

SKILLS AND SENTIMENTAL INTELLIGENCE: A NEW DIMENSION IN EMPLOYABILITY

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ABSTRACT: *In a dynamic, multidimensional and more operational environment, the effectiveness of human resources is a matter of major importance, leading most organizations and enterprises to pursue total quality in all their activities (Hofstede, 1990). The quality can be ensured through the comprehensive improvement of employee skills, international alliances, the introduction and support of innovations, the lifelong education and training of human resources. International organizations, in a context of global co-operation and synergy, are called upon to play an important role in this direction, as they have both the appropriate experience and extensive diplomatic networks. To that end, important official texts have been drawn up, of which a constant point of reference is the need to acquire proper and appropriate skills. Which are though the right skills? Since specialized skills seem not to be adequate, emphasis has been lately put on emotional competence, which may contribute to the creation of a healthy working environment (Goleman, 1998). This study, through the qualitative analysis of the European Commission's text "Communication: A new skills agenda for Europe", tries to capture and investigate whether there are references to skills related to the field of emotional intelligence in its content. The analysis of the text shows that references are made mainly to the categories of interpersonal relations management and self-management. In particular, there is a strong need for policy makers to develop communication, facilitate change, enhance the development of others, teamwork, co-operation and adaptation to continuously changing environments.*

KEYWORDS: Skills, Employability, Sentimental Intelligence, European Union.

INTRODUCTION

In a fast changing global economy skills are considered to determine competitiveness, employability and the capacity to drive innovation. National and regional labor markets encounter specific challenges: the digital transformation of the economy, new ways of working, skills shortages, demographic changes, increase in life expectancy and in work life limits, changes in business models (European Commission, 2016). Under these particular circumstances, different professional groups need to redefine their work profile and strengthen it with skills that will allow them to respond to the mental, physical and emotional demands of the new labor market.

The European Union has a long history in shaping policies regarding the development and prosperity of societies. Thus, at the beginning of the 1990s the European Community stressed the importance of coherence in the effectiveness of development policies, while the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) states that the Union should take into account the fact that the coherence and cooperation of policies can affect developing countries (Mackie, 2007). A common reference point for many official texts is the emphasis on shaping those conditions that will help people acquire the right skills. "With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and

can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens” (European Commission, 2016). This should be taken seriously into account given that, according to the OECD Survey (2013) of employability skills, roughly one third of workers are over or under qualified for their job, while one sixth report a mismatch between their existing skills and those qualified for their job. Consequently, skills development is considered to be a wise and vital investment, since not only can it reduce unemployment, inequality and poverty, but also promote economic growth (UNESCO, 2012).

Acquiring, however, only technical and specialized knowledge is not enough to solve problems and conflicts that inevitably emerge in a complex and multipurpose workplace. So emphasis is now put on emotion, which, if it is appropriately recognized and exploited, can lead to spectacular results. Empathy, for example, is a basic dimension of communication and the functioning of organizations in a context of globalization (Cooper & Sawaf, 1996).

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Employability and skills

Employability has been defined as the capacity of getting and keeping satisfactory and fulfilling work. It is also considered to be the consequence of having key skills, a likely effect of having good working experience, a product of skilful career planning and interview technique, a mix of cognitive and non –cognitive achievements and representations (Knight & Yorke, 2005). In addition, it is a complex and lifelong process which involves a number of areas interlinking. Dearing (1997) links employability to the acquisition of skills for life, while Hillage and Pollard (1999) suggest that it should also be considered in terms of knowledge and attitudes.

Skills refer to a set of achievements, understandings, knowledge and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to get employed and to be successful in their chosen occupations. Right skills ensure that labor market participants have the capability of being effective in their workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy (Knight & Yorke, 2004).

Given that working conditions are becoming more complex and unpredictable, one can easily wonder what kind of skills and abilities are needed. The Human Development Report (2016) lists four skill areas. The first concerns thinking (problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making and learning), the second one working tools (technology tools), the third the ways of working (communication, cooperation) and the fourth the skills to "live" (Career, Citizenship, Personal and Social Responsibility) (Panagiotopoulos & Karanikola, 2017).

In addition, all social and professional groups should have access to the internet and become capable users of technology (Carlsen et al., 2015). Research data show that despite the fact that 3.2 billion people worldwide use the internet, only 7% of households in the less developed countries have access to the Internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2015).

Blanchard, Carlos and Randolph (1999) also point to the need for technical capabilities, mainly because of the evolution of technology and the rapid depreciation of knowledge. In addition, emphasis is also on the need to acquire administrative needs, as more and more workers are called upon to become self-employed and involved in decision-making. Equally important is the development of the ability to socialize and involve workers in different groups and actions,

as well as behavioral skills related to workers' attitudes towards work, ability for responsible work, flexibility, tolerance and self-awareness.

Furthermore, according to Jacobs (2001), the individual's abilities are distinguished in advisory, communicative, leadership and educational. The person, in other words, can help others solve problems, is open and flexible, presents ideas with purpose and purpose, manages clearly and precisely the reason, inspires respect and trust in others, organizes effective groups and helps others to learn . These abilities refer to emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence: Concept, Dimensions and Models

Since the mid-20th century, the intelligence index has been a key element in both the academic and professional path of the individual. However, in recent years, emphasis has also been put on the concept of emotional intelligence, as emotion is considered to be a basic source of information, especially when a person is working in a group. Emotional intelligence describes those abilities that differ from cognitive, on the one hand, and complement it on the other. The roots of this distinction lie on the psychologist Thorndike (1920), who spoke of "social intelligence". Gardner (1983) then proposed a multi-intelligence model, emphasizing two types of intelligence: knowledge one's inner world and social adaptability. Bar-on, in 2000, distinguishes five dimensions of emotional intelligence: intrapersonal skill, interpersonal skill, adaptability, stress management and general mood (as cited in Brinia, 2008).

According to Goleman (1998), emotional intelligence is the ability to know what one feels, to control their emotions, to be able to motivate themselves, to be creative and to understand what others feel. Orioli sees it as a kind of smart tactics, such as the ability to stay calm under pressure and create a climate of confidence. Sparow defines it as a practice of observing emotions, remembering them and editing them (as cited in Brinia, 2008).

The most well-known model of emotional intelligence is Goleman's (1998), who initially considered that its basic characteristics are the following skills: self-awareness, emotional management, self motivation, empathy, relationships, communication, personal style. Later, he developed a model that mainly focused on business and included the following skills: self - awareness, self - regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills. In collaboration with Boyatzis and Rhee, the theory of performance has been formulated, comprising four skills: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills and relationships.

Self-perception, self-control and motivation are personal abilities, while empathy is a social capacity. In particular, self-perception refers to the person's ability to recognize their feelings and the effects that they carry. Its dimensions are consciousness, self-esteem and self-confidence. Self-control refers to the ability of an individual to manage their internal situation and its dimensions are reliability, conscientiousness, adaptability and innovation. Incitement concerns the emotional trends to achieve and to express commitment, initiative and optimism. Empathy concerns the person's ability to understand others, and the basic dimensions of it are the orientation to service, the development of others, the correct handling of diversity, the political perception, the recognition of the needs of a group and the strengthening of relationships. Finally, social skills relate to one's ability to influence, communicate, lead, influence, establish and manage change, resolve disagreements, cultivate bonds, work together and contribute to team cohesion.

METHODOLOGY

Research aim

The aim of this study is to explore through content analysis of the recent European Union text "Communication: A new skills agenda for Europe" whether in its content there are references to skills related to the field of emotional intelligence.

Research questions

- Does the European Union text take into account the emotional dimension in the definition of skills?
- If so, which skills of emotional intelligence are proposed?
- In what way are they captured?
- Is their drafting in line with the spirit of other international texts on contemporary skills?

Presentation of research material

The new Skills Agenda for Europe was adopted by the Commission on 10 June 2016. It is the result of communication from the Commission of the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. This agenda aims to make sure that European people develop the right skills for the jobs of today and tomorrow. This task is essential to boost employability, competitiveness and growth across the EU. Besides, it calls on EU countries and stakeholders to improve the quality of skills and their relevance for the labor market. Different actions are designed in order to improve the quality and relevance of training and other ways of acquiring skills, to make skills visible and to enable people make better career choices, find quality jobs and improve their life chances.

Presentation of the methodological tool

The method of qualitative content analysis was used in order to analyze the material. The summary model, in particular, which was composed by Mayring in 1980, leads to the reduction of the material which is under research, aims at finding the significant messages of the text and produces a general idea of it. It consists of 10 steps:

1. Choice of the material.
2. Circumstances under which the material was written.
3. Typical characteristics of the material.
4. Direction of the analysis.
5. Research questions.
6. Unit of analysis.
7. Categories.
8. Choice of the 3 examples: summary, explanation, structure.
9. Re-examining according to the theory and the material.
10. Interpretation according to the research questions (Bonidis, 2004).

