



STEAM BOSS

boosting soft skills

Companies Needs

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Sapere utile



UNIMORE
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI
MODENA E REGGIO EMILIA

Saaremaa
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Introduction

In the ever-changing landscape of the labour 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 labour 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 labour 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 organisations.

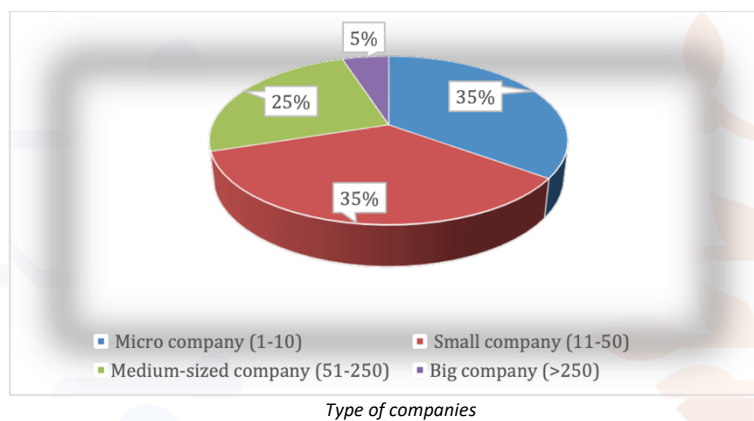
Aligned with the goals of the 2030 Agenda, this initiative aims to strengthen the relationship between companies and the VET system. By fostering dialogue and collaboration, our aim is to address digital transformation and tailor the VET system to meet the demands of the labour market.

With the goal of collecting the companies' perception of the importance of soft skills for the employees of their organisational 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 analysed:

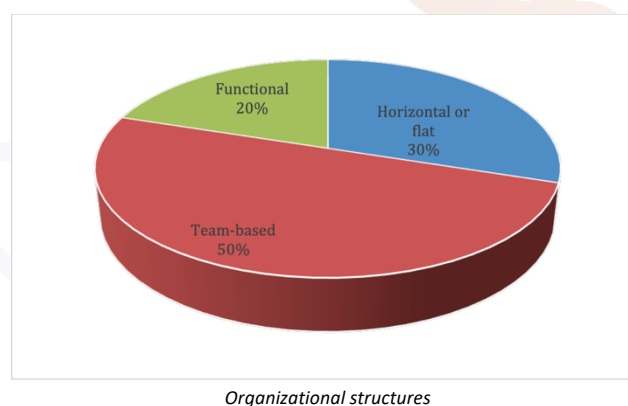
- Company profile: industry, size, company structure;
- Selection and recruitment process: steps, importance of previous experience and soft skills in personnel selection;
- Soft skills: evaluation of their importance and priority;
- Potential collaborations: willingness to collaborate in subsequent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

Company Profile

Our survey (<https://forms.gle/j7wyKSJEvHRG4brC8>) received responses from 20 companies. All respondents are to some extent connected to Saaremaa, reflecting the characteristics of the local region. However, among the respondents, there is Bolt, a company with global reach, as well as several internationally oriented companies whose parent companies are located outside of Estonia. For instance, the manufacturing units of electronics firms like Incap Estonia, Ouman Estonia, and Ionics System are in Kuressaare, but their headquarters are in Scandinavia. There are also several respondents engaged in international e-commerce. Despite the local context, the majority of respondents consist of local micro and small enterprises from various sectors: food industry, fisheries, agriculture, light industry, PR and communication and various services.



