Future of Soft kills

cegos

BEYOND KNOWLEDGE*

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To tackle the changes happening in the world of work, it is now vital for companies to step up the pace of their teams' skills development. How can organisations anticipate and ease in these far-reaching changes, rather than simply dealing with the consequences?

Current advances in technology are challenging employees' entire skills set, including technical, behavioural and line-of-business skills.

Under these circumstances, we will have to define and construct the framework necessary for man and machine to work together intelligently and efficiently. At Cegos we have three fundamental beliefs about this:

- *We firmly believe that, as technologies progress, the strictly human aspects of work and the skills they entail will steadily grow in importance.*

- *We have long known and seen first-hand that human interaction is crucial for deep-seated learning.*

- *In a world where it will be increasingly necessary to learn and train efficiently on an ongoing basis, our job is to embed the skills that will help engage learners and ensure that their training is effective and has a lasting impact.*

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From French origins, the Cegos Group has always been a key observer and dedicated player in the world of work and business, leading to its international culture.

As a European and global leader in learning and development, **Cegos is a source of major innovation, advising and supporting companies in their plans to transform and grow, and advancing the personal and professional development of individuals worldwide.**

Boosting learners' employability and the collective performance of its customers, Cegos brings them much more than knowledge.

Turnkey and Tailored Learning Solutions

Blended and Digital Learning

Managed Training Services

Over **250,000** people trained each year

50 countries covered worldwide

1,000 employees

20,000 client companies

€200 million in revenue

Is the world of work changing?
The skills revolution is under way!

As early as 2016, the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report predicted that 5 million jobs would be lost by 2020 and replaced by artificial intelligence, robots etc. Over the same period, it also predicted that 2.1 million new jobs would be created, that would require IT, maths, network architecture, and engineering skills. The report showed that **growth areas for employment all require strong social skills**, and that highly specialised, single-skillset jobs are in decline.

In September 2017, a report by the Conseil d'Orientation pour l'Emploi (COE) examined the impact of automation and digitisation on workplace skills. The report showed that *"three skills groups should all be mobilised in an economy which has been radically changed by the convergence of artificial intelligence and big data"*:

- **Specialist technological skills;**
- **New technical skills,** which are required in addition to more traditional skills in each job category;
- "**Cross-cutting**" **skills,** which, according to the COE, include good general knowledge, social skills (teamwork, social intelligence, etc.) and situational skills (autonomy, learning to learn).

In its "Future of the Workplace" report published in 2018, McKinsey estimates that, by 2030, demand for technological skills (digital, programming and IT skills) will climb by 55%, that requirements for social and emotional skills (leadership, management, entrepreneurial skills, etc.) will increase by 24% and that demand for highly cognitive abilities (such as creativity or complex information processing) will grow by 8%.

While these studies all point to the impact of technology, **it would be too simplistic to believe that digital technology is the only game changer when it comes to skills.**

Our world is changing before our eyes; whether through new relationships to work, the search for meaningful work, the development of collective intelligence or global awareness of the fragility of environmental ecosystems. These deep changes are having a strong impact on the forms of employment and job content. They are encouraging workers to change job field and company several times over the course of their career.

These fundamental changes mean that everyone needs to be constantly learning in order to adapt to the fluctuations and modifications of their job, their profession or their work environment.
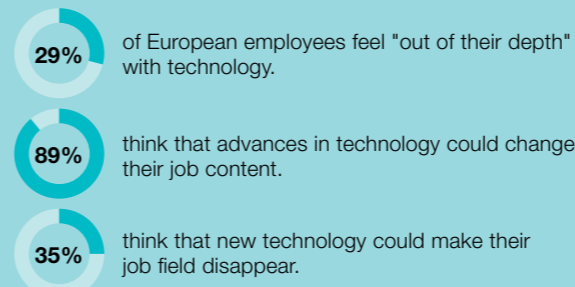
Impact of technology and key skills for the future:
what companies are saying about it

Every year Cegos conducts a barometer survey to ask organisations and employees about their goals and challenges, their expectations and their professional training practices.

