MODERN CONDITIONS FOR SOFT SKILLS FORMATION AMONG STUDENTS OF SOCIONOMIC PROFESSIONS

Abstract. Modern higher professional education only stands on the threshold of reforms, related to the educational guidance aimed at the development of soft skills which are in demand in the international labour market. The basis of modernization consists of innovative transformations of constituents of the educational system, including continuous on-line education, blended learning. The development of universal «Soft skills» among the students of socionomic professions enables developing in a professional direction, building a career, and afterwards getting work in a successful organization.

Keywords: «soft skills», «hard skills», socionomic professions, higher education institutions, labour market, educational programs.

The main task of higher education institutions (hereafter – HEI) of Ukraine and leading world educational establishments is qualified preparation of modern specialists by introduction of the programs concerning forming of «soft skills» in an educational process [1].

According to a certain speciality for preparation of specialists in socionomic professions, a complex of programmatic theoretical and practical learning outcomes is formed for successful adaptation of future specialists in professional activities using «soft skills» methods [2].
With the transition of developed countries to postindustrial space, the requirements for the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired in higher education institutions are significantly modified at an increasing pace. The ability to use computer technologies and equipment, as well as knowledge of foreign languages are gradually moving from the category of important features of a modern specialist to the category of instrumental skills that are necessary, like ordinary literacy. The decisive factors are: the special knowledge, close to practice, as well as interdisciplinary knowledge - skills and abilities to be educated throughout life, where systematic and strategic thinking is determined in the context of widespread globalization processes [3].


The problem of the formation of soft skills was studied by American researchers A.Doyle [11], W. Kenton [12], M. Robles [4], B. Rudolpf [13], T. Parsons [14], G. Mitchell [8], G. Gunningham [19].

The effective methods of the development of «soft skills» are set out in the scientific works of Polish researchers: M. Argyle [21], G. Filipowicz [23], M. Łaguna [22], P.Smółka [20].

The information technology society defines «Soft skills» as a direction, makes a modern specialist competitive, flexible, regardless of type of professional development. Highly qualified specialists must have a high level of development of "soft skills", which will ensure 80% of career success [4].
The term «soft skills» came into usage in scientific research starting from the 90th of the twentieth century among the specialists in education, management, business of the USA and Germany.

Scientific research of determination of «Soft skills» equate with such terms as: «people skills» (skills of communication with people), «employability skills» (skills are for employment), «Non-professional skills» (amateurish skills), «key skills» (basic 32 skills), «skills for social progress» (skills are for social development), «life skills» (vital skills) [5].

Socionomic professions are types of professions that are focused on the social component of life and aimed at solving social problems [6].

K. Koval in his scientific work «The development of «soft skills» among students is one of the important factors of employment» notes: «The term «soft skills» is determined as «soft» skills (competencies), personal or unified. «Soft skills» is a sociological term which refers to the emotional intelligence of a person, a list of personal characteristics associated with effective interaction with the environment» [7].

The definition of «soft skills» is associated with the interaction of people in society, that is, «soft» skills are equally necessary for everyday life and for professional development, therefore, according to modern scientific research, professional success is formed precisely by «soft skills», therefore for career growth, you need to start using them from the lowest level [8].

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A basic concept «soft skills» is complex and combines the above listed terms, which create a whole system that unites a large number of groups and sub-groups of skills necessary for professional growth of a personality [10].

Ukrainian researchers O. Glazunova [], T. Voloshina [], V. Korolchuk [] study the formation, development and influence of information and communication technologies on the formation of «soft skills» using the following components:
– personal effectiveness;
– communicative;
– administrative;
– strategic skills;
– information management [10].

According to 2020 LinkedIn data, 57% of top managers consider «soft» skills more important than «hard skills».

