

## **Soft Skills Importance in NGOs' Positions**

**Ola Hajjaj**

University of Palermo, Department of Economics, Statistics, Psychology and Social Science, Italy  
*ola.hajjaj@unipa.it*

**Ivana Mandysova**

University of Pardubice, Faculty of Economics and Administration, Czech Republic  
*Ivana.Mandysova@upce.cz*

*Abstract.* Getting a job is the target of most people especially youth after graduation; however nowadays having a university certificate is not the only thing which matters for employers, especially with the continued increment in the graduates' numbers. Currently, many employers are searching for the perfect employee who will have both hard and soft skills. This study aimed to highlight the soft skills role in getting a job and it will focus on the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) sector. As it is one of the most attractive destinations for youth nowadays. NGOs are characterized by international work environments, its staff consists of a different variety of people who have different certifications and skills. The study examines the importance of soft skills through understanding the most important soft skills needed and required for the NGOs' jobs and owned by the NGOs' staff. In order to achieve the purposes of the study, the researchers collected the data from its various sources. The study will adopt the descriptive analytical method and a questionnaire as a key tool to obtain the required information. The study sample consists of employees of the NGOs sector; they ranked the soft skills depending on their daily work tasks as NGO staff. The results of this study show that soft skills are very important to get involved in the NGOs sector and ranking shows the top 10 most used soft skills in NGOs positions which can be useful to the youth who would like to work for NGOs to start developing these skills during and after their university degree. The study also showed that having a university degree is required in NGOs' jobs however the most of the positions are not limited to one specialization.

*Keywords:* NGO, Soft Skills, Jobs.

### **1 Introduction**

Getting a job is the target of most people especially youth after graduation; however nowadays having a university certificate is not the only thing which matters for employers, especially with the continuous increment in the graduates' numbers. Historically, technical skills, also known as hard skills, were the only skills necessary for career employment; but today's workplace is showing that technical skills are not enough to keep individuals employed when organizations are right-sizing and cutting positions (James & James, 2004). Currently, many employers are searching for the perfect employee who has soft skills not only hard skills. Because soft skills are critical for productive performance in today's workplace, current and future business leaders are emphasizing the development of soft skills (Nealy, 2005). Spreading of a competency approach in human resources management led to focusing on particular skills of workers/job applicants, instead of their IQ or formal level of educational attainment, in processes of hiring, evaluation, development, and planning of career growth (Kubeš, Spillerová, Kurnický, 2004).

### **2 Soft Skills Verses Hard Skills**

The term soft skills have been around a long time in both business and educational settings, in corporate meetings, and in curriculum development (Evenson, 1999). Parson defined soft skills as character traits that enhance a person's interactions, job performance, and career prospects (Parsons,

2008). The bulk of skills supporting individual's employability can be found among the so-called "soft skills" which can be described as "intangible skills which are hard to measure and are closely connected with [individual's] attitudes", hard skills, on the other hand, can be described as "skills which are easily observed and/or measured, easily trained and closely connected with [individual's] knowledge" (Balcar, Homolová, Karásek et al., 2011). The importance of soft skills cannot be neglected by people who are searching for a job or who want to keep their jobs. The lack of soft skills can sink the promising career of someone who has technical ability and professional expertise but no interpersonal qualities (Klaus, 2010). While technical skills are a part of many excellent educational curricula, soft skills need further emphasis in the university curricula so that students learn the importance of soft skills early in their academic programs before they embark on a business career (Wellington, 2005).

### **3 Literature Review**

Many researchers have targeted the soft skills and its importance in many different fields. Ngang, Hashim and Yunus (2015) their study aimed to investigate the novice teacher perceptions about gaps related to soft skills obtained from their teaching professional training compared to the soft skills needed in their workplace. The study findings showed that team work skill and communication skill were the two most important soft skill components, not only very much needed in their workplace but also gained from their teaching training program. However, entrepreneurship skill was the least capacity soft skill component needed in their workplace as well as gained from their teaching training program. Ariratana, Sirisookslip and Ngang (2015) the study aimed to measure the development of leadership soft skills among educational administrators using the guidelines. The results of the study indicated that the level of leadership soft skills among educational administrators is high. However it revealed that educational administrators have to improve their communication skills, using technology to monitor and evaluate teachers' teaching strategies, promote team work spirit and healthy interpersonal relationship. Some studies aimed to measure the percentage of the soft skills compared to the hard skills in job success, Klaus found that 75 % of long-term job success depends on employees' skills, while only 25 % is dependent on technical knowledge (Klaus, 2010). Other studies have found that nearly two-thirds of all graduate vacancies are open to graduates from any discipline with the type of skills required dependent upon the role to be carried out within a particular organisation (Raybould and Sheard, 2005).