The 2018 barometer survey, entitled "Transformation, skills and learning: how to address the future?" polled 2,227 employees and 316 HR directors and managers in private-sector companies in Germany, Spain, France, the United Kingdom and Italy.

How new technology will impact employment and human resources

Employees' viewpoint

29% of European employees feel "out of their depth" with technology.

89% think that advances in technology could change their job content.

35% think that new technology could make their job field disappear.

HR Directors and managers' viewpoint

89% of European HR directors and managers believe technology will have an impact on HR management in their organisation.

53% think that their organisation will be faced with the emergence of new job fields.

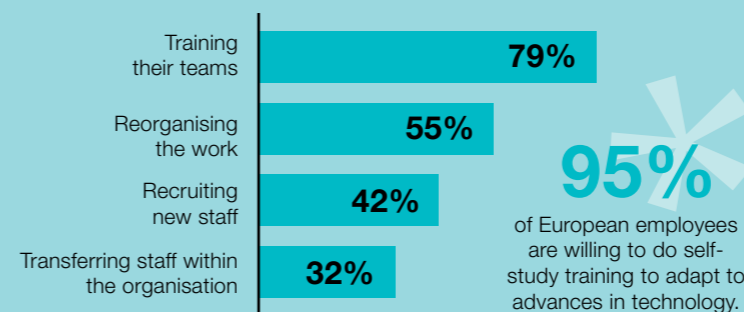**45%** think that advances in technology will create jobs.

Companies' efforts to anticipate these impacts are not always visible to their employees

- **87%** of the HR managers polled say they have started looking into the impact of technology advances on job fields and skills.
- Only **59%** of employees believe their company is currently taking steps to anticipate the impact of new technologies on employment and jobs.

All agree that training is the main factor for adjusting to these changes

HR Departments plan to cope with these changes by:

Training their teams	**79%**
Reorganising the work	**55%**
Recruiting new staff	**42%**
Transferring staff within the organisation	**32%**

95% of European employees are willing to do self-study training to adapt to advances in technology.

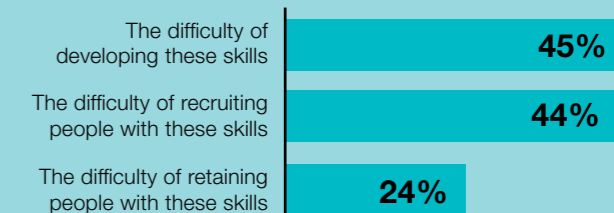### Developing a learning culture that is a perfect fit with the business

For the human resources managers polled, the lead role in mapping out the necessary changes lies with the HR Director (74%) more than senior company management (55%).

What European HR directors see as the key skills for the future

As they see it, their company's employees should start by acquiring the following behavioural skills:

Agility and adaptability	**49%**
Learning to learn	**45%**
Efficient work organisation	**41%**

24% of HR Directors are facing a shortage of key skills, for a number of reasons:

The difficulty of developing these skills	**45%**
The difficulty of recruiting people with these skills	**44%**
The difficulty of retaining people with these skills	**24%**

Mathilde Bourdat, in charge of the "Training" expertise at Cegos Group explains:

"Today, international studies are predicting far-reaching changes in employment in the very near future. Future work, whether salaried or not, will call for at once in-depth expertise, a knowledge of technology that allows employees to grasp the reasoning and the requirements of other actors in the system, and cross-cutting skills such as: general knowledge, interpersonal skills and context-specific skills.

To prepare people for this sweeping change, we believe the best answer lies in a set of three skills: cross-functional working, cooperation and empowerment. These three notions are central to the organisation of work in new-world companies."

Softskills : what are we talking about?

It is almost impossible to define "soft skills" with any degree of precision, since their scope is constantly evolving with developments in the world of work and, in particular, the economy's shift to digital.

It is, however, possible to start by explaining what soft skills are not. First of all, they are not a person's inherent qualities or personality traits. For example, while courage is a quality, the ability to take risks is a skill that can be acquired and honed.

