



# STEAM BOSS

boosting soft skills

## Companies Needs

Spain National Report | March 2024



Sapere utile



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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:

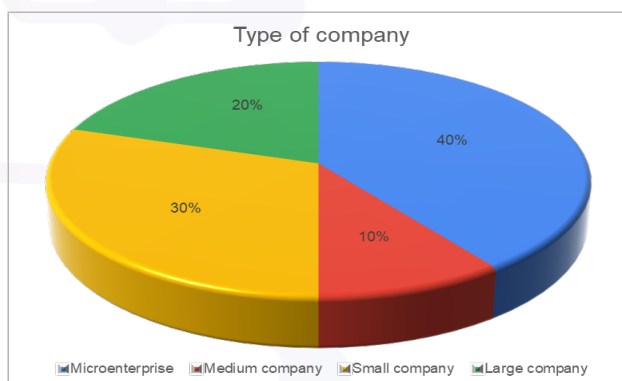
- Company profile: industry, size, company structure;
- Selection and recruitment process: steps, importance of previous experience and soft skills in personnel selection;
- Soft skills: evaluation of their importance and priority;
- Potential collaborations: willingness to collaborate in subsequent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

## Company Profile

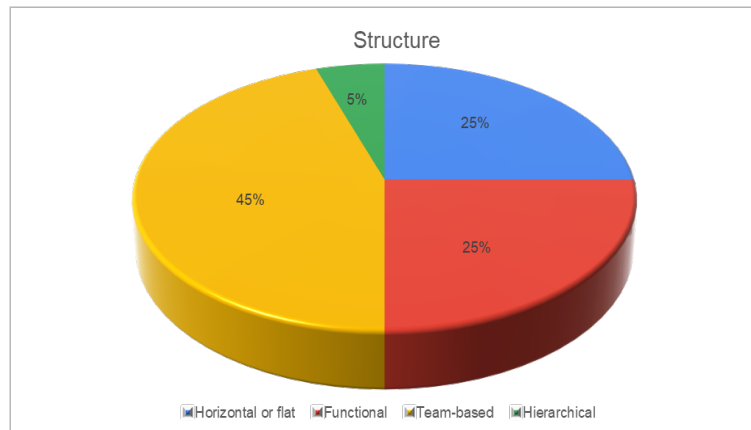
The number of companies that participated in the needs detection survey in Spain finally amounted to twenty. The heterogeneity of the survey is particularly noteworthy, since they belong to very diverse sectors, and there is also a representation of companies of very different sizes, from micro-companies, with few or very few employees, very common in the Spanish business fabric, to big corporations, with a large number of workers, and leaders in their professional sector.

The fact that there is such great diversity means a great opportunity and enhances the aims and objectives of the survey, since the results can be extrapolated to reality in a much more meaningful and complete way, as they reflect the feelings of different professional sectors and their way of understanding the importance of soft skills in those people who are part of their workforce. Therefore, this variety ensures the presence of different approaches, visions and ways of integrating and valuing soft skills, because the skills will not be required in the same way for an early childhood educator or a social integrator as for an administrative assistant or an electronics technician, to cite several examples.

Specifically, the different companies belong to the social and cultural services sectors: NGOs, nursery schools, foundations for people in vulnerable situations, associations of people or relatives of people with different pathologies, functional diversities or conditions (Asperger's, Alzheimer's, deaf people, etc.), as well as the field of administration and management, including companies and associations in the electronics, technology and telecommunications sectors, and even a school of protocol, a company in the interior design sector and an industrial design company. As mentioned above, the respondents ranged from micro-companies (40%) to large corporations employing a large number of workers (20%), such as EULEN, an entity that provides general services to companies, and which has more than 75,000 employees.