### **4 Research Questions and Problem Statement**

The growth of such NGOs over the past two decades has given them an increasingly important role and has led them forming a distinctive sector within civil society. They have been engaged in all sectors of social life, such as relief, rehabilitation, health, education, development programs, peace, human rights and environmental issues, using finance raised from voluntary, private sources, and donor agencies and managing themselves autonomously at local, national and international levels (Bagci, 2007). NGOs have gained increased attention among scholars and practitioners of development. They have become increasingly important agents of the development process, in all of their main areas of work such as humanitarian relief, long-term development, policy formation and political advocacy (Attack, 1999).

Working in NGOs attracts a large number of people around the world especially those who want to contribute in the development of the communities in or outside their countries and create positive change all over the world. NGOs operate like any other organizations; they have staff who works in accounting, management, fundraising, logistics, public relations, business development, human relations, product development, legal and more. NGOs share a common objective in initiating and operating social development and service activities. Their operations are carried out independently for non-profit purpose. While an NGO may come in the form of a registered foundation or an unregistered

assembly, it can be categorized as a part of the Non-Profit Sector, which plays a significant role in social development and service through activities of various kinds (Pruekpongsawalee, 1998).

Individuals who undertake the role and responsibility in a non-governmental organization must suitably meet the job descriptions, from the body of knowledge to professional skills and other requirements indicated by the organization. They are also expected to possess specific characteristics, which are crucial in this line of work from voluntary spirit to personal sacrifice and ideology in social service (Chitradub & Kao-ian, 2013). There are thousands of job opportunities advertised by NGOs annually, the job description focuses mostly on the job tasks and the soft skills needed to implement it while the hard skills required for most of the NGOs' jobs are not restricted to one specialization. Especially jobs under the titles of: Project/program coordinator, project/program officer, project/program assistant, project/ program associate, administrative Assistant .....etc. In such jobs, the job description includes many necessary and required soft skills such as:

- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Capacity to work under pressure and meet tight schedules under minimum supervision.
- Leadership and Self-Management.
- Ability to organize and prioritize work schedule to meet client needs and deadlines
- Ability to approaches work with energy and a positive, constructive attitude
- Ability to remain calm, in control and good humoured even under pressure
- Ability to work productively as part of a team
- Excellent time management skills.
- Excellent English language skills, both spoken and written

This study aim is examining what is the most used and most important soft skills needed in NGOs' jobs from the perspective of the NGOs' staff depending on the level of importance for their use to soft skills in implementing their daily and frequent task in their workplace.

## **5 Methodology**

### **5.1 Data Source**

In order to collect the needed data for this research, primary and secondary sources were used as follows:

- Secondary resources: by collecting data such as books, journals and articles.
- Primary sources: in order to obtain the data needed for this research, a questionnaire of 21 sentences was designed by the researcher depending on the literature review of related studies and the review of the NGOs' job announcements. It was distributed on the study population in order to get their opinions about soft skills importance in their work .The questionnaire followed Likert Scale to measure the importance of each soft skills, where 5 =extremely Important, 4=Very Important,3=Moderately Important,2=Slightly important, 1= Not at all important.

### **5.2 Population and Sample Study**

Questionnaire was sent by emails to 35 European NGOs; it was provided with cover letter explaining its purpose and the aim of the research. The questionnaire asked the NGO employees to rate the level of importance of each of the mentioned soft skills depending on their daily work activates.

Data was collected by sending the questionnaire emails to 35 NGOs, 14 of them responded. The nationalities of these NGOs are as the following : one British , two Dutch , two Greek , seven Italian and two Spanish NGOs .Of those 14 NGOs 47 employees responded to the survey: 4 NGOs managers, 11 project managers, 16 project coordinators , 14 project assistants , 1 administrative assistants and 1 editor in chief website association. Of them 32 are working as full time and the rest are part time, 25 female and 22 males.

Table 1: Sample distribution according to education level

Education Level	Number
Diploma (2 years)	2
Bachelor degree	29
Master	15
PhD student	1

As indicated in Table (1) more than half of the sample has bachelor degree , 15 have master , 2 have diploma of two years and only one has a PhD degree. The sample have various specializations mostly were : business administration and International relations only two of them have specializations related to NGOs which are: NGO management and international cooperation and the other one is development studies. The rest of the sample have different specializations such as :economy , mathematics , engineering, sociology, literature...etc , which indicate that the university specialization does not play an important role in getting a job in the NGOs field and it is more focused on soft skills and experiences .