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In an article published on the French website ladn.eu, organisational psychologist Cécile Jarleton underlines the risks of a tendency in Human Resources Departments to confuse personality traits, emotional state and behavioural skills as the same thing. By defining that aspects of soft skills *"sometimes stem from people's innermost being, the result is that we expect our employees to have standardised personalities."*

Especially as existing studies cannot prove the connection between personality traits and performance: *"By trying to 'measure' personality, we are using the wrong criteria. We are looking at what people are, when the important issue is what they do. It's totally unconscious, but this bias exists."*

Once this risk has been revealed, we can also associate soft skills with other, similar concepts. Some experts are more inclined to talk about "smart skills". Others, even today, prefer to talk about "mad skills": to keep up with constant changes in the economic and legislative environment, companies are caught up in a process of continual evolution, leading them to take in a growing number of non-typical profiles, capable of coming up with disruptive ideas and spreading a culture of collective intelligence.

Let's attempt, nevertheless, to give a simple definition of soft skills:

In contrast to hard skills, which are skills that require technical and methodological competence, **soft skills can be defined as behavioural skills. They are a set of interpersonal, situational and emotional abilities that help the company and its people cope with the complexity and unpredictability of the world around them.**

A constantly evolving concept

Soft skills first emerged as a field of study in the 1950s in the United States, before catching on in Europe in the 1970s. Since then, the field has been steadily gaining traction in the area of training and development.

Soft skills are spreading in three directions:

- **They are entering the mainstream:** initially reserved for top management teams, they now concern the entire workforce.

- **The range of soft skills required across the board is expanding:** driven by increasingly rapid changes in work organisation since the advent of the digital age.

- **The required level of proficiency is rising:** employees are now required not only to be aware of soft skills but also to put them into practice in a growing number of operational situations.

For organisations: a major competitiveness driver

Faced with an increasingly unstable micro- and macro-environment, the highest-performing companies and organisations are the ones that:

Have a strategy of empowering their employees:

they set up an organisation that will build each employee's autonomy, initiative and empowerment. These organisational arrangements are behind the success of start-ups and agile companies, enabling them to adapt more quickly, deliver better service to their customers and boost their employees' productivity.

Take full advantage of the diversity of their employees' profiles:

complementary skills sets, non-typical personalities capable of thinking outside the box, along with more traditional profiles in line with the company's values. The ability of each employee to work with a variety of profiles and incorporate new ideas is a major driver for creativity, adaptability and performance.

According to research conducted by the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland, **soft skills are one the five factors with the greatest impact on a company's success**, alongside the spirit of enterprise, competitiveness, investment and innovation.

The benefits of soft skills reported by various studies and surveys corroborate these findings. They include, for example, **faster adoption of new work practices**, the **greater talent retention**, thanks to easier mobility at every level of the company, and **kept deadlines**, thanks to more collaborative work processes.

Lastly, **while the advent of artificial intelligence is challenging technical skills, it is also enhancing the value of soft skills, i.e. everything that AI is (as yet) unable to achieve**.

For learners: a decisive factor in employability and attractiveness

In the current context described above, **soft skills have become the most sought-after assets in the eyes of recruiters, ahead of technical skills and line-of-business expertise**. Companies need **people who are more agile and adaptable to cope with changes in the market. The talent war is also part of the explanation for the importance of soft skills** in recruitment criteria. As companies have to work harder to retain talented people, it is in their best interests to focus on the right people, i.e. candidates whose soft skills will be a long-term match with the company.

Soft skills also contribute to well-being in the workplace and have a knock-on effect on workers' individual work/life balance. They increase resistance to stress, help employees find personal fulfilment in their work, and can be carried over into their private life. Therefore, it is in every employee's best interest to take the lead role in building their capital of soft skills.