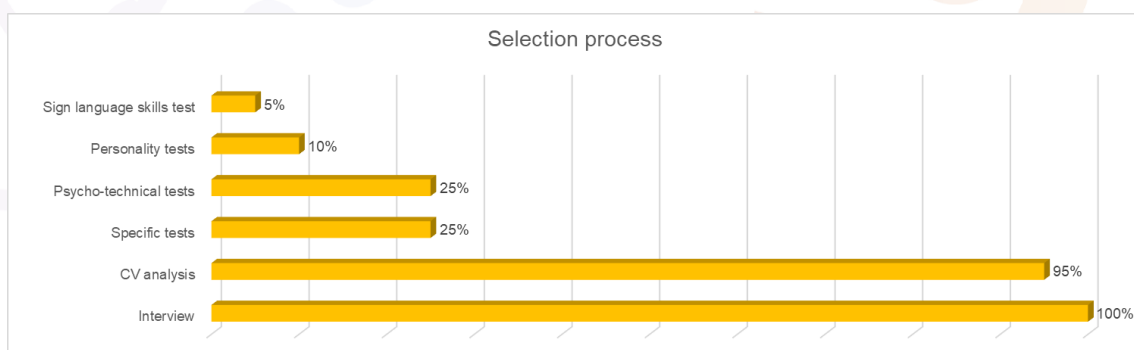
The predominant organisational structure, with 45%, is team-based, while the hierarchical structure is absolutely residual. Functional and horizontal structures account for 25% of the responses each.



## Selection and Recruitment Process

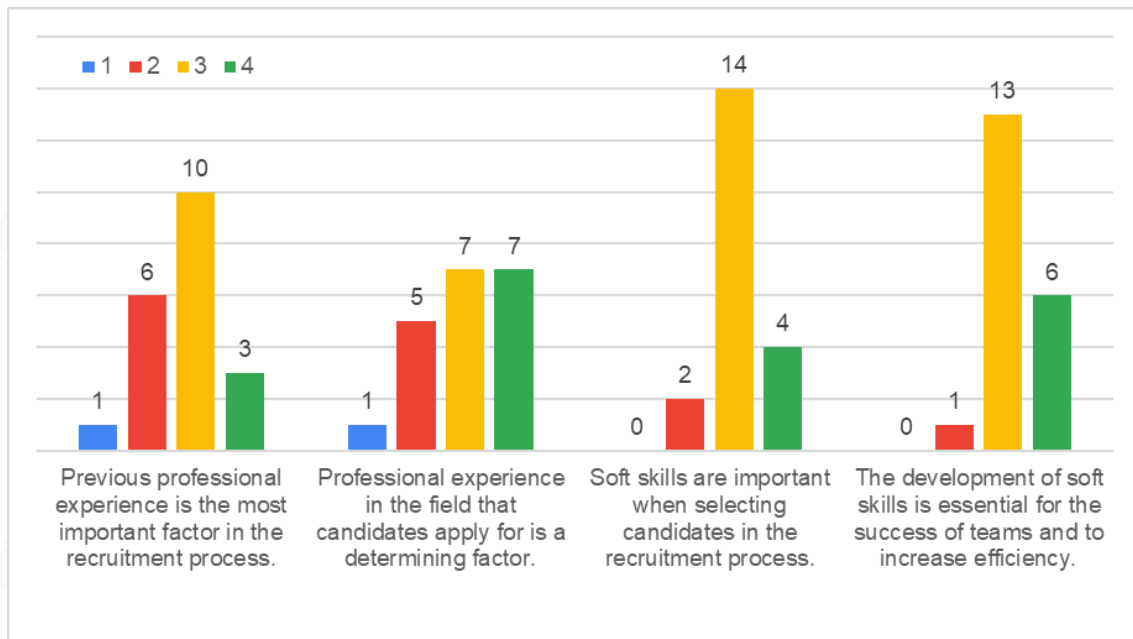
In the process of selecting future employees, the responses of the companies analysed show quasi-unanimity on some points, since all, or practically all of them, resort to the analysis of CVs and the subsequent development of an interview with the candidate, which shows that the more traditional methods are still in force, and are the only ones for many companies.

It is also significant that medium-sized and large companies carry out more exhaustive selection processes in which, in addition to the aforementioned methods, others are used, such as specific tests, which can be very versatile, and psycho-technical tests. Evidently, this type of company has more resources to be able to carry out more complete selection processes. It is also noteworthy that companies in the technology sector resort to more extensive and complex selection processes, in which the more classic methods are combined with others such as specific tests, psycho-technical tests and even, although in a smaller number, personality tests.



