

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS FOR LAWYERS

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Abstract

Each profession needs different types of knowledge and skills. In the past, authors have not dealt with the importance of soft skills. Nowadays authors realised that hard skills are useless without soft skills. Even for some professions where workers have to work and interact with others, soft skills are crucial. For some professions is necessary that they just do not have knowledge of soft skills but they are masters in soft skills, they should be able to listen, to negotiate, they have to know how to make public speech, etc. One of these professions is lawyers. The research dealt with three main research questions. The first research question examined how much are soft skills important for lawyers. The second research question dealt with the level of knowledge soft skills of students at Faculty of Law Charles University. The third research question examined what kind of soft skills students, who study at Faculty of Law would like to master.

Key words: knowledge, lawyers, soft skills, students

JEL Code: I21, K00

Introduction

Nowadays, in the age of globalization and so high competition is not enough to have just hard skills at work. Because of increasing globalization is becoming increasingly common in our lives. Everything is more connected, even more complicated and changeable conditions constantly force people to adapt for some change or to something new in their life. The need of soft skills springs from the fact the world and especially the working environment, is shared with other people. In order to be truly successful, workers and especially lawyers need soft skills. Soft skills are behavioural skills which people need in their behaviour and during dealing with people. Soft skills are also called interpersonal skills. Soft skills are the opposite of hard skills. Hard skills always focus on a specific activity, thus indicating professional skills of people. If the lawyers have sufficient expertise in their position, the technical part will certainly not be a big deal. But to have only expertise is not enough. They have to be

strong in oral and written communication. They have to be excellent in listening ability. They should also give attention to details, because just single word could change the meaning of a contract or clause. They should be able to practise effective time management, they should have self-awareness, self-development, they should be good leaders and professionals. (Research on effective time management is based on the development of past research by authors Bazantova & Charvatova, 2018).

In research of Rhode (2013) was found out that lawyers have lack in soft skills and even lawyers devalue importance of soft skills.

1 Theoretical background

Some of the authors realised, that the soft skills have the effect on success at work and it is possible to train soft skills. For example Ricchiardi & Federica (2018) wrote that soft skills are important not just for personal development but also for work achievement. Li Yan, Yang Yinghong, Siu Man Lui, Marz Whiteside & Komla Tsey (2017, p. 242) made an experiment with training of soft skills. They found out in this experiment: *“The training had a statistically significant positive impact on the assessed human qualities soft skills outcomes.”* Other authors who dealt with soft skills, for example Sridharan & Boud (2019), made the research about influence of feedback on enhancing teamwork behaviour and self-assessment ability. There was another research from Hung-Wei, Xiang & Hsin-Te (2019, p. 184), who found out that: *“soft skills have essential effects on online business students' learning outcomes.”* Or other authors Ahmad, Chew & Zulnadi, et al. (2019, p. 271 - 272) who found out *“Soft skills are very important to enable students to venture into the job market after graduating from their schools as the present line of work is very particular on the soft skills such as leadership, communication, thinking skills, and information technology management, interpersonal and collaboration skills ...”* Between another authors, who made experiment belong Deep, Berhannudin & Othman (2018, p. 17), who found out that is possible: *“to improve of various soft skills through applying problem-based learning”*. There are also authors who dealt with the role of soft skills. Between these authors belong Garcia, Biencinto & Carpintero et al. (2016), who wrote that soft skills play an important role for personal growth, employability, social development, social participation, change adaptation, etc., even though there is not a general agreement which skill is more important. Later the authors admit that the rank of importance of soft skills depends on the field of reference.

Kiser (2017) describes that the most important soft skills for lawyers are patience, trust and optimism. He believes that lawyers can develop these skills and that they can make them stronger. Some of authors, who deals with term of soft skills, for example Parlamis & Monnot (2018, p. 227) wrote that the soft skills should be called “*CORE*” skills, because: “*the term soft skills is about finding a more appropriate and memorable term.*”

2 Objectives and methodology

The research dealt with the importance of soft skills for lawyers, with the level of knowledge of soft skills and which soft skills would students like to master. Students of Faculty of Law at Charles University participated this research.

