

IMPROVING SOFT SKILLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY IN CAREER COUNSELING: --- TRANSFER OF V4 EXPERIENCE

Petr Řehoř, Lukáš Klarner,
Alena Čarvašová et al.

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- Visegrad Fund
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Wolters Kluwer

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ABSTRACT

Abstract (EN): This monograph emphasizes the significance of career counseling and the development of specific soft skills among university students within the context of a rapidly evolving society and labor market. The research is being conducted in cooperation with four universities, three of which are from the Visegrad Four countries: the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (USB), the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SUA), Budapest Business University (BBU), and Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU). The primary objective of the monograph is to evaluate the significance of career counseling and the development of selected soft skills in students from the four named universities. A questionnaire survey of 616 students provides several important insights: Students consider the development of soft skills to be a key factor in success in the labor market and identify a particular need for support in the areas of self-management and well-being. At the same time, they appreciate the activities of Career Centers but see room for improvement through individual counseling, workshops, and close links with practice. The monograph offers recommendations for improving the services of Career Centers and educational institutions that support the systematic development of soft skills and prepare students for their professional careers. The results and recommendations serve as a valuable source of inspiration for academic institutions, career counselors, and other entities focused on supporting the personal and professional development of students.

Keywords: