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Soft skills in eLearning: teaching and assessing soft skills online

Soft skills are confirmed as essential in a context of rapid innovation. eLearning offers its advantages for their optimal learning.

If digitalisation has demonstrated one thing, it is that **soft skills** are essential both at work and for personal development, since they offer that added value that allows professionals not only to stand out in their field, but also to adapt effectively to changes and new challenges.

The eLearning approach to soft skills opens new frontiers in adult education, promoting continuous learning which is fundamental to remaining competitive and performing in the world of work today and tomorrow.

eLearning as a tool for developing soft skills

The flexible approach of eLearning offers some advantages in **soft skills training**.

This is also thanks to the possibility of offering personalized learning experiences. Advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analysis allow online training programs to be adapted to the specific needs and skill levels of each user, focusing on areas of individual improvement and promoting a targeted growth path. Furthermore, interactivity and the use of simulations, role-playing games and realistic scenarios enrich the training experience, making the learning of soft skills not only effective, but also engaging and stimulating. In summary, thanks to technology, eLearning overcomes traditional training barriers, making the development of soft skills accessible to a wider audience.

Definition and distinction between soft skills and hard skills

The distinction between soft and hard skills is very old. In medieval times, the trivium and quadrivium were the two paths of higher education: the first was humanistic, the second was scientific. Dialectics, grammar and rhetoric were part of the first, while arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music made up the crossroads. The distinction was not opposition: trivium and quadrivium together were preparatory for advanced studies in medicine or law.

Nowadays, soft and hard skills are two categories of skills that play complementary roles in defining the profile of a complete and effective worker. **Hard skills refer to those technical skills and specific knowledge** acquired through formal education, professional training or direct work experience. These skills are measurable and easily demonstrable, such as mastery of graphics software, knowledge of a foreign language or accounting skills. These are the skills that are often found listed in CVs and which are directly linked to the specific functions of a job role.

In contrast, **soft skills concern those interpersonal skills and personal attributes** that influence how we interact with others and approach work. These include communication skills, teamwork, adaptability, problem solving and leadership. Unlike hard skills, soft skills are less tangible and not always easily quantifiable, but they are essential for working effectively both independently and within a team. They enable professionals to navigate the complexities of human relationships, manage conflicts, motivate themselves and others, and adapt to unexpected changes and challenges. Soft skills include skills such as:

- **Effective communication**: the ability to express ideas clearly and listen actively
- **Teamwork**: collaborate effectively with others, promoting an environment of mutual support
- **Leadership ability**: guiding and inspiring others towards achieving a common goal
- **Conflict management**: ability to resolve disagreements in a constructive way
- **Adaptability**: flexibility in responding to changes and new situations
- **Critical thinking**: analyzing situations or statements to form a reasoned judgment

- **Time management**: prioritize tasks and manage your time effectively
- **Emotional intelligence**: recognizing, understanding and managing one's own emotions and those of others
- **The problem-solving approach**: identifying, analyzing and solving problems effectively
- **Creativity**: generating innovative ideas and finding original solutions

Continuous technological innovation has demonstrated two things: that **hard skills can face obsolescence** and that soft skills remain essential for reflecting on how and with whom to apply the former.

Compared to hard skills, **soft skills are transferable between different roles and sectors and remain relevant over time**. Knowing how to speak in public can be useful for an entry level salesperson as well as for a long-term CEO.

Furthermore, soft skills amplify the effectiveness of hard skills, allowing professionals to deftly navigate through the complexities of modern work dynamics.

In a world of work that rewards agility, collaboration and innovation, soft skills become the catalyst that allows professionals to effectively apply their technical skills in a wide variety of contexts.

The importance of soft skills for the integration of AI in working contexts

In the workplace, soft skills allow professionals not only to stand out in their area of ??technical expertise, but also to contribute positively to the corporate climate and culture, promoting a more **harmonious and productive work environment**. The ability to resolve conflicts, negotiate and work effectively in teams are qualities that improve internal collaboration and increase an organization's ability to achieve its strategic objectives.

These don't just apply to interactions with other people. Critical thinking is essential ? and will become increasingly so, even in interaction with the machine. It is a fact that artificial intelligence can help carry out repetitive and progressively more complex tasks. That its results must be taken with caution is equally true. **Supervised Artificial Intelligence** is this: the machine that creates and submits its work to the human, who knows how to evaluate its contribution and what the limits of this confidence are. Critical thinking and specific skills are essential for this: soft skills and hard skills together are what is needed in the relationship between human beings and artificial intelligence.

Strategies and best practices for teaching soft skills online

Teaching soft skills online presents unique challenges, requiring specific strategies and best practices to ensure learning is effective and engaging. One of the key aspects is the creation of an interactive learning environment that simulates real situations, allowing learners to practice soft skills in safe and controlled contexts. In eLearning, the use of simulations, role-playing games and case study scenarios allows students to explore different problem-solving strategies, improve communication skills and develop empathy and leadership through direct experience.

Another effective strategy is the **integration of immediate and constructive feedback systems**, which help learners reflect on their actions and understand the impact of their communication and behavioral choices. This approach fosters a continuous learning cycle, where students can quickly adapt and improve their soft skills based on concrete assessments and operational suggestions.

Incorporating social and collaborative learning is also crucial to the effectiveness of online soft skills training. Creating virtual spaces where learners can share experiences, discuss scenarios and work together on projects promotes the development of teamwork skills and the ability to manage complex interpersonal dynamics. These collaborative environments enrich the learning experience, making training closer to the reality of the working world.

Furthermore, the adoption of personalized **training approaches**, which take into account individual needs and skill levels, is essential. Through the analysis of learning data, it is possible to adapt the training contents to the specificities of each student, ensuring that everyone can progress at their own pace and according to their needs.