-centered approach. Students are online several hours a day, with short intervals between one class and another. Brain research has established that the mind can process visual cues and infographics at a much faster rate than written language according to numerous neuroscience studies: Holcomb & Grainger (2006), Lester (2006), and Bohn & Short (2012).

Therefore, incorporating visuals to either support or replace verbiage where possible enhances the user experience by both speeding up and deepening students’ understanding of key concepts discussed in a given segment. The added variety from the images also provides relief from the

visual monotony of text alone. The Employability I: English course incorporates the awareness of the power of visualization, and its increasing importance in companies, by stressing how language is one part of a larger picture, communication. Course materials are rich in visual cues, and students learn about copyright restrictions, creative commons licenses, and sources for open access images such as Unsplash and Ouch! by icons8. Many classroom activities, such as those using PowerPoint, Jamboard or Mural are designed to encourage students to express themselves both verbally and visually as well.

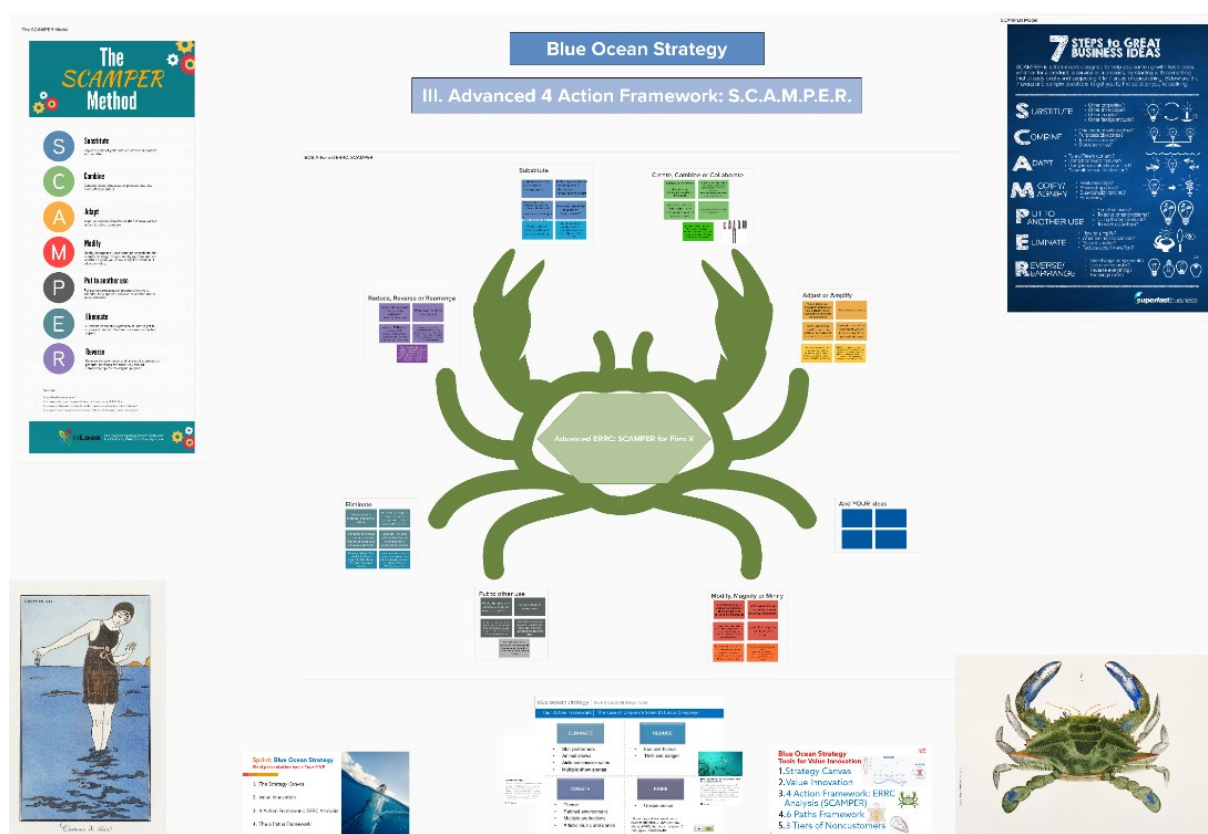
The third **“Taker to Maker”** principle informing how the courses were designed and taught is a key factor in skills-based education: the shift from seeing students in the role of somewhat passive recipients of knowledge given to them by an instructor to making them active participants and co-creators of their own education. This progress is made possible in an online environment thanks to the use of collaborative online tools, in particular in break-out rooms such as those provided by learning platforms such as Microsoft Teams. Within Teams, students can collaborate on the same Powerpoint, Word or Excel document. Other online digital tools introduced to enhance student engagement included Cloze, Kahoot, Mentimeter, Microsoft Forms Surveys & Quizzes, Mysimpleshow, Padlet, Quizlet and WordWall.

