



# STEAM BOSS

boosting soft skills

## Companies Needs

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Sapere utile



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## Introduction

In the ever-changing landscape of the labor market, continuously shaken by changes, soft skills have become crucial for professional success. Over the last 25 years there has been a growing recognition of the importance of these skills, acknowledging their pivotal role in adapting to technological changes and work processes. Soft skills refer to interpersonal and intrapersonal attributes that go beyond technical knowledge and define the attitude that a person has and shows when relating to himself, to others and to events in the different contexts of his life, including work. Some of these skills are, for example, effective communication, teamwork, problem solving, creativity and adaptability.

The European project “STEAM Boosting Soft Skills” (approved by the Italian National Agency INAPP, 2023-1-IT01-KA220-VET-000163992) adopts the STEAM approach, an educational methodology that integrates science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics to promote the development of these soft skills, collaborating with local companies to achieve three key objectives:

- Enhancing the soft skills of Vocational Education and Training (VET) students;
- Designing STEAM pilot projects aligned with the needs of the labor market;
- Align VET trainers' skills with European standards.

The entire project is placed within a community framework which intends to pursue, among others, the objectives set by the European Pillar of Social Rights through clear and measurable implementation measures. An example of this is one of the objectives identified during the 2021 Porto Summit, which underscores the necessity for actions and measures that make it possible to include at least 78% of people between 20 and 64 years old in the labor market by 2030.

Promoting the growth of soft skills among VET students aligns with this direction, with the goal of supporting individuals in entering and staying in corporate organizations.

Aligned with the goals of the 2030 Agenda, this initiative aims to strengthen the relationship between companies and the VET system. By fostering dialogue and collaboration, our aim is to address digital transformation and tailor the VET system to meet the demands of the labor market.

With the goal of collecting the companies' perception of the importance of soft skills for the employees of their organizational realities, a closed-ended questionnaire was administered. This questionnaire aimed to collect responses that offered an overview of the soft skills most sought after and considered crucial to guarantee the development of work teams and the achievement of high levels of efficiency. In particular, data relating to the following aspects were collected, aggregated, and analyzed:

- Company profile: industry, size, company structure;
- Selection and recruitment process: steps, importance of previous experience and soft skills in personnel selection;
- Soft skills: evaluation of their importance and priority;
- Potential collaborations: willingness to collaborate in subsequent phases of the project.

## Company Profile

21 companies based in different Italian regions and belonging to different industrial sectors responded to the questionnaire: training, automation, logistics, metalworking, trade, services, IT, food, entertainment. These are mostly small and medium-sized enterprises (up to 250 employees), aligning with the predominant entrepreneurial fabric of the country. According to the latest survey by ISTAT, in 2021, 95.1% of Italian companies had a maximum of 9 employees ("Italian Statistical Yearbook, 2023").

Even with regards to the internal organizational structure of the surveyed companies, there is a certain variety: more than a third of the companies (38.1%) state that they have an internal organization of a functional type, and are therefore structured on the basis of specific skills and functions, with positions of maximum responsibility at the top and each department managed independently. Five out of twenty-one companies (23.8%) claim to have a hierarchical structure, with a clear chain of command from top management to lower-level employees, each with a supervisor. There are also five companies that show a horizontal or flat organizational structure, with minimized management levels, promoting a more decentralized structure and quicker decision-making processes. To a lesser extent (14.3%) companies declare that they have a team-based structure, with different teams performing specialized tasks, authorized to make decisions in line with the company's general objectives. It is interesting to note that this aspect related to the organizational structure does not present specific correlations with the number of employees: both micro-enterprises (0-10 employees) and medium-sized ones (51-250) present diverse organizational structures among themselves.

In summary, these companies vary significantly in terms of the industrial sector to which they belong and their internal organizational structure. If it is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the profiles sought by these companies present very different technical skills, it becomes interesting to investigate which are the soft skills most requested by these companies, in order to grasp the possible transversality and usefulness of skills more closely related to how resources behave and interact with others, even in vastly different work sectors.

## Selection and Recruitment Process

Companies were asked to provide information about the methods used during the recruitment and selection process. From the questionnaire responses, it emerged that almost all companies use the analysis of the Curriculum Vitae (all companies) and the interview (20 out of 21 companies) as the main tools for personnel selection. Other selection methodologies are used only to some extent, specifically:

- 19% of companies (4 out of 21) declare that they administer technical tests to potential candidates;
- 9.5% of companies (2 out of 21) use personality tests or specific assessments (physical/skills, artistic,...);
- Only one company indicated using LinkedIn as a useful tool for analyzing the profiles of potential candidates.

