



# Micro-videos and micro-behaviors as an innovative methodology for training in soft skills

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*Abstract:* - In the last 20 years- specially after Daniel Goleman published the best-seller book in Emotional Intelligence-, corporations and business schools have agreed that soft skills are very important, and people need leadership, teamwork, presentation capabilities, etc. Therefore, these types of skills are already part of the academic curriculum. However, this does not mean that students effectively assimilate and develop all the soft skills they need. We propose a completely different method for implementing soft skills, based in content (emotional skills), technology using micro-videos), pedagogy (practicing micro-behaviors) and blended learning (professor as coacher). There is practical evidence that this is very effective in businesses and therefore could be implemented in universities and business schools, to prepare effectively students when they begin working in a turbulent environment characterized by radical change due to globalization and digital transformation.

*Key-Words:* - emotional intelligence – micro-videos – micro-behaviors – emotional skills – soft skills.

## 1 Introduction

Since 1995 when the best-selling book “Emotional intelligence” of Daniel Goleman was published, the academic and business world seem to have almost unanimously agreed that emotional intelligence is as important- or more- than cognitive intelligence. One may expect that after 23 years, emotional intelligence would be a common subject in universities and business schools, as well as in businesses. But this is not the case:

- a. Yale is one of the very few Universities in the USA that has firmly established the subject of emotional intelligence in the academic curricula. Research on MBA students at the Western Reserve University [1] show that emotional competencies can be developed but not with a typical MBA curriculum. Other examples of business schools prove that it is more an exception than a rule (ESADE in Spain, Lancaster University in UK), and that it is applied more in postgraduate studies than in graduate university courses.
- b. There have been more initiatives in primary education schools, where emotional intelligence and the concept of multiple intelligences of Gardner have been included into many school vision statements. Many researches prove a positive impact [2].
- c. Emotional intelligence has not gained momentum in business training and is not a common course to be found in the agenda of the Human Resource Directors.

In our opinion, there are six main reasons that may explain this situation:

1. Academic research has placed most of its efforts in proving the scientific foundations of emotional intelligence, and how it can be measured... and very little in how to implement it in practice.
2. Universities and businesses do not have a clear concept of what emotional intelligence is. Most cannot distinguish between leadership and soft skills vs emotional intelligence: they think they are equivalent.
3. Few companies have invested in emotional intelligence courses, and there is a lack of a sufficient number of success cases that can motivate other companies to follow.

4. Psychological terminology not translated to the business world. This does not help companies to understand the benefits of emotional intelligence. The most used terms in emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills and motivation... which are difficult to mentally translate into specific business advantages.
5. Failure to understand that emotional intelligence cannot be “taught” in the same way as cognitive or technical content. Emotional intelligence requires changing habits, attitudes and behaviors, and these cannot be changed just by understanding the concepts, regardless of how clearly, they are explained.
6. Intangible and difficult to measure. It is easy to train and measure the result of cognitive and technical courses... and much more difficult to train and measure the results of emotional skills training.

## 2 Problem Formulation

At the same time, during the last fifteen years, the business environment has changed radically: globalization and digital transformation are changing the rules of competition. Start-ups are disrupting well established businesses and whole sectors are being turned upside down. The rate of change is accelerating and has never been so demanding. Individual emotional capabilities tap the organization’s emotional energy, which represents one of the most poorly understood and underexploited internal capabilities. Emotional capabilities can facilitate radical change in an organizational level [3]. In this context, business is increasingly needing employees with soft skills suitable for this new situation:

- a. Positive thinking. Optimism is key to accepting risk, and change involves risk-taking decisions.
- b. Resilience to stress. Do not expect people with low self-esteem to resist setbacks easily or to withstand high levels of uncertainty.
- c. Empathy. This is critical to understand new customer needs, work with peers and do collaborative work in an increasingly diversified and multicultural workplace. Without people with strong empathy skills, functional silos will not disappear.
- d. Teamwork and collaboration. People do not necessarily know how to be open-minded and relate themselves with others in a positive way.

Here we have a strong paradox: businesses have never needed so many “soft skills” from their employees, which in practice they do not have- at least in the level needed. Most of these soft skills are emotional skills, directly related to emotional intelligence. Now that awareness seems to increase in businesses that soft skills are a critical necessity...the problem is that there is no clear method to increase the emotional skills of people. Universities and business schools, which have to be designed to cover business needs, are not preparing students in having the emotional skills the businesses require.