More specifically, this text was chosen given that is an official text which sets out guidelines for the policies that all Member States will pursue in terms of empowering people and

improving their employability. The main axes of the text are the need to improve the quality of skills and to strengthen the work profile of individuals mainly through the provision of appropriate vocational education and training. In addition, emphasis is placed on the need for existence of the European Qualifications Framework.

Following the theoretical context and the dimensions of sentimental intelligence, four categories were made:

- Self-awareness, which includes emotional awareness, accurate assessment and self-confidence.
- Self-management, which includes self-control, propensity to achieve, initiative, credibility, conscientiousness, adaptability and optimism.
- Social awareness, which includes empathy, service orientation, operational awareness and political awareness.
- Managing interpersonal relationships, including leadership, communication, conflict management, facilitating change, influencing, enhancing the development of others, building ties, teamwork and collaboration.

Findings

The content analysis of the above-mentioned text reveals that there are references to skills related to the field of emotional intelligence. In particular, reference is made to the need for the development of confident and active citizens, who take an initiative to develop and integrate in an effort to adapt to continuously changing work environments. In addition, there are some references to the need for developing a person's political perception, while greater emphasis is put on interpersonal management skills. In particular, the need for communication, harmonious coexistence and social cohesion of people is mentioned. People need to develop the capacity to drive innovation, to work in team, to reach shared vision and commitment to work, to have the ability of creative thinking and problem solving. In addition, another important skill is the ability to adapt more quickly to new situations, to introduce creativity and innovation, to overcome biases in increasingly diverse environments.

DISCUSSION

In this specific text of the European Union, we note that emotional competence and skills have been taken into account. Significant references are made to the category of interpersonal management and self-management, and no reference is made to skills that are part of the self-awareness category. These references complement the basic, specialized, digital, certified knowledge and skills that a modern citizen must have in order to increase the chances of finding and maintaining a job. The design and implementation of the framework of these skills is in line with the spirit of other official texts of international organizations (UN) that seek to achieve global and universal goals (Panagiotopoulos & karanikola, 2017). These types of skills are also referred as life skills, which help citizens become more flexible and improve their life quality (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013; Jenkins, 2011). The building of them can contribute to the development of self-confidence, self-fulfillment and personal efficiency and performance (Schuller et al., 2006). Through these skills, people can

take on new challenges and provide practical and emotional support to those around them (Balatti et al., 2007).

Implication for research and practice

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it provides useful contemporary information about European Commission efforts to meet the demands of contemporary work. These efforts can be compared to those of other international organizations, such as UNESCO and UN, thus creating large databases. Data that will multiply and will be indicators of evaluation and comparison of relevant actions at a local, national or international level. However, in a future research, it would be useful to explore what will actually take place and how all EU policies on the right skills will actually be implemented, contributing in this way to the wider development of the societies. The prospect of global cooperation and addressing major social and economic issues remains a major challenge. In addition the dimension of sentimental intelligence should be taken into account seriously, given that people need to learn to cooperate, to tolerate and respect each other. Emotional intelligence is learned, cultivated, taught (Buradas, 2002), so the international, national and policy areas of the workplace must emphasize the exploration, identification, evaluation and improvement of the elements of emotional intelligence.

CONCLUSION

Underemployment and unemployment are now affecting the lives of people worldwide. More and more people are either inactive or working somewhere below their level of skills and abilities. In addition, the nature of work and employment contracts are constantly changing and people feel more and more insecure and vulnerable. They need to be supported and equipped with the right mental, sentimental and cognitive skills. These types of skills can be a pathway not only to employability and prosperity but also a key to social cohesion and fulfillment.

Future Research

This European Commission text highlights the impact of right skills on employability. Emphasis is placed on the adoption of corresponding policies, on the search for ways of financing, on the cohesion and co-operation of many actors and partners. These skills should correspond to the needs of the professional groups. Economic, cognitive, digital, social, sentimental skills that will contribute to global development and prosperity. It would be useful in future if official texts of other organizations were also investigated. A comparative approach could then be made regarding their actions and their willingness to contribute to the global development and prosperity. A comparison that will lead to the enrichment of international data and its subsequent dissemination. As policymakers look to the future, they will need to develop a deeper understanding of the interrelationships of different policy solutions, and how different mixes of policies can increase healthy workplaces.

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