The role that the candidates' previous experience has in the selection process was then investigated. In general, it was found that 15 out of 21 companies (71%) consider previous professional experience as one of the most important factors in the selection process, especially if this is consistent with the industry required by the candidates. However, soft skills also carry significant weight in the evaluation, and their development is considered essential for the success of teams and for enhancing overall corporate efficiency, according to 85% of the surveyed companies.

Given the variability of company profiles, no specific correlation is observed between the size or type of companies and the criteria used for candidate selection. However, it emerges that for companies that consider previous experience not to be a determining factor for hiring, soft skills and their detection during the selection phase become more relevant. These are also companies that value the development of these skills as critical for the success of the team and overall corporate effectiveness.

## Soft skills Importance

To capture the importance attributed to soft skills, companies were provided with a list of 12 soft skills and asked to evaluate their relevance on a scale from 1 ("not very relevant") to 4 ("very relevant"). Of the 12 skills evaluated, those that obtained the highest average scores were:

- Teamwork (average score: 3.2);
- Time management (average score: 3.3);
- Proactivity (average score: 3.5);
- Flexibility (average score: 3.6);
- Problem solving (average score: 3.7).

These are fundamental skills for dealing with the complexities of today's work. Problem solving, for example, is considered very important by the surveyed companies because the instability of work in recent years requires people to demonstrate greater planning autonomy and the ability to handle uncertainties, critical situations, emergencies, and conflicts more frequently.

Flexibility is also considered very important: being flexible means being able to adapt to the changes in the world around us. It proves to be a crucial skill, especially when dealing not only with rapid structural transformations in the labor market or society itself, but also with continuous updates and changes in tools used at work, constantly subject to modifications, such as digital devices.

Proactive workers act preventively rather than reactively: therefore, they do not wait passively for a certain event to occur, but take the initiative and do what is necessary to overcome the obstacle. Similarly, they do not passively wait for others to act or provide solutions, but assume his own responsibility, always trying to evaluate all the factors at play and identify those that depend on their actions.

In the last two positions, we find these skills, which, although receiving lower scores, still have an average score equal to or above 2.5:

- Leadership (average score: 2.6)

- Creativity (average score: 2.5)

Other soft skills, suggested by companies in an open response to the questionnaire, reinforce the importance of proactivity, flexibility and time management, as they indicated the relevance of the ability to self-manage, adopt a positive approach to work and exhibit resilience to face difficulties.

Therefore, it can be concluded that none of the soft skills proposed in the questionnaire is considered entirely unnecessary within the working context of the surveyed companies.

An interesting aspect to explore would be the correlation between company size and the importance attributed to soft skills. In fact, from our limited sample of companies interviewed, it emerges that micro-businesses, i.e. those with 0 to 10 employees, generally attribute greater importance to soft skills compared to medium-sized (51-250 employees) and large (>250 employees) companies. This could be indicative of the fact that the smaller a company is, the more its employees need to be capable of solving diverse challenges and tasks flexibly and with a spirit of initiative.

## Potential Collaboration

At the end of the questionnaire, companies were asked if they were interested in being involved in the subsequent phases of collaboration envisaged by the project. One of the goals of "STEAM Boosting Soft Skills" is in fact to strengthen the relationship between the needs of companies and the VET system, in order to reduce the mismatch between the skills of male and female students graduating from training courses and those actually required by the labor market.

The subsequent phases of the project will involve companies in various activities, including interviews, co-design of pilot programs, training events, surveys.

Out of the 21 companies that responded to the questionnaire, more than half expressed interest in continuing the collaboration (11 out of 21), while the remaining 10 decided not to provide further contributions or were undecided.

## Conclusion

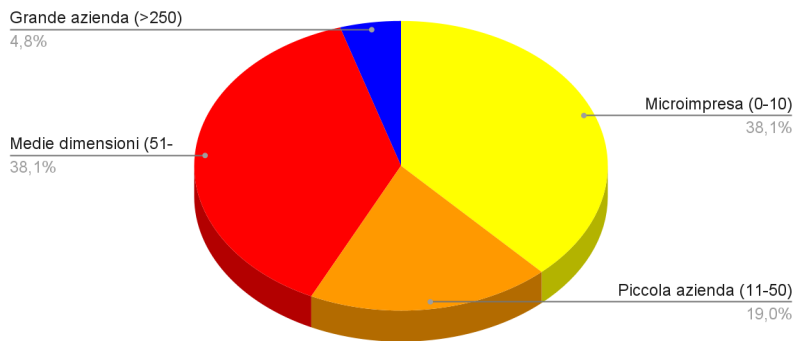
Although obtained from a limited set of data, the results of the questionnaire administered to Italian companies confirm the importance of developing soft skills in young individuals preparing to enter the workforce. This underlines the importance of training these soft skills even during the training period, enabling students to be better prepared to face future challenges in a complex and ever-evolving labor market.