The goal of this research is to find out if soft skills are important for university students who study at Faculty of Law and what is the level of each soft skill by these students. The research dealt with three main research questions. The first research question examined how much are soft skills important for lawyers. The second research question dealt with the level of knowledge soft skills of students at Faculty of Law Charles University. The third research question examined what kind of soft skills students, who study at Faculty of Law would, like to master. Based on the analysis of the results obtained, will be evaluated if students need to improve theirs soft skills and what kind of soft skills. According these results will be created and accredited a new course of soft skills for lawyers. This new course will be aimed at the students at Faculty of Law in Charles University.

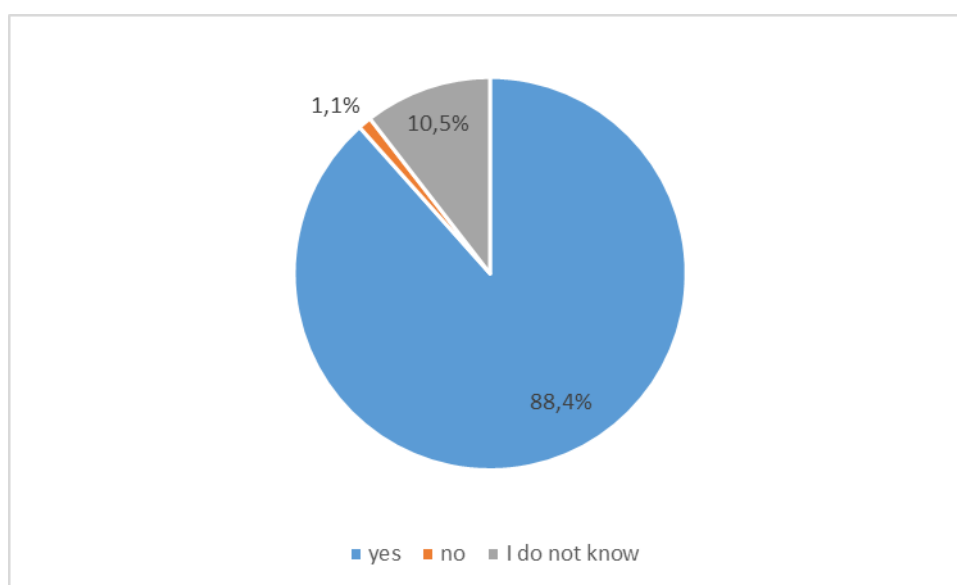
During this research were used various methods, such as secondary data analysis, which consist of analysis of professional resources of the topic. Others research methods which we used was survey and analysis of the results of questionnaire survey. The questionnaire survey was done in the Czech language and it was given in paper form and it was also published in google form. 354 university students attended the research – 211 women (59.6 %) and 143 men (40.4 %). They are studying at the Law Faculty of Charles University. Most of the respondents (60.7 %) study their 2nd year of Master’s cycle.

3 Results

In the research we wanted to find out how much are soft skills important for the successful work of future lawyers. Unlike from the research of Rhode (2013) we gained very different results. The most of students 88.4 % wrote that soft skills are important for theirs future career and just 1.1 % of students think that soft skills are not important for theirs career,

which shows figure 1, which is below. This finding is significant, because students at Faculty of Law have not attended the course of soft skills, and even though they have not had this course, they realise the importance of soft skills. This outcome shows that nowadays more people know how important soft skills are for their work.

Fig. 1: Importance of soft skills for students at Faculty of Law



Source: Own research, 2019.

The research dealt also with the managing of conflicts. Students had to rate how good they are in managing conflicts. Almost 56 % of students rated themselves by the highest grades 4 and 5, which is possible to see in tab. 1.