As for the importance given by the different companies to previous professional experience, both in the sector and in any other field, we did not find too many surprises, with previous professional experience (in any field) being important or very important for 65% of the companies consulted, while the candidate's experience in the professional field requested by the candidates, and to which the company belongs, is important for 70% of them.

Regarding the relevance of soft skills in the selection of candidates, it can be categorically stated that the candidates' soft skills are taken into account, and are valued very positively, when it comes to hiring. This aspect is considered important for 70% of the respondents, and very important for another 20%. None of them considered this aspect as not relevant at all.



## Soft Skills Importance

First of all, and before proceeding to a general analysis of the importance of soft skills for corporations, it is essential, with a view to their subsequent training development in the STEAM Bo.SS project, to carry out a classification or ranking of the 6 soft skills most highly valued by the companies that participated in the survey:

1. Teamwork, valued as very important by 85% of the companies, and as important by the rest.
2. Problem solving, rated as very important by 80%, and important by the remaining 20%.
3. Proactivity, rated a 4 by 70%, and a 3 by 30%.
4. Time management, considered very important by 65%, and important by the rest.
5. Flexibility, a soft skill that is essential for 60% of the respondents, while the others rate it as important.
6. Empathy, which despite being considered very important by 65% of the companies, and important by 25% of them, 10% consider it not very relevant.

It is important to emphasise that companies attach great importance to the possession of these interpersonal skills among their employees, since the other skills, in general, also have a high degree of consideration and acceptance, with some exceptions that will be analysed later.

As for possible discrepancies between professional sectors, no significant differences between them could be inferred, except that, as might be expected, companies in the social sector give greater importance to emotional intelligence than others do not consider so essential, while analytical thinking tends to be more highly valued in those in the technology sector, although no definitive conclusions can be drawn, since despite this, there are examples of companies in the telecommunications sector that have highly valued emotional intelligence, and in the social sector that have done the same with analytical thinking.

Some companies have also wanted to highlight some skills that were not mentioned beforehand, such as commitment, positive thinking, humility and honesty.

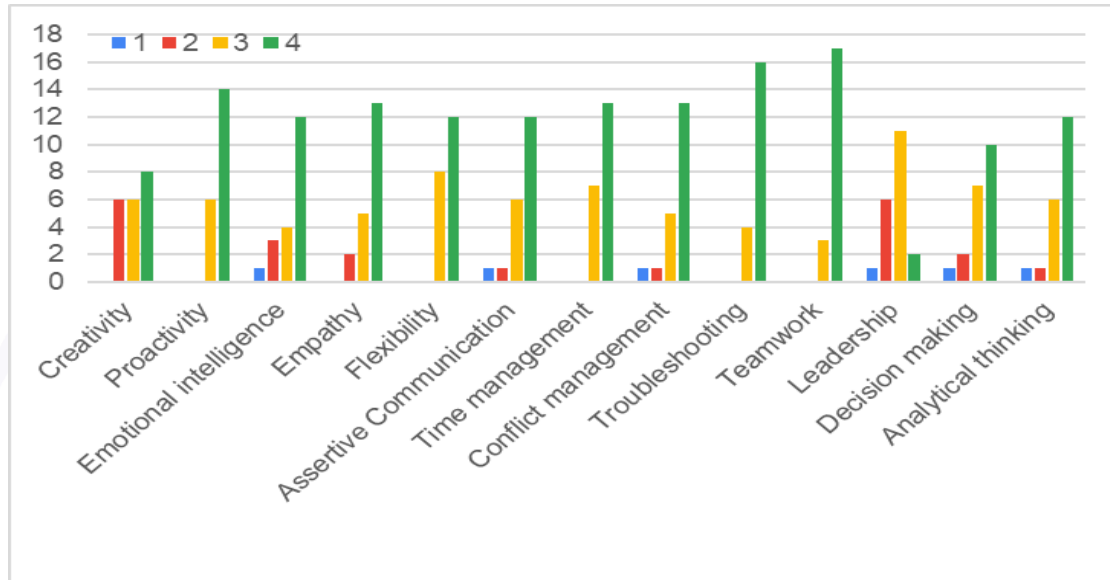
On the other hand, and as previously highlighted, within the common consideration of the great relevance of the possession or acquisition of soft skills, there have been several that have not been especially considered, and whose results are quite different from the rest.

