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## Introduction

Soft skills are currently receiving applied researchers' attention for different age groups alongside occupational education programs to better train people for their future careers. Nevertheless, introducing the concept of soft skills correctly is an important challenge in higher education. Global Universities are more and more demanded to develop highly skilled graduates who are able to respond to the ever changing and complex needs of the current workplace (Weil, 1999; Sleezer et al., 2004; Possa, 2006). In addition to this, the rapid growth of higher education across Europe has resulted in questions being moved up about the quality of the graduate labor market and the skills graduates must have to match employers' needs (Teichler, 2003; Elias and Purcell, 2004). In this line, the review of training models and skills assessment shows that great efforts have been made to establish classifications or types of competences, but conceptual change is also needed. A change that involves deep transformations at different levels of education and seeks to ensure authentic and meaningful learning by students. The conceptual revision of what learning by skills implies, allows us to underline that it is an inte-

grated learning, in which the skills add a dynamic factor between knowledge, skill and effective behavior. In this sense, an integral vision is necessary that fosters an experiential and active learning of the student and that allows to train professionals able to successfully face the complexity of the situations in which they will have to be involved during their career, thus preparing them to be autonomous in their professional life.

It is necessary to be consistent with the current market of the knowledge society, different from that of the industrial age. Professions, functions, jobs, trades, etc. are no longer, with rare exceptions, so clearly defined. Multidisciplinarity is a growing need in the workplace. In this way, their requests have also changed: transversal skills are required, as well as technical skills which are considered fundamental. Teamwork, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, collaboration, active problem solving are fundamental skills that are evaluated through different tools in order to get a good job. Undoubtedly, the transition to a university training based on skills is a great challenge, and a very demanding one. Nevertheless, with a firm willingness to go in this direction, a pedagogical, didactic and evaluative transitional training (also for teachers) can be reached.

My contribution is made by 4 chapters.

The first chapter, **Hard and soft skills, implications for universities and the labor market**, represents a good scenario of the competences and the role of Education dedicated to soft skills. From the wide range of definitions of the term competence, three common factors are extracted: knowledge, skill and behavior. To ap-

proach the universal problem, still unsolved, of the type of training that everybody needs to successfully perform a certain job, the components of competence are explained: knowing, knowing how to do, knowing how to be, wanting to do and being able to do. Through the concepts of technical and personal competences, an approximation of their use is made both in the university and within companies, and, finally, the most common types of evaluation used in both scenarios are introduced.

The second chapter, **The Bridge between University and the Labor Market**, describes how the European education system and the labor market aim to develop a unique European Higher Education Area. Given the importance of higher education for the development of each EU country, several lines of work have been developed, aimed at training in skills, as well as a common frame of reference that allows European countries to compare their professional qualifications (EFQ). Since the establishment of the European Higher Education Area, concrete proposals for program design and competency classification have been carried out, such as the Tuning Project and the ESCO classification.

The third chapter, **Curriculum design and soft skills. Best cases proposal**, provides a detailed description of how the curriculum design tool can impact university degrees, especially paying attention to the European project Cosky 21. The best cases presented include the Polytechnic University of Valencia, which offers a specific course in the development of Soft Skills. Also, at the University of Roma Tre, within the Department of Educational Sciences, we have worked over the last 3

years on the concept of Soft Skills, evaluating and working for its improvement with various seminars and workshops.

The fourth chapter, **Interviews: Hard work on Soft Skills**, includes different interviews from global testimonials, people that have expertise on soft skills. Also, there are interviews to people who are currently working in the CoSKI21 project and for whom this project has a crucial role in their position/job.

This contribution was born to the meeting with a European consortium that was working in a European project named CoSKI21, described in the third chapter; the Universities involved are members of this Consortium, but as is always the case, people are the key to success.

During a first meeting on Skype we had a stimulating conversation about the importance to work with soft skills, how important they are in our teaching activity and how strategic soft skills are to our professional and personal life. The speakers involved, in different ways, all agreed with the necessity of teaching the importance to work with soft skills, how we can develop them, how strategic they are to the job market, to make students and will-be workers happy. The real impact of our teaching, our learning style, our values as humans, result in understanding how we are looking for something and the reasons why we are looking for it; I am aware that bridges have been built, I am aware of the strategic role of soft skills for the labour market, I am conscious that to work in the European Education Area we have to meet people and work together in this common space.

The journey is very long but we started it, and we are travelling together – good educators, passionate researchers, curious students, all people who are seeking happiness.