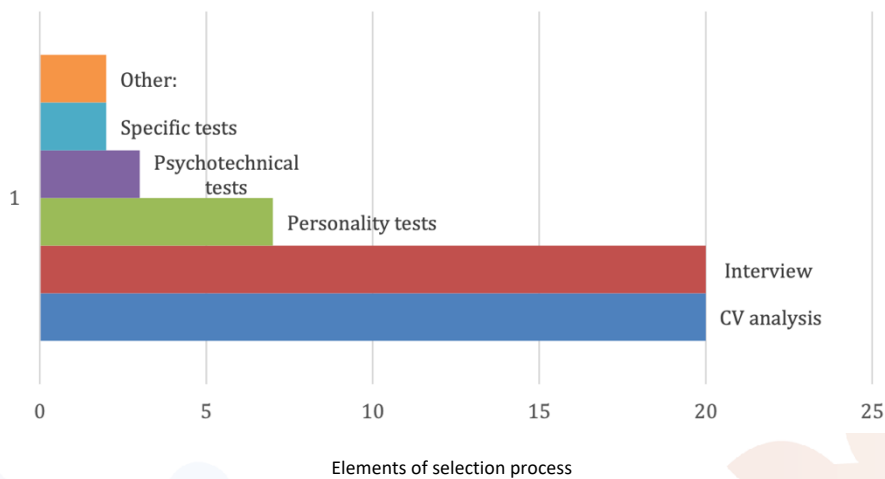
Since the majority of respondents were micro- or small enterprises, it is natural to assume that most of them (50%) indicated a team-based structure for their organization. No one highlighted a hierarchical structure. In the case of responses from subsidiaries of larger companies, respondents likely had to make a choice between the actual structure of the parent company and the local unit.



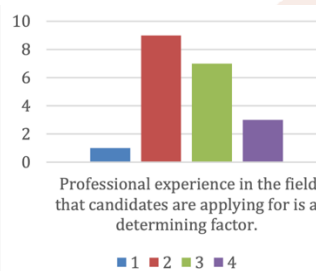
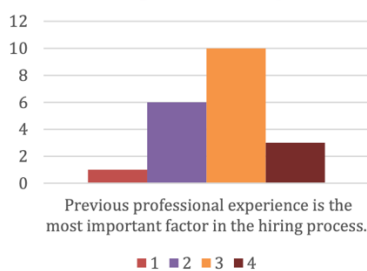
Due to the diverse backgrounds and fields of operation of the companies involved, their needs and expectations regarding the recruitment and training of new employees vary.

Selection and Recruitment Process

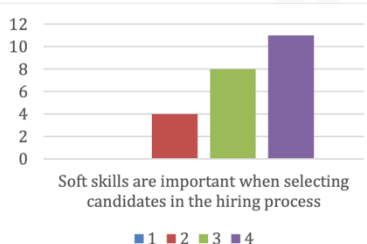
The size of the company undoubtedly influences the recruitment and selection process. Large enterprises typically have separate departments dedicated to these tasks, with well-defined procedures in place. In contrast, smaller and family-owned businesses have less regulated processes. However, all respondents mentioned using both interviews and CV analysis. Companies with specialized fields may use more specific tests or trials. For example, HR Entertainment Solutions utilizes domain-specific skill tasks and situation-solving exercises. Additionally, some respondents mentioned implementing a trial period tailored to new employees, after which a final decision is made.



The survey results also revealed a clear trend in emphasizing soft skills in the employee recruitment process. However, it should be noted that small businesses often focus on a single product line and may require individuals with specific skills. Regional background plays a role as well, as the distance between the employee's residence and the workplace can also be a factor.



It can also be inferred that soft skills are increasingly valued across companies with diverse backgrounds.