Table 2: Sample distribution according to NGOs' work experience

Overall Work Experience in NGOs	Number
More than 5 years	13
3-5 years	11
1-3 years	16
Less than one year	7

Table (2) indicates that most of the study sample have more than one year work experience in the NGOs field, which is a good indicator about the sample knowledge about the NGOs' work environment.

## 6 Data Findings and Discussion

Depending on the collected data analysis, Table (3) shows the frequency of the responses and the percentages which indicate the level of importance . It was indicated that the 'ability to work in team' was in the top of the soft skills which is needed in NGOs' work by a rate of 74.47 % as extremely important and 25.53 % as very important. In the second place, the 'ability to interpersonal and communication skills with people at all levels' with a rate of 68.09 % as extremely important and 31.91 % as very important. In the last place was ' flexibility to move among various places, cities or countries' with rate of 23.4 % as extremely important . None of the soft skills was ranked as 'not at all important' .The Ability to speak at least one additional language (beside the mother tongue language) was ranked as number 9 from the 21 mentioned skills which shows its importancy as one of the NGO requirment especially for jobs such as NGO manager , projects manager and project coordinator as these positions normally need to have good English skills in order to deal with other partners around Europe .

Table 3: Level of importance of each soft skills (N=47)

Soft Skills	Extremely Important		Very Important		Moderately Important		Slightly Important		Not at All Important	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Ability to interpersonal and communication skills with people at all levels.	32	68.09	15	31.91						
Ability of time managing and prioritizing tasks	30	63.83	16	34.04	1	2.13				
Ability to meet deadlines and complete tasks	26	55.32	20	42.55	1	2.13				
Ability to work in team (to be a team member).	35	74.47	12	25.53			0			
Ability to work independently.	18	38.3	17	36.17	12	25.53				
Good presentation skills (Self presenting, idea, project...etc).	12	25.53	25	53.19	9	19.15	1	2.13		
The ability to lead others without being over bearing and distribute tasks.	18	38.3	20	42.55	8	17.02	1	2.13		
Ability to work under pressure.	22	46.81	20	42.55	4	8.51	1	2.13		
Ability of multi-tasking in the same time.	23	48.94	15	31.91	9	19.15			0	
Flexibility to move among various places, cities or countries.	11	23.4	24	51.06	8	17.02	4	8.51		
Ability of negotiation and diplomatic skills.	15	31.91	24	51.06	7	14.89	1	2.13		
The ability to think logically, to analyse problems and identify logical solutions to them.	17	36.17	24	51.06	6	12.77			0	
The ability to actively listening to others; being engaged in others when they are speaking and accurately hearing their thoughts and ideas.	22	46.81	21	44.68	4	8.51			0	
The ability to engage people and attracted to them to be a part of activity or in conversation.	19	40.43	20	42.55	8	17.02			0	
Ability to manage conflict and find creative and mutually acceptable solutions. (Mediation).	20	42.55	18	38.3	9	19.15			0	

Networking with stakeholders and organizations to building agreements, cooperation and initiatives.	23	48.94	18	38.3	5	10.64	1	2.13
The ability to work with multidisciplinary approaches and intervention capacity with the different strains of action.	14	29.79	24	51.06	8	17.02	1	2.13
Ability to manage anger and control negative feelings in stressful and negative situations.	12	25.53	27	57.45	8	17.02		0
Ability to make decisions and start up an initiative.	14	29.79	27	57.45	6	12.77		0
Ability to speak at least one additional language (beside the mother tongue language).	22	46.81	13	27.66	7	14.89	5	10.64
Ability to plan strategically and creatively to meet specified objectives.	22	46.81	19	40.43	5	10.64	1	2.13

Depending on the sample ranking the top 10 soft skills ranked from the most to the less important for NGOs positions are:

1. Ability to work in team(to be a team member)
2. Ability to interpersonal and communication skills with people at all levels
3. Ability of time managing and prioritizing tasks
4. Ability to meet deadlines and complete tasks
5. Ability of multi-tasking in the same time
6. Networking with stakeholders and organizations to building agreements, cooperation and initiatives
7. Ability to work under pressure
8. The ability to actively listening to others; being engaged in others when they are speaking and accurately hearing their thoughts and ideas
9. Ability to speak at least one additional language (beside the mother tongue language)
10. Ability to plan strategically and creatively to meet specified objectives.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of each Soft Skills (N=47)