If, as asserted by the World Economic Forum, over 50% of employees will need to update or reset their skills by 2025 due to digitalization, individuals currently in education will find themselves dealing with new working methods and tasks, and only those who have the ability to adapt to these new circumstances with a proactive and flexible approach will be able to remain competitive on the labor market.

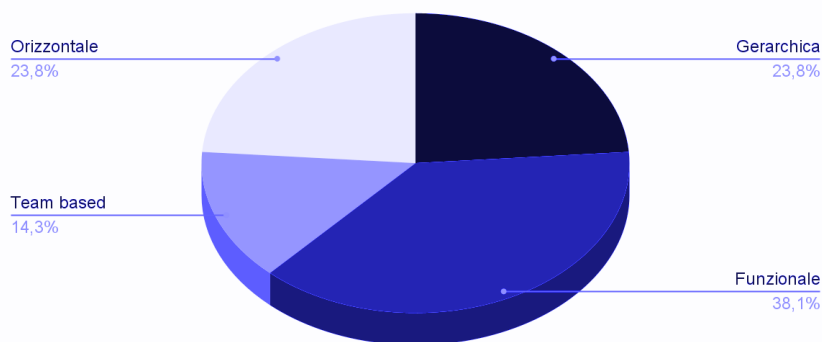
Given this initial analysis of needs, it will be interesting to integrate and compare these results with the responses provided by companies from other partner countries (Portugal, Spain and Estonia). This will provide a comparison with what is deemed essential in other contexts and contribute to build a community vision.