In an opinion piece published in the French daily newspaper Les Echos in October 2018 under the title *"Les métiers n'existent plus, nous sommes tous des ensembles de compétences"*, Bénédicte de Raphélis Soissan, the founder and CEO of Clustree, an HR referral platform for career development and recruitment, explains that:

> *Although the industry approach is still local, skills need to be global. Skills bust the silos that keep a group's teams and entities separate. Most importantly, they enable employees to keep growing. In the past, we defined a person by their job field. But in the future, we firmly believe that we'll define people by a set of skills, knowledge and natural affinities. The job title won't matter anymore. Skills will be the centre of interest. Everything else - internal mobility, career paths, training and compensation - will revolve around them."*

Seven key skills areas
for the future

1 **Remote collaboration**

In increasingly networked organisations, where teams are multiform, adaptable, remote and sometimes multicultural, and where virtual communities and social networks are taking over from vertical organisations, being able to collaborate and cooperate at a distance is crucial. This calls for strong interpersonal skills, proficiency in the use of collaboration tools, a good control of several languages and an awareness of multicultural differences.

2 **Digital communication**

When someone mentions "digital technology", we immediately think of the tools and media involved, rather than what we actually do with them. While being a proficient user is essential, it is not enough. What we call "digital literacy" involves three complementary skills:
- Searching, accessing, sorting, filtering and synthesising the relevant information in a critical, systematic way,
- Producing self-generated content that contributes real added value for others, that goes beyond just sharing,
- Producing and publishing suitable multimedia content.

3 **Agility and adaptability**

The growing fragmentary nature of career paths already lead us to develop a broadly transferable set of expertise, knowledge and experience. We will increasingly have to adapt to a variety of changes. Our agility and ability to lead change will then be a key success factor. This implies developing great tolerance for uncertainty and new ideas, acquiring knowledge in several disciplines, and a great penchant for ongoing change.

4 **Creativity and sense of innovation**

Creativity is the ability to bring fresh outlooks to situations. It implies being open to new forms of ideas and experiences (cultural, artistic or professional). It can be developed by becoming a proficient user of the tools that foster creativity, whether individual or collective (questioning, experimenting, etc.) and by an environment that favours coming up with new ideas and spending time on them.

5 **Spirit of initiative and enterprise**

Now more than ever, what we do will depend on us. Freedom of enterprise, both within and outside organisations, has never been so great. An individual's ability to turn ideas into actions requires great motivation (enthusiasm is the most powerful driver for action), an ability to take risks and manage projects with a view to achieving one's goals.

6 **Efficient work organisation**

The proliferation of unproductive communication, the growing mass of information, various distractions and the diversity of projects to be conducted simultaneously already force us to become extremely productive in our own work in order to achieve our objectives. This is especially true in three areas:
- Time is and will remain in short supply. Today everyone needs to be on top of best practices in time management and priority setting.
- Good management of your work environment, whether remote or at the office, offline or online, should give everyone streamlined access to all of the current issues.
- It is important to take every opportunity to automate routine tasks, using the various applications available or developed by yourself.

7 **Learning to learn**

We should all be setting aside at least 20% of our working time for sharpening our skills to remain employable and trying to stick to those required by the changing job market. To do so, people have to develop a culture of self-guided learning and devise a learning strategy within our ecosystem (company, networks, training institutions and communities).

We acquire soft skills by putting them into practice, when the time is right, with other people: it's a learning process!

Developing cross-business skills means making new habits, which can sometimes run against the grain of deeply-rooted behaviours and beliefs. Soft skills differ from hard skills in that it takes more than an understanding of how they work to master them. **To acquire soft skills, learners must first become aware of their behaviour and its impacts, accept to change, then let time and practice do the rest.**

Soft skills are acquired with other people's help

What triggers a change of world view or belief? **The individual needs to be confronted with other people whose world views and beliefs differ from theirs**. They need well-meaning, sincere feedback on the impact of their current behaviour patterns. They need to try out new practices in a protected, risk-free context in order to monitor how effective they are. This is what is known as **socio-cognitive conflict**.

Fully asynchronous training solutions are not ideal for this, but **models that revolve around testing and feedback** help learners become aware of the impact of their behaviour in their relationships, on collective effectiveness and the operational outcome.