These skills are:

1. **Leadership**, which 35% consider not very or not at all important.
2. **Creativity**, considered unimportant by 30% of companies.
3. **Emotional intelligence**, which is a more heterogeneous variable, as 60% consider it very important, but 20% do not take it into account very much.

It is very risky to draw hasty conclusions as to why these skills are less popular given the small number of participants, but it could be due to a somewhat traditional (and erroneous) conception of relations between superiors and employees, in which leadership can be seen as a risk or an intrusion rather than a

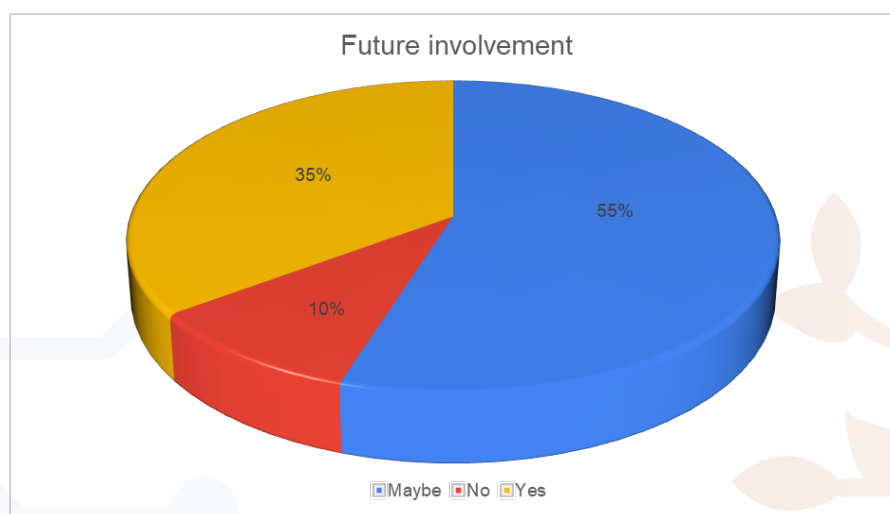
desirable and profitable skill, while creativity and emotional intelligence are sometimes considered only relevant for certain types of activities and/or sectors.



## Potential Collaboration

Regarding the possible collaboration of the companies in future stages of the project, the results are, in general, encouraging, since 35% (7), express their unequivocal intention to do so, but it should also be noted that in a high percentage the response is ambiguous (maybe, 55% of respondents), which calls into question their future collaboration, and in many cases this response may be a correct and polite way of declining this collaboration.

In any case, with those that have shown interest, the objectives of the project would be covered for the subsequent stages, since the minimum required was 5.



## Conclusion

As final reflections, it could be said that:

- Companies highly value that their candidates possess or acquire a set of interpersonal skills that are going to make them more valuable assets in their entities, as these skills increase their productivity and versatility.
- The possession of specific soft skills is considered as, or even more, important than the accreditation of previous work experience in the sector or in any other field.
- The development of soft skills is also considered essential by organisations for the success of teams or to increase their efficiency, which leads to think that the training of students in soft skills is an aspect of singular relevance for training centres, especially in those of vocational training, one of whose basic objectives is to increase the employability of their students. To ensure training success, communication and close collaboration with companies is essential to ensure that the skills students learn are those effectively valued by the productive sector.

For all these reasons, it is safe to say that the STEAM Bo. SS project has enormous potential, since the acquisition of soft skills, in collaboration with the productive sector, is an imperative nowadays.

Likewise, training trainers so that they can acquire the necessary knowledge in these subjects, and know how to transmit it to the students, is essential to achieve the planned objectives, and a *sine qua non* requirement to achieve the final success of the project.



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