Tab. 1: How students manage theirs conflicts (cooperation, "cool head", more intellect than emotions) (1 the worst – 5 the best)

Degree of managing conflicts	%	Numbers of answers
1	2.0	7
2	16.1	57
3	26.0	92
4	42.1	149
5	13.8	49

Source: Own research, 2019.

Surprisingly just 12.4 % of students obtained bad grade 1 and 2 in negation. More than half of respondents, (52 %) believe that they are good in negotiation. 35.6 % of students

evaluated their negotiation skills as an average. The more detailed results is possible to see in tab. 2.

Tab. 2: Degree of ability of negotiation (1 the worst – 5 the best)

Degree of ability of negotiation	%	Numbers of answers
1	2.8	10
2	9.6	34
3	35.6	126
4	37.9	134
5	14.1	50

Source: Own research, 2019.

Another part of research was to find out if students are able to recognize time thieves and if they are able to reduce them. By the research was find out that more than half students (52.3 %), are able to recognize time thieves and they also know how to reduce them. Just 8 % of students do not know the time thieves and have problems with managing their time as shows tab. 3 below.

Tab. 3: Ability to recognize time thieves and reduce time thieves

Answers	%	Numbers of answers
Yes, I know and know how to reduce them	52.3	185
Yes, I know but I can't reduce them	41.2	146
Yes, I know the time thief, I know how to reduce some of them, but not all time thieves I am able to reduce	2.8	10
No, I don't know the time thieves, but I don't have a problems with time management	1.4	5
No, I don't know the time thieves, and I have a problems managing my time	2.3	8

Source: Own research, 2019.

By the research, we wanted to find out if students are able to identify the right strategy. Around 64.7 % of students (47.7 % obtained grade 4.17 % obtained grade 5) think, that they are able to identify the right strategy. Surprisingly just around 7.9 % think, that they are not able to identify the right strategy.

For the lawyers is not just important to find the right strategy, but it is also important to know the leadership rules so they can follow them and they can become leader. 50.6 % of students think that they are able to lead a team very well. Just 18.9 % of students think that they are not able to lead a team very well. This finding is surprising because most of the respondents (97.2 %) are full time student, so they do not have experience how to lead the team. 30.5 % respondents think that they have average leadership skills. Also, why this finding is astonishing, is that just 2.5 % of respondents, which shows tab. 4, really know very well the leadership rules. So by these finding arises question, whether they had not overestimated theirs leadership skills.

Tab. 4: Knowledge of leadership rules (1 the worst - 5 the best)

Answers	%	Numbers of answers
1	17.5 %	62
2	23 %	82
3	28.8 %	102
4	28.0 %	99
5	2.5 %	9

Source: Own research, 2019.

The research also examined which kind of soft skills students possess. Students had to mark all the soft skills, which they have or think to have. The most students are independent; they are able to cooperate and are good in critical self-reflection. At least they think that, but with some finding, for example the ability of leadership, we could polemize with this. The more detailed results shows tab. 5.

Tab. 5: Overview of soft skills, which students are able to control

Answers	%	Numbers of answers
independence	79.0%	280
ability to cooperate	77.6%	275
critical self-reflection - self-reflection – i.e. monitoring and evaluating your own work and taking further steps	76.9%	272
communication skills verbal	75.5%	267

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listening and receiving feedback	71.3%	252
diligence – willingness to work	71.3%	252
improving skills, willingness to learn new things	70.6%	250
social empathy – the ability to empathize with others	62.9%	223
organization skills – especially the ability to plan your time (but also employee time, production process, etc.)	58.0%	205
negotiation	54.5%	193
the ability to accept criticism	53.1%	188
ability to adapt and accept change and flexibility	53.1%	188
nonverbal communication skills	51.0%	181
conflict prevention and management	51.0%	181
performance – not only the willingness to perform, but also the performance itself is related to experience	49.7%	176
self-management	49.0%	173
complex thinking – linking partial knowledge to the whole	49.0%	173
structured thinking to identify, understand, and solve a problem	48.3%	171
coping with stress	46.9%	166
foresight	46.2%	164
openness – ego self-presentation (presentation of own opinions without too much shyness)	46.2%	164
ability to give constructive criticism (clear message on what needs to be improved and propose ways to do it)	45.5%	161
teamwork – to be neither too active nor too low	45.5%	161
assertive behaviour, assertiveness	44,8%	159
leadership skills	44.1%	156
risk appetite – the courage to try a new but not powerless commitment to the current, be prepared, not risk blind	44.1%	156
team management	44.1%	156
creativity – development, change, new innovative practices	42.7%	151
stress resistance	42.0%	149
providing feedback	39.9%	141
thinking by analogy (linked to learning and linking knowledge from a variety of areas to new contexts)	36.4%	129
structural thinking – break into the system structure, do not get lost in individual steps	36.4%	129
strategic thinking or conceptual thinking (ability to think up a strategy)	35.7%	126
influencing people or selling skills	24.5%	87
team building	23.8%	84
contacts – the ability to reach the right people at the right time (customers, colleagues, superiors,...)	23.8%	84

entrepreneurial thinking, decision-making in terms of uncertainty, understanding of market patterns, etc.	21.7%	77
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Source: Own research, 2019.

Conclusion

By the research was found out that the most of students (88.4 %) think that soft skills are important for theirs future career. By the research was found out that 52 % of students think that they are good in managing conflicts, just 2 % of them rated theirs ability of managing conflicts very bad. More than 52 % of students rated themselves by grade 4 and 5 (5 was the best grade of ability to lead successfully negotiation. 35.6 % of students think that they ability in negotiation is average. Just 12.4 % of students think that they are bad in negotiation.

The second part of research considered the level of knowledge of soft skills, because especially for lawyers some of soft skills are crucial. One of this skill is communication. In the research, we wanted to find out the level of verbal and nonverbal communication. By the research, we found out that just 8 % of students think that they are perfect in verbal communication. 53 % of students rated theirs ability in verbal communication as very good. The good result is that just 2 % of future lawyers assess theirs verbal communication as insufficient. 8.3 % of students think that the level of theirs nonverbal communication is perfect. 42 % of students evaluated theirs nonverbal communication as average and 32.8 % of students think that theirs nonverbal communication is very good. 16.1 % of students evaluated theirs nonverbal communication as sufficient. The positive fact is, that just 0.8 % of respondents wrote, that theirs nonverbal communication is insufficient.

The research also considered the level of presentation skills. Just 9.6 % of students believe that they are perfect in presentations. 39.3 % of students evaluated theirs presentations skills as very good. 35.6 % of students think that they are average skills in presentations. What we find as a positive fact is, that just 1.4 % of students think, that they are really bad in presentations. The rest of students (14.1 %) assessed theirs presentations skills as sufficient.

The third part of research examined what kind of soft skills students would like to master. Most of the students wrote they would like to improve with managing stress; they would like to be more assertive and better in negotiation.

When we compare the results of our research with research of Rhode (2013), we got different results. We found out that students do not have lacking in soft skills and they know that soft skills are important for theirs future career.

Based on the analysis of the gained results from research, was created and accredited a new course of Soft Skills for Lawyers at the Faculty of Law in the Charles University. The most of students would like to learn how to manage stress and to learn how to be more assertive and be better in negotiation. In addition, students have another problem have with the skills in presentations and some have problems with verbal and nonverbal communication. Just 8 % students believe that theirs verbal communication is perfect. According to these results, students, who will pass this course, will learn how to be more assertive. They will also learn how they should present, and how to improve their skills in verbal communication and how to influence others by nonverbal communication, which has bigger impact on others than verbal communication. Because people get information by words just by 7 %, by voice intonation, it is 38 % and by body language, it is 55 %, which is important at the court, when the judge make decision about granting and punishment. Students will also learn in this course how to manage conflicts, they will learn about the strategy, which is the best to use in which type of conflict.

By a new course which was created and accredited will students have better skills, which they will use in theirs future career.

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