Soft Skills	MEAN	SD
Ability to interpersonal and communication skills with people at all levels.	4.68	0.47
Ability of time managing and prioritizing tasks	4.62	0.53
Ability to meet deadlines and complete tasks	4.53	0.55
Ability to work in team(to be a team member).	4.74	0.44
Ability to work independently.	4.13	0.8
Good presentation skills (Self presenting, idea, project...etc).	4.02	0.74
The ability to lead others without being overbearing and distribute tasks.	4.17	0.79

Ability to work under pressure.	4.34	0.73
Ability of multi-tasking in the same time.	4.3	0.78
Flexibility to move among various places, cities or countries.	3.89	0.87
Ability of negotiation and diplomatic skills.	4.13	0.74
The ability to think logically, to analyze problems and identify logical solutions to them.	4.23	0.67
The ability to actively listening to others; being engaged in others when they are speaking and accurately hearing their thoughts and ideas.	4.38	0.64
The ability to engage people and attracted to them to be a part of activity or in conversation.	4.23	0.73
Ability to manage conflict and find creative and mutually acceptable solutions. (Mediation).	4.23	0.76
Networking with stakeholders and organizations to building agreements, cooperation and initiatives.	4.34	0.76
The ability to work with multidisciplinary approaches and intervention capacity with the different strains of action.	4.09	0.75
Ability to manage anger and control negative feelings in stressful and negative situations.	4.09	0.65
Ability to make decisions and start up an initiative.	4.17	0.64
Ability to speak at least one additional language (beside the mother tongue language).	4.11	1.03
Ability to plan strategically and creatively to meet specified objectives.	4.32	0.75

The mean and standard deviation were calculated for each of the soft skills as shown in Table (4), the lowest mean was 3.89 and the highest 4.74 based on scale of 5, which indicates that expected value for the importance level mostly vary between extremely important and very important.

## 7 Conclusions

Finding of this study revealed that the soft skills are essentials for NGOs positions and it plays an important role in the implementation of daily activities in NGO jobs. The most import 10 soft skills as ranked by the NGOs employees were :working in team, interpersonal and communication skills, time managing and prioritizing tasks, meeting deadlines and complete tasks, multi-tasking, networking, working under pressure, active listening, speaking at least one additional language (beside the mother tongue language), strategic planning. In addition, the study revealed that the university degree for NGOs positions is required however it is not limit to one specialization but it is open to different specialization as the NGOs positions required more soft skills than hard skills.

## References

- Ariratana,W., Sirisookslip,S.,Keow Ngang, T., 2015.‘ Development of Leadership Soft Skills Among Educational Administrators.’ *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (186) 331 – 336
- Attack, I. 1999. ‘Four criteria of Development NGO Legitimacy.’ *World Development*, 27(5): 855-864.

- Bagci, Cahit. 2007. 'Historical Evolution of NGOs: NGO Proliferation in the Post-Cold War Era' *Published in Avrupa Gunlugu*, Vol.2, No. 4, pp. 299–326
- Balcar, J., Homolová, E., Karásek, Z. et al. 2011. 'Transferable competences across economic sectors: Role and importance for Employment at European level.' Luxembourg: *Publications Office of the European Union*. ISBN 978-92-79-20946-8.
- Chitradub, S., and Kao-iean, S. 2013. 'Final report: A capacity development system for advisor of children and youth council in Thailand project.'
- Evenson, R. 1999. 'Soft skills, hard sell' [Electronic version]. *Techniques: Making Education & Career Connections*, 74(3), 29-31.
- James, R. F., & James, M. L. 2004. 'Teaching career and technical skills in a "mini" business world.' *Business Education Forum*, 59(2), 39-41.
- Klaus, P. 2010. 'Communication Breakdown.' *California Job Journal*, 28, 1-9.
- Kubeš, M., Spillerová, D., Kurnický, R. 2004. 'Management Competence.' Praha: *Gradiva Publishing* ISBN 80-247-0698-9.
- Nealy, C. 2005. 'Integrating soft skills through active learning in the management classroom.' *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 2(4), 1-6.
- Ngang, T., Hashim, N., Mohd Yunus, H., 2015. 'Novice Teacher Perceptions of the Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace.' *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (177) 284 – 288
- Parsons, T. L. 2008. 'Definition: Soft skills.' Retrieved from <http://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/soft-skills>.
- Pruekpongsawalee, M. 1998. 'The Research report accompanying the draft law on national education: The role of the NGOs in Education'. Bangkok: *Office of the Basic Education Commission of Thailand*.
- Raybould, J. and V. Sheard. 2005. 'Are Graduates Equipped with the Right Skills in the Employability Stakes?' *Industrial and Commercial Training* (5): 259–263.
- Wellington, J. K. 2005. 'The soft skills of success: Be it high tech, low tech, or no tech.' *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 71, 628.