## 3 Problem Solution

If businesses increasingly demand employees with soft skills, universities and business schools need to train their students in soft skills- in order to work and deliver results in a global and ever-changing environment. But traditional methods are unable to respond to this need:

- a. Traditional classes where a teacher explains the subject and the students listen and understand is good for technical knowhow, not for habit forming.
- b. Innovating teaching methods such as “business cases” or “flipped classroom” make classes more interactive and entertaining, but this does not form habits either.
- c. Leadership, communication, change management and other similar subjects do not directly nor completely cover the soft skills needed, as they are more cognitive-based.

A new methodology is required to train students in emotional skills and enable them to acquire habits, attitudes and behaviors that businesses needs. Technical know-how is given and expected: relational skills are necessary and not so easy to find. It is a real differentiator.

We propose a new methodology that could allow students to acquire emotional skills, and which is based in combining the following six elements:

1. Content: The soft skills that businesses need should be based in the concept of “emotional skills” [4] instead of psychological definitions based in emotional intelligence. Depending on the authors, there are between 18 and 21 emotional skills, among them: persuasion, communication, empathy, resilience, self-esteem, proactiveness, adaptability, etc.
2. Context: emotional skills are related among them, according to the theory of the inverted pyramid [5]. Developing skills require combining several related emotional skills which reinforces each other.
3. Micro-videos. People today have a culture of video permeating all activities in life. Video for training purposes should consider the concept of span of attention. The longer the video, the higher will the drop-off rate be. In a study on a video data base of 564.710 videos (all type of videos), almost 65% stopped viewing videos after 3 minutes [6]. More focused analysis on span of attention related to educational videos (MOOC) showed that the optimal video length was of 6 minutes or less [7].
4. Blended learning. The role of the professor is to act as a coach in class, responding to questions, suggesting best practices, etc. Because the students have been training everyday in emotional skills, the role of the professor as a coacher (for example every 1 or 2 weeks) would be to accelerate their learning by sharing experiences and helping to find practical ways of implementing skills.
5. Learning by using micro-behaviors. These are the tiny, often unconscious things that we say and do, making those around us feel included, valued and motivated – or excluded, unappreciated and disrespected. We propose that short but everyday training in micro-behaviors can boost specific emotional skills. Because changing habits requires time and practice, it is not sufficient to view a micro- video every day, one needs to relate it to micro-behaviors and then practice them immediately. And -if possible- everyday, to build a specific emotional skill.
6. Technologically enabled. The video course content and its relation to practice through micro-behaviors need to be systematically implemented. This can be one through an app or web-based-platform that runs in any digital device (PC, tablet, smartphones), in any operating system, and only requiring an internet connection to allow video streaming. This adds maximum flexibility and liberty of choice to the student, that should have these courses available anytime, and anywhere.

Each of the elements of this method have a strong theoretical background:

- a. Emotional skills belong to the discipline of emotional intelligence, which has proven its relevance and importance in personal and organizational development. Recent advantages in neuroscience have confirmed many of its hypothesis.
- b. Multimedia learning. People learn viewing videos in a much more productive way than reading text and looking at images [8].
  - a. Micro-videos are starting to be the most innovative training format in business. Span of attention watching videos has proven to be of less than drop off dramatically after 5 minutes.
  - b. Small and frequent changes are habit-forming. Requiring students to create a list of micro-behaviors that relate to the micro-videos, during the whole duration of the course. Learning by doing is more effective than reading, listening or interacting

A method combining all these variables and developed in a web-based platform has been developed and market-tested in a strong competitive market (Business Training) in Spain, in several industries. After identifying a company objective (for example, improving the sales team performance), the emotional skills involved were identified: in this case empathy, persuasion and communication skills. Then the sales team began a 3-month-course that consisted in each one organizing their own training, but based in viewing a video every day, and identifying and practicing a list of micro-behaviors in order to apply what the videos suggest. Reinforcement was produced with periodical meetings with the team (applying the concept of blended learning). The results published were very positive: abandonment rate after 3 months of less than 5% (vs. 95% of similar video courses like MOOC).

The innovativeness and efficiency of this method suggest that it can be applied in universities and business schools. It could be the best way to prepare them for what business need more nowadays: people with emotional skills that can drive innovation, change management and growth in a volatile and unpredictable environment.

## 4 Conclusion

Organizations need to reinvent their business to adapt to a global and digital economy, and they need employees open to change, flexible, collaborative and empathetic with customers. This requires more than just technical knowledge: this requires soft skills.

Universities and business schools need to train students in soft skills to respond to the needs of corporations. But their actual methods are not valid to change attitudes and behaviors. This needs a new methodology that combines several elements such as emotional skills content, micro-videos, learning by doing, and blended learning. This method has been tested in several Spanish companies with very good results. We propose Universities and Business Schools to adapt this method to comply with one of its main objectives: prepare students that can deliver results to businesses.

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