The conditions for the formation of "soft skills" among students of socionomic professions are based on the conditions we have defined:

– creativity
– ability to convince
– collaboration
– adaptability

The components of the concept of "soft skills" according to the information of the Merittrac-Internet platform, point out the basic soft skills that are necessary in the workplace for every specialist in socionomic professions, namely:

Communication skills are more than speaking a professional language. Active listening, presentation and excellent opportunities for grammatical and stylistic development are part of the communication skills that are vital for professionals in the socionomic profession, since any activity requires interaction with colleagues, managers and subordinates. An assessment of soft communication skills can help recruits find candidates who are able to effectively express creative ideas and adapt the latest professional development methods.

A work ethic - being punctual, performing professional tasks on time, expressing initiative, being reliable and keeping promises made - are some simple but important examples of professional ethics.

Time Management - employers search for effective workers who know how to use their working hours most efficiently and opportunities to prioritize and complete critical tasks first. Delegation is another essential skill for effective time management.
Teamwork is the ability to work with colleagues in an office environment or online platforms, and it's harder than it seems. Employees who trust each other, work together, give and accept ideas can help create a peaceful, productive work environment. Workplace simulation and role play are several techniques used as part of the soft skills test to assess teamwork skills.

Critical thinking - By its very nature, professionals in any organization tend to base their decisions on their own prejudices, interests, or irrational emotions. Critical thinking is the ability to analyze facts before making a decision and is an essential skill in making final decisions.

Leadership skills - a leader - a person who will be able to work with a team management style and lead the team in the right direction, which requires the culmination of basic management skills that will make the specialist a leader. Supervised behavioral and personality tests can be used as part of a soft skills program to assess a candidate's leadership qualities [12].

Problem solving is the ability to think logically before solving a difficult situation and come up with consistent ways out of situations that have appeared or reached their apogee.

Conflict resolution - conflicts are an inevitable part of work in a professional team that must be resolved promptly, fairly, ethically. Unresolved conflicts can hinder team productivity, and therefore conflict resolution is an important and desirable skill for every manager [13].

Along with «soft skills», there should always be «hard skills», that is why N. Dlugunovich in his scientific work «Hard (tech) skills» notes that these are professional, technical skills associated with activities in the field of formalized technologies. Since these skills are stable, well visible, measurable and identified with specific structures and are included in the list of requirements contained in job descriptions of professional requirements [14].

«Hard skills» are personal skills that determine the level of readiness of graduates of socionomic professions to realize their own competencies. During the mastering of "hard skills", it is necessary to formulate educational instructions, where the quality of training can be checked with the help of an exam, that is why
depending on the specialization and educational program, there exist special «hard skills» [15].

The formation of «soft skills» and «hard skills» among students of socionomic professions is a necessary condition for determining the level of professional competence of future graduates.

In scientific research Mishchyk L. and Tyulpa T. define that: "Socionomic professions include a wide range of specialties: psychologists, teachers, social educators, social workers, to which all areas of professional activity in the social sphere belong.

Socionomic professions are types of professions that are focused on the social component of modern life and are aimed at solving social problems of society [16].

Basic characteristics of soft skills among students of socionomic professions include:

– the interaction, which translates the character, content of relations between specialists in socially oriented professions and social groups, which are subdivided according to statuses (social positions), functions, roles, regardless of the sphere of human activity;

– the contiguity between the goal and the tasks to which both sides of the professional formation of the personality strive;

– the activity of a specialist in the socionomic profession of a sense of developing social and professional skills and improving the personal qualities of subjects of modern society, are formed from life and professional experience;

– the direction of the specialist’s actions to achieve socially important goals, which include: public well-being, health, high quality of life, personality development, socialization, prevention of healthy behavior, solving socially important problems, motivation [17].

The period of permanent technological development, especially in connection from quarantine restrictions, forms the determination of professional concepts, related to the educational improvement of specialists of socionomic specialties, such as: on-line trainings, courses and studying.
The National Institute for the Training of Teachers of Technical Sciences, Chandigarh city, India, introduced research on the conditions for the formation of «soft skills» in professional training of students and emphasized some of them:

– the work environment is the best place for developing soft skills, where it is possible to develop professional competencies in the field of knowledge and customize practical experience.