This is also what the Cegos 2018 European Barometer Survey shows: when it comes to skills development, the employees polled were apparently more open to ATAWAD (i.e. "anytime, anywhere, any device") solutions than their HR managers. They prefer to learn in a classroom context (training, coaching or peer learning), where they can interact with other learners and where classes are designed as periods when employees are available to learn. Otherwise, their preference goes to solutions that enable employees to learn when they need to (using online resources, for example).
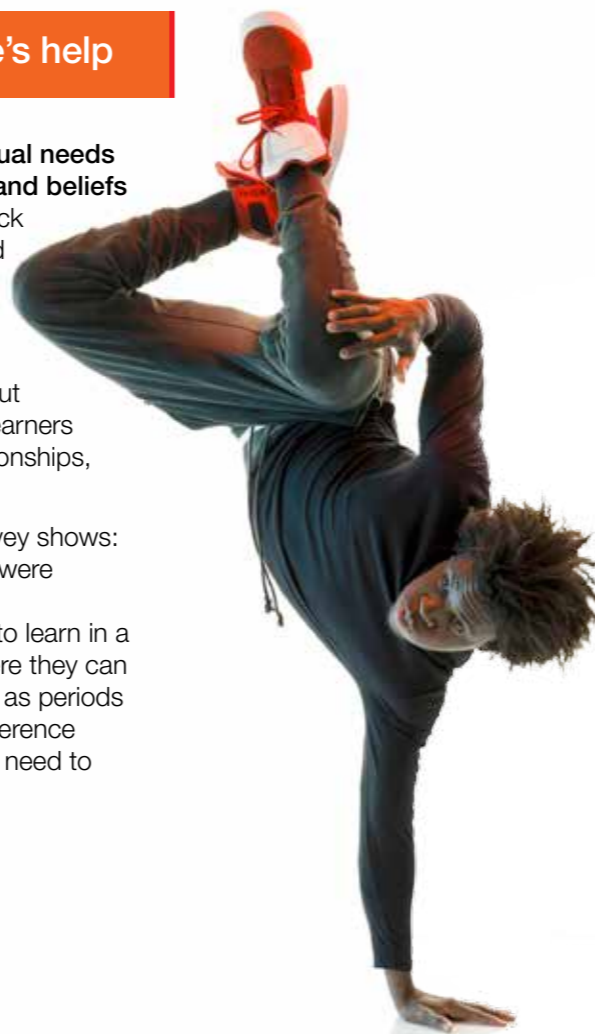
Soft skills are acquired with use

A distinction needs to be made here between **awareness raising** and **acquiring effective "on the job" proficiency.**

Awareness raising and acquisition of the basics

Traditional training sessions based on experience and practising in groups help learners acquire the basics. Not everything will be remembered, or be transferred to the workplace, but it is a first step towards the learner's initial grasp of a few basic and favourable practices.

The efficiency of these training sessions can be reinforced thanks to innovative learning methods or digital aids. For example, learning time can be optimised by using methods that make each minute a learning experience. Another example is the use of virtual reality to recreate a realistic working environment in the training room. Putting the lessons learned into practice helps the learner experience stronger emotions, which in turn help anchor the best practices in the learner's memory.

Acquiring real "on the job" professional proficiency

It takes an average of 60 repetitions to form a new habit. This means that, in order to become an automatic mechanism, a new practice has to be solidly anchored in the learner's working life.

It begins with placing the learner in an enabling environment that provides opportunities to make use of the new practice. This is not enough, though **to prevent old habits from gaining the upper hand, the learner has to be guided and supported**. This support can take a variety of forms:

- **Support from the tutor or manager**,
- **Support from peers:** made easier today by corporate social networks. These systems work well when there is an established community of practice,
- **A digital reinforcement programme:** which guides and supports the learner as they take their first steps.