## Appendix

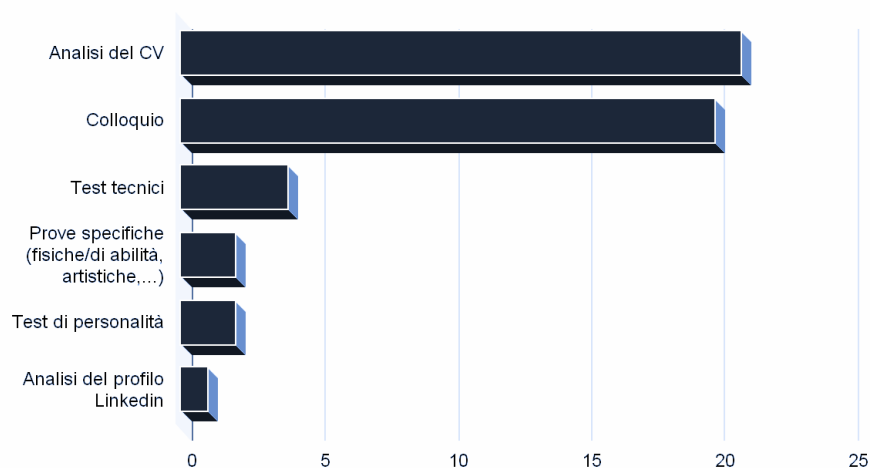
### Dimensione aziendale



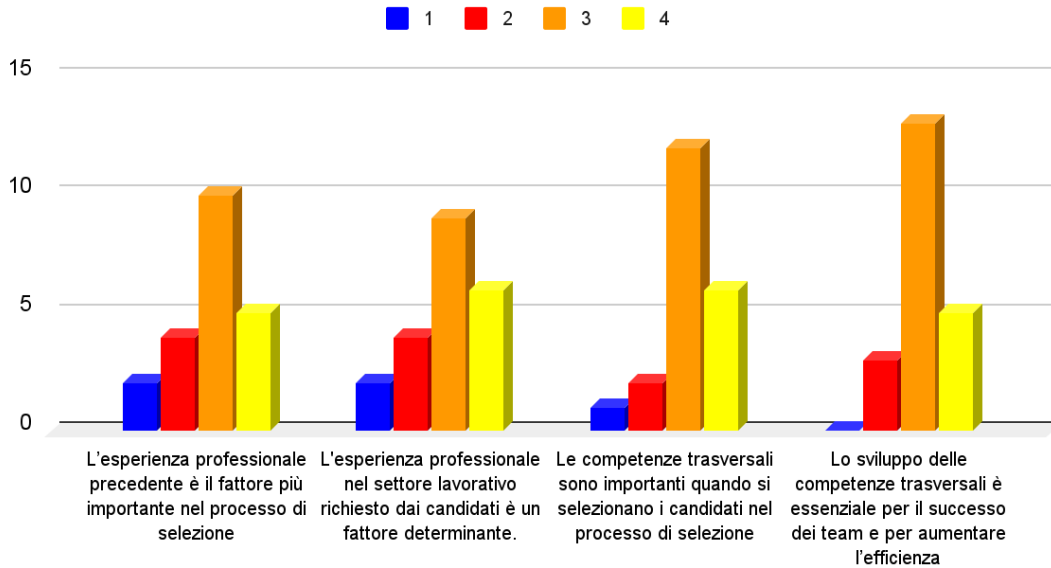
### Struttura organizzativa



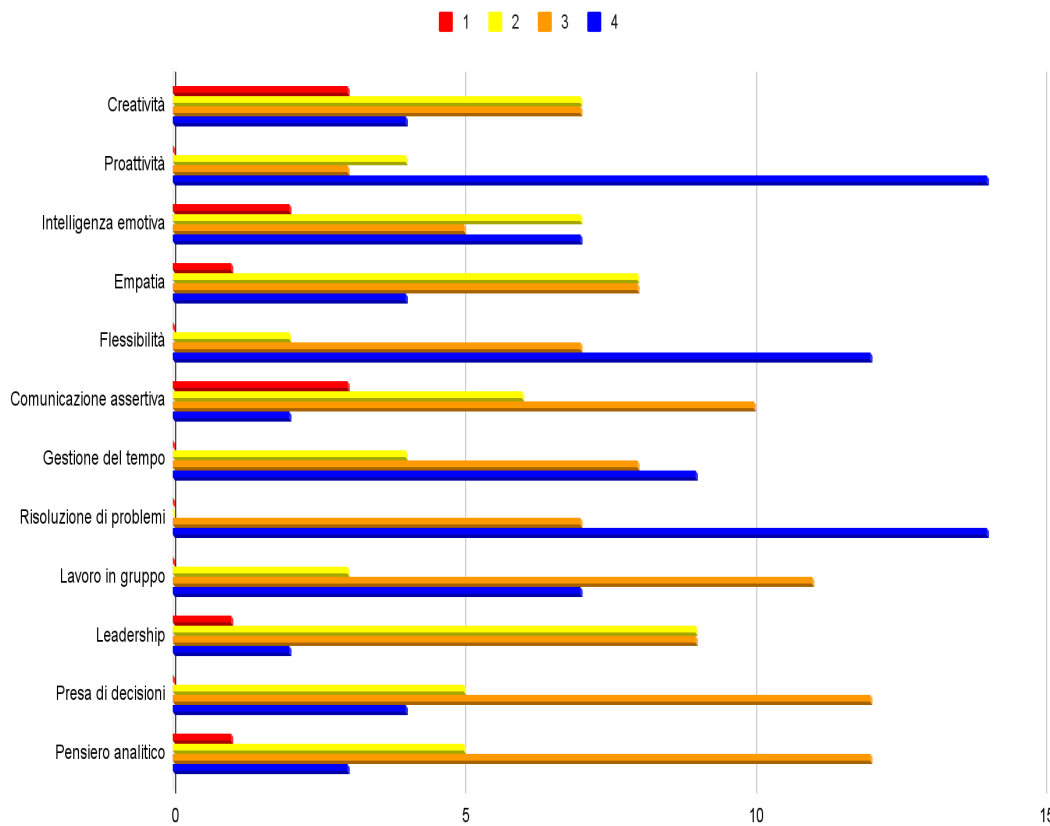
### Fasi del processo di selezione



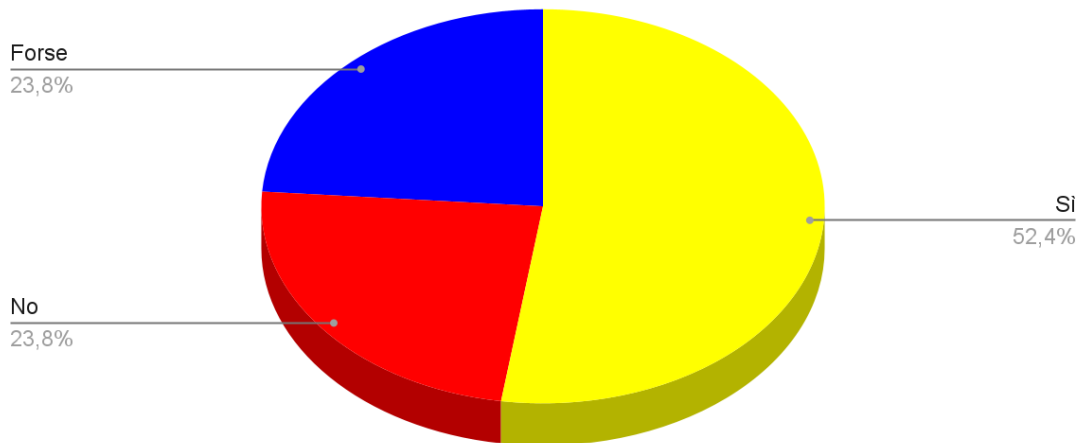
## Processo di selezione



## Soft skills



## Potenziale collaborazione





# THE BOOST THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE



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