– the audience is an ideal educational environment, where it is possible to practice the alternative methods of communicating with colleagues and facilitate teaching, experimentation and transmission of knowledge in an interactive form [18].

Graduates of higher educational institutions of socionicomic professions play an important role in the development of a bank of professional capital and are one of the major aspects of the formation of stable development of a country. The acquisition of soft skills by graduates in an educational environment will increase Ukraine's ability to compete at the global level and realize the vision of a modern economic model and a program of government transformation of the population.

Employers, adopting the foreign experience of international successful companies, observe the absence of «soft skills» in modern graduates. Soft skills are called key, basic skills, key competencies or skills of employment, which are used in different workplaces and life situations, such traits as integrity, communication, politeness, responsibility, professionalism, flexibility and teamwork [19].

Soft skills are becoming an integral part of success in professional development, according to CareerBuilder, 77% of employers specify that soft skills are just as important as hard skills. A dilemma appears – how to balance professional competencies and get as a result a universal worker of the 21st century [20].

In Ukraine, the concept «soft skills» is relatively new and scarcely explored. The HEI system does not pay due attention to development of soft skills among the students of socionicomic professions. Educational and curriculum programs are overloaded with disciplines that develop hard skills in students, related to knowledge of special disciplines, and receiving practical training within the walls of higher educational institutions. At the modern stage, training agencies offer professional programs aimed at developing «soft skills» [21].
Realizing the requirements of modern labour market, the level of unemployment of Ukrainian graduates, universities come to the conclusion that it is necessary to develop not only educational programs which will include requirements for the level of development of universal competencies among students, but the necessity to create the special educational environment for higher education institutions, that is able to provide formation of «soft skills» of competencies [22].

Ukrainian higher educational institutions observe the current tendencies in the development of soft skills and the demand for creative specialists in socionomic professions, namely, the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, the Faculty of Psychology, includes training programs, «soft skills» development seminars in the educational process for students of socionomics until a complete restructuring of the educational process, in which the system of project-based or problem-based learning begins to dominate [23].

Modern conditions for the formation of "soft skills" (soft skills) among students of socionomic professions in the HEI:

– integrity – to encourage students to work selflessly in groups, where every member of the group must take responsibility for the given work or result. Upon completing the group work, students must think about contribution to their own development and why they deserve part of the final grade;

– communication – to develop student’s communicative skills in oral and writing form, to take part in group discussions and present a group, be able to speak in front of an audience and report own ideas;

– courtesy - to ensure that students are respectful and polite to each other in the classroom and when working with others;

– responsibility - to develop students’ sense of duty to the leader and other members of the group for the task given to him, to oblige to explain the reasons for not completing the task and ways to correct the situation;

– flexibility – to give students long-term, challenging projects which must be completed within the limits of the set parameters and time frames, where these measures will stimulate to organizing and focusing, solving production problems and self-control;
– teamwork – to encourage collaboration through group activities, to appoint students to the common goal, to emphasize the importance of connection, trust, integrity, responsibility [24].

Institutions of higher and secondary education, where students and students social activities outside the classroom and out-of-class activities related to the practice of volunteering and local government programs, are becoming a powerful resource for the development of social skills «soft skills».

Project activities have great potential for the development of «soft skills», entrepreneurial business projects solve not only educational but also social, administrative tasks, accumulating enormous possibilities for development of «soft skills». Similar initiatives for students are one of the best forms of investments in one’s own future.

Consequently, the modern conditions for the formation of «soft skills» among students of socionomic professions is the objective requirement of the international labour market. Administration of higher education institutions must respond to these challenges, and in light of the wider autonomy of universities in terms of the formation of educational and curriculum programs, it is necessary to take the initiative to cover a wide range of development of «soft skills» among students during educational activities.

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