Regarding this last point on digital learning as reinforcement, the aim is not just to remind learners of the key concepts or methods. Rather, it is to **help learners change the way they see the professional situations they encounter**, encourage them to take concrete action by changing their habits, and help them practice until the good habits become automatic. Depending on the skill to be acquired, there can be a number of coexisting systems:

- **Guidance and support that prompts daily action by providing multiple opportunities for transfer:** a method will be broken down into micro-actions that are more frequently applicable on an everyday basis. These micro-reflexes are then gradually assembled until the whole method can be applied.
- **A practice module** that the learner can "act out" a number of times.
- **Step-by-step guidance and support** to prepare learners prior to a randomly-occurring event.
- **A system of posting proofs so that the learner can receive feedback from peers** (or from the manager, if applicable). On a platform, learners post their achievements, which are then analysed by their peers, using a precise debriefing table.

Soft skills are acquired when the time is right, with exponential effectiveness

The right time to acquire soft skills that are going to overturn established habits is when the learner is ready to accept them.

In a constantly changing environment, new needs can emerge at any time.

Providing training opportunities as soon as possible after a need has been identified is crucial but it does consequently imply changing the process for obtaining training time. If training plans are drawn up after the annual performance appraisals, there is often a 12 to 18-month delay before the learner can actually receive the training they need. There are a number of ways to work around this problem:

- **Write training plans into projects,**
- **Provide a digital resource library,**
- **Set up a subscription system:** whereby each employee has a training entitlement that they can activate as and when they wish. Employees can then identify the classroom or virtual classroom sessions that suit and register on their own initiative.

Developing soft skills is a long process that consists of successive layers.

Some concepts can only be understood and "lived out" if it has been possible to open certain doors beforehand, or if the learner can link them to prior personal experience. Training sessions, and in particular "ahead-of-time" sessions, can fulfil this role by giving the learner these opportunities.

The boost to soft-skills development will then reward the efforts made at the outset.

While the initial awareness-training sessions yield measured results, **the further the learner progresses along their development path, the faster they learn.**

At the same time, **how should companies go about developing soft skills when the learner does not feel particular need for them? This is where guidance and support methods prove to be very useful**, by associating soft skills with the learner's career path, skills maps (i.e. the soft skills required for certain types of job) and/or customised skills assessments (which focus on a specific skill and itemise the various behaviours observed).

These systems can be used to personalise training paths to meet the company's requirements and also match the learner's experience, background, needs and wants. They do not guarantee the learner's motivation but lower the risks of the learner losing motivation and becoming discouraged. They also help ensure that the training is provided "at the right time".
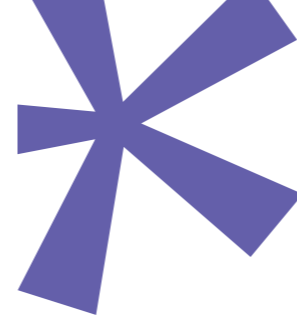
The #UP collection

#skills #onthejob #interactive #digital

The future belongs to those who will be able to mobilise soft skills. Leadership skills, project management skills, communication skills – the kind of skills technology cannot replace.

Whether people need to increase productivity, use time more efficiently or understand how to manage a remote team, **the #UP experience makes it happen.**

Thanks to the #UP skills acquisition programmes created by Cegos, each learner:
- Gain and apply new skills directly transferred on the workplace
- Do it at their own pace own pace, guided by a tutor, a coach or their line manager… and also thanks to the experience shared with peers.
- Is guided at every step of the program to apply their skills, reflect on the experience and improve their performance, immediately and for the future.

#UP | Focus on results - 1 to 1 coaching - Tutor support - Manager engagement
International and multi-language - Off-the-shelf - Anytime, Any place, Any device - Certificate

The #UP programme: a simple and effective process

1. Set up
Sign in to LearningHub@Cegos to access the schedule, course materials, daily challenges and implementation journal.

2. Personalise and learn
- Choice of 2 learning sprints
- A programme "energiser" to keep the user focused and on track.
- E-coaching during the process and discussions with the line manager.

3. Live session
A virtual workshop to consolidate learning and share experiences with peers.

4. Coaching
1 to 1 sessions with a coach to collect and share evidence of implementation as well as results.

5. Certification
Downloadable implementation journal issued to show evidence of results achieved in the workplace.

For more information:
cegos.fr/the-up-skills-acquisition-collection

cegos.com

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