The fourth principle incorporated into every meeting, **“Ask the Right Question,”** was placed on the computer screen on a sticky note by one of the authors as a reminder to fight the tendency to ask, “How can I make my students pay attention to me?” and replace this with the question “How can I help students put something together that they want to pay attention to?” This shift is an established method to enhance student engagement and long-term learning outcomes based on the concept of student rights and freedoms as learners (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017). Providing individualized learning paths and feedback tools to help students use metacognition and goal setting as well as facilitating professional learning sessions (Emery, 2019) create an environment for enhanced collaboration.

In all cases, the priority is to shift the focus from a passive student role, listening to the instructor, to an active one in which class time is specifically dedicated to giving students opportunities to “put something together” with the content covered in ways that result in creations of their own making, so engaging their highest order thinking skills, according to Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Bloom, 2001). Marzano Research makes the point that this is a shift from collecting dots, to connecting dots. While collecting dots is important, leaders must also learn to “connect dots“, by “seeing patterns before they are obvious and making connections between disparate data to generate new insights and novel ideas that lead to innovation. This capability requires a mind-shift and skill-shifts from industrial-age thinking to the creation of knowledgeable, creative and adaptable life-long learners” as Linda Neiman puts it in her article “Will the rise of A.I. put you at risk or make you more competitive?” (Neiman, 2019).

One way students have “connected dots” together online is using visual collaboration tools such as the Mural whiteboard. In the example shown in Figure 7, students studied and evaluated a variety of information resources to produce their own unique explanations, examples and recommendations for application:

FIGURE 7. SCAMPER - A MURAL ACTIVITY FOR CONTENT CREATION AND EVALUATION



Source: Muzzu, 2021

Additionally, introducing students to the Digital Competencies Wheel by the Center for Digital Dannelsen (Skov, 2016) in the form of an online assessment test enhanced their awareness of the portfolio of hard and soft digital skills that exist and that could be relevant to their upcoming professional life. Students' feedback included requests to have a similar test for every skill. The exercise exposed them to how an abstract concept such as "communication" can be broken down into sub-skills (team collaboration, digital collaboration, business communication, etc.). Each can then be assessed individually, giving students specific feedback on where there is room to improve.

The Digital Competencies Wheel in particular showed that not all skills are relevant to or expected of every student. The framework helps students see the big picture and make an informed decision about their ambitions in each subskill given the understanding that time and resources are finite. These reflections led to a prioritization of learning goals and taking personal responsibility for personal and time management by the end of the discussion.

## 7. How Digital Competencies were Enhanced in Combination with other Soft Skills

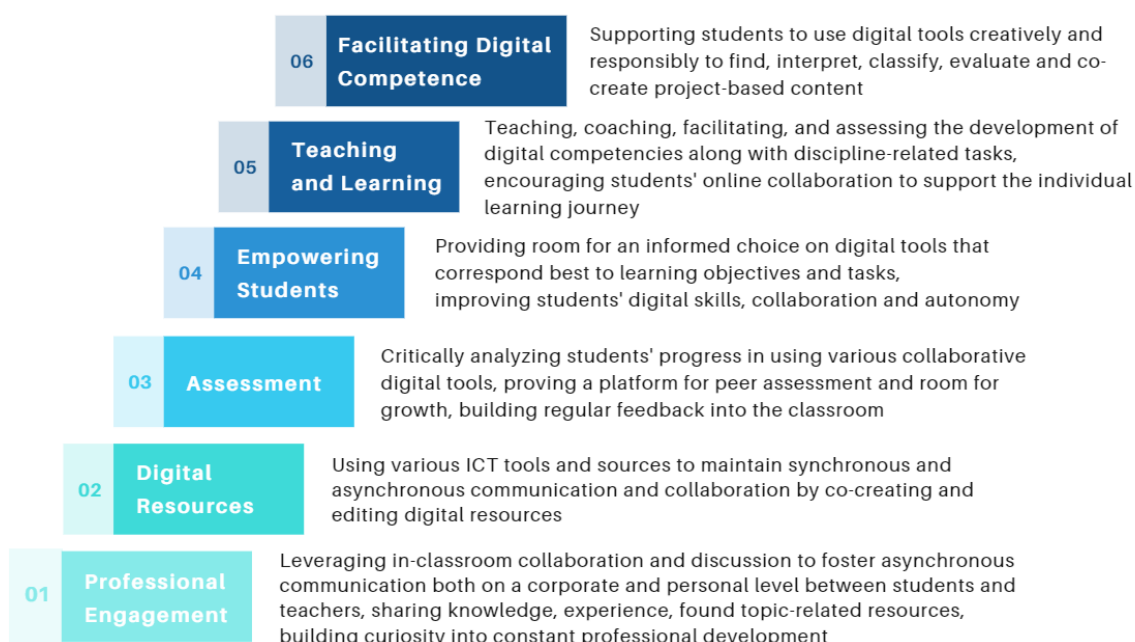
The six DigCompEdu areas focus on different aspects of educators' professional activities:

