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Soft Skills: Essential Tools for People-Centered Resilience

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Letter to the Editor

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Dear Editor,

This letter addresses the question of the average time interval between the onset of a critical situation and the initiation of the response phase. Furthermore, it examines which psychological factors are associated with accelerating the transition from crisis onset to the commencement of adaptive and effective responses in individuals.

Crises, at both individual and societal levels, are defined as situations that disrupt the normal flow of life, exposing individuals and communities to intense psychosocial pressures and critical decision-making processes (1).

According to the World Health Organization, a crisis is an event characterized by damage and destruction that creates needs exceeding a community's response capacity, severely disrupts public health, and necessitates the provision of essential healthcare services to affected populations, particularly vulnerable groups. However, the time interval between the onset of a crisis and the initiation of an effective response is not constant; rather, it is significantly influenced by individuals' psychological and social capacities.

The pattern of crisis response varies among individuals: some rapidly enter a phase of instability, whereas others exhibit delayed reactions or initial denial (2).

In such situations, possessing specialized knowledge or physical resources alone is insufficient for an effective response. Instead, cognitive processes, emotion regulation, decision-making under pressure, and social interactions play decisive roles in determining the quality and speed of individual reactions.

In 2025, digitalization, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), and hybrid management models are reshaping workplace priorities. The role of managers in increasingly dynamic environments has become more complex, and although hard skills remain essential, soft skills provide the foundation for effective performance. Indeed, many business leaders identify these skills as key drivers of organizational success (3).

In this regard, such competencies are also highly relevant in crisis contexts, where rapid and adaptive responses are required.

Life in the twenty-first century requires individuals to assume multiple roles—as workers, parents, citizens, and consumers—in rapidly changing environments. Recognizing this need, business, political, and educational leaders increasingly advocate for the development of competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration, commonly referred to as “twenty-first-century skills” or “soft skills” (4).

The term “soft skills” broadly refers to a complex set of personal attributes that enable individuals to become effective and constructive members of organizations (6). These skills encompass interpersonal abilities and personality traits that facilitate effective interaction with

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others and successful navigation of complex social environments. Unlike hard skills, which involve specific technical competencies, soft skills are more nuanced and highly transferable across occupations and industries (6).

Soft skills are non-technical, industry-independent competencies that can be applied across a wide range of professions and tasks. They include interpersonal and "people" skills that enable individuals to function effectively within groups and organizations (5). Examples include critical thinking, emotional intelligence, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, time management, adaptability, conscientiousness, and communication skills (7). In contrast, hard skills consist of specialized knowledge and technical abilities associated with particular professions or roles (6).

A core set of personality traits and soft skills is essential for effective crisis management. Although these attributes are present to varying degrees in all individuals, they can—and should—be strengthened through deliberate practice and development (7).

Soft skills comprise a set of behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal competencies that enable individuals to communicate effectively, regulate emotions and stress, make sound decisions under complex conditions, and respond flexibly and creatively to challenges.

These competencies play a pivotal role in achieving success in both personal and professional domains and are particularly important for fostering adaptive responses during crises. Individuals with stronger soft skills are more likely to transition rapidly from the initial shock of a crisis to active, goal-directed engagement. Consequently, soft skills may directly contribute to reducing the time interval between crisis onset and the initiation of an effective response.

Unlike hard skills, which are often technology- or task-dependent, soft skills are rooted in individuals' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral patterns. Within the field of crisis management, the development of these competencies is essential for empowering communities and strengthening people-centered resilience. Investment in soft-skill training not only enhances the effectiveness of specialized interventions but also contributes significantly to reducing vulnerability and promoting sustainable societal resilience.

In their systematic literature review, Zahn et al. (2025) reported that although the term "soft skills" is widely used, no universally accepted definition or definitive list of such skills exists. Nevertheless, soft skills are generally described as transversal competencies that can be applied across diverse contexts and occupations, distinguishing them from hard skills, which are specific to particular tasks or roles. The authors identified more than forty significant soft skills in the literature, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, stress management, problem-solving and decision-making, time management, adaptability, effective communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity (8).

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