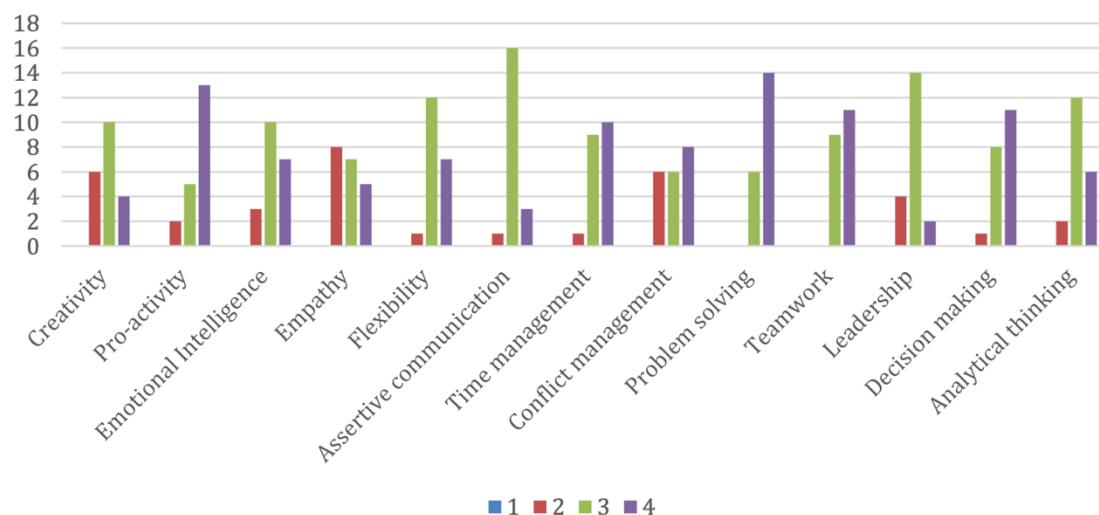


Statements according to their level of importance (1- not important, 4-very important)

Soft Skills Importance

Soft skills are non-material qualities that encompass communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, creativity, flexibility, empathy, and similar attributes. Employers value these skills highly because they are crucial for effective teamwork and creating a productive work environment. Indeed, even if an employee possesses excellent technical skills, the lack of soft skills can affect their ability to communicate effectively, collaborate, and solve problems. Therefore, compared to technical skills, soft skills are often more diverse and their importance in the workplace is significant.

None of the categories in our survey received a rating of 1 (not very relevant) when assessing the importance of the listed soft skills. There was the least variability in responses when evaluating **problem-solving** and **teamwork**, as their importance was only noted in the higher categories 3 and 4.



Rating of soft skills (1- not very relevant, 4- very relevant)

Compared to the other categories, creativity and empathy are considered somewhat less important. This could be influenced by the fact that small businesses are often associated with specific and narrow fields. Conversely, in family-owned businesses, relationships are based on different foundations, and therefore empathy is not emphasized. The assessment of leadership stands out slightly differently from the overall picture. However, this rating may have been influenced by the fact that a large portion of the respondents were involved in company management themselves, or perhaps leadership is not as crucial a category for micro-enterprises.

Decision-making, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, and flexibility were the categories for which consistently higher ratings were highlighted.

Additional soft skills mentioned as necessary included determination and an interest in technology.

Potential Collaboration

60% of respondents indicated their willingness to continue cooperation within the framework of this project. 40% chose the option 'maybe.' Understandably, in some cases, tight schedules and other commitments serve as obstacles. Positive responses may also have been influenced by closer ties within the local community and personal contacts.

At the same time, collaboration with some companies (among respondents) continues through other activities and educational projects with the school: field trips, company visits, career lectures, job shadowing, etc.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that both large and small companies, regardless of their field of activity, value soft skills and effective interpersonal communication. Integrating soft skills into education across various subjects actually means preparing young people for their future careers. Practical, everyday problem-solving-oriented learning helps students make better choices for vocational training and future career paths. As evident from the expectations of entrepreneurs, soft skills are needed everywhere and are highly valued in creating better results and a motivating work atmosphere.

Estonia's planned educational reform places greater emphasis on vocational secondary education. Every young person should have the opportunity to acquire education according to their abilities and interests, with the educational system providing a suitable place for each learner's development. It is necessary to develop career guidance and encourage greater cooperation with vocational schools so that young people can better understand their interests, weaknesses, and strengths and make more informed choices. Equally important is collaboration and partnership with entrepreneurs and community institutions. Soft skills are transferable to every aspect of life, they provide the key to effective and fulfilling work. We thank everyone who participated in our survey and look forward to continued cooperation.



THE BOOST THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE



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