- **Area 1: Professional Engagement** – Using digital technologies for communication, collaboration and professional development.
- **Area 2: Digital Resources** – Sourcing, creating and sharing digital resources.

- **Area 3: Teaching and Learning** – Managing and orchestrating the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning.
- **Area 4: Assessment** – Using digital technologies and strategies to enhance assessment.
- **Area 5: Empowering Learners** – Using digital technologies to enhance inclusion, personalisation and learners’ active engagement.
- **Area 6: Facilitating Learners’ Digital Competence** – Enabling learners to creatively and responsibly use digital technologies for information, communication, content creation, wellbeing and problem-solving.

In an especially prescient statement, it had already been posited well before the coronavirus made its entrance on the world stage that the “forces outlined in the VUCA model are beginning to wend their way into the rarefied environment of academe and are necessitating an existential reappraisal of higher educational institutions. Higher Education may have bypassed the Industrial and Taylor mass production revolutions, but they are unlikely to be as easily able to evade the very revolution they enabled through the knowledge economy” (Stewart et al., 2016). The DigCompEdu framework reflects an acute awareness of the need for universities to include digital competence in their curricula if they are to prepare students appropriately for employer’s changing demands. The critical analysis (Figure 8) of how Digcompedu principles were incorporated into UE’s Employability modules demonstrates the results of this reappraisal as it took place in terms of enhancing students’ digital competencies as well as greater learning outcomes within the courses analysed here.

FIGURE 8. AN ANALYTICAL SUMMARY OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE UE EMPLOYABILITY COURSE ACCORDING THE DIGCOMPEDU FRAMEWORK - EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR THE DIGITAL COMPETENCE OF EDUCATORS BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION’S JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE



Source: analysis and design by Shtaltovna & Muzzu (2021); framework by Punie & Redecker (2017)

Reformulating the specific accomplishments in each area according to the DigCompEdu framework in terms of the Employability modules provides instructors with a roadmap for further growth and further professional development in digital competencies and ICT tools



usage to enhance students' own digital competencies in the hybrid learning mode once the lockdown is over. In the conclusion, the achieved goals are summarized into three areas: digital communication and collaboration, digital content creation and media literacy, and digital problem solving, and are followed by critical points and suggestions for further research in the final section.

## **8. Conclusion**

### **8.1. Digital communication and collaboration**

To enhance students' skills at collaborating effectively using digital tools, regular breakout rooms, discussions and digital collaborative activities have been introduced and implemented within both the Employability I: English and Employability II: Soft Skills modules. UE students are challenged to interact with their international peers in the breakout rooms, with three to four participants in a discussion. It is the authors' experience that putting students into pairs is less effective for larger classes. This can be due to resistance to starting a discussion with students who are not well acquainted with each other, or other hidden issues related to previous communication between them, as well as the concern that disparate opinions about a topic may lead to conflict. Placing students in groups of three to four resolves or prevents many of these problems, and stimulates critical and systems thinking, collaboration and understanding as well as respecting different perspectives and views - the latter one of the key aims of both modules.

UE Employability students are exposed to, and learn to create with, a variety of digital technologies such as Cloze, Kahoot, Microsoft Forms and Surveys, Mentimeter, Padlet and Quizlet as well as collaborative exercises in Microsoft Excel, Word and PowerPoint. In each case, they first learn how to do an exercise or take a quiz online, then go from takers to makers, creating their own versions for each other after collaborating on the design and relevant content. They are encouraged to analyse and discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each, and to evaluate the professional context in which this tool might be used most effectively, such as brainstorming, classifying data and opinions, creating and refining input into the digital visualisation or given frameworks within a given professional or educational context.

In addition, students are systematically trained to co-create, co-construct and share the results of their discussion and digital collaboration through the use of digital whiteboard collaboration tools such as Jamboard and Mural. In doing so, they improve their ability to create as well as review digital content with their peers, to choose the appropriate digital technologies for a given task, to adapt communication strategies to a specific audience and to be aware of cultural and generational diversity in digital environments.

### **8.2. Digital content creation and media literacy**

In order to encourage mastery in digital content creation skills, a variety of activities were incorporated into the digital environment via synchronous and asynchronous assignments and post-task assessments. Employability students at UE are learning to modify, classify, evaluate and create digital content, and to integrate and refine information into different formats using Common License copyright, licenses and references adequately. UE Employability module students are also systematically challenged to search for current data, business analyses (HBR reports, Business Insider, WEF reports) and case studies to illustrate the concepts and frameworks taught in class.

To build their ability to assess media messages critically, students were introduced to the Media Literacy Framework by Christ (2016) and Schilder & Redmond (2019), which train the user to ask key questions when assessing the credibility of a given information source. Students then searched for advertisements and applied what they had learned, analyzing their subject by exploring who wrote it, for what purpose, to which audience, with what formats and why certain content was chosen and other related information was not included.

### **8.3. Digital problem solving**

It was already evident pre-pandemic that “the VUCA forces will present businesses with the need to move from linear modes of thought to problem solving with synthetic and simultaneous thinking” (Stewart et al., 2016). In order to incorporate interactive and collaborative learning activities, asynchronous assignments and post-task assessments, Employability module UE students were introduced to, and given a forum to practice applying, problem-solving techniques by identifying and addressing case study problems that were either individually chosen or provided by their instructors. After discussing their options, creative group-work solutions were transferred into a visual digital collaboration board (Jamboard, Mural, Whiteboard) and considered how to adapt these solutions into new business-oriented situations.

To implement “using by doing” approach, the instructors introduced digital collaboration tools and their main features one by one and task by task, increasing complexity as students gained experience in using them, and building their skills from Awareness through Acquisition to Application, followed by Experimenting and Evaluation to finally reach the Creation level of digital collaboration, according to the Six Levels of Skills Development Framework (Shtaltovna, 2021).

When the class was debriefed by the instructor on proposed solutions, students were invited to consider in which way the use of the tool was beneficial, and in which cases it could be used similarly or even more creatively so that students could adjust and customize digital environments further according to their team and personal learning/professional needs.

### **8.4. Further research and critical points**

Challenges to the status quo of the higher education sector pre-pandemic already included the trend toward mobility, increasingly known in the wake of the coronavirus as the WFA or Work From Anywhere movement (WEF, 2021).

Another key trend was and remains the increasing accessibility of knowledge. Related to this access is “the increasing size of the market for learning, creating new competitors to traditional university programs, as well as the affordances of technology to augment, improve and economise program delivery.” Higher education is no longer an observing non-participant viewing technological and social developments from the safe distance of its “cloistered classrooms” (Stewart et al., 2016).

Given the dynamic nature of these developments, further and continuous research into up-and-coming technologies designed to facilitate the move from office work to working from “anywhere” is needed. For example, a “visual email” application, Loom, has arrived on the market, and given the likelihood of its growing popularity in a remote work environment, student familiarity with this form of communication is likely to be an additional helpful digital soft skill which could be introduced and practiced in future courses.



Visual online collaboration tools such as Jamboard and Mural will increase in importance as productivity facilitators, whether staff is meeting in person or remotely. As online applications are subject to regular updates as features are added or modified, instructors should not only track the development of new technologies, but changes in those they already employ as well. This paper is based on the authors' continually evolving digital competencies, developing through online experimentation with students since the initial abrupt switch to online education. Future class preparation should include the latest advances in these and other tools employed.

Additionally, a more detailed methodology with which students can express their reactions to the various tools and teaching styles they experience in the course is currently in development. It is possible that changes will be appropriate if and as students' beginning competency level changes, depending on what they are learning in other courses whose instructors are equally cognizant of, and responding to, external trends accelerated by the events of 2020, a year that will likely go down in history as the epitome and prime example of what it means to live in a VUCA world. Post-pandemic, the long-term effects of the coronavirus will continue to affect not only individual bodies well into the future, but the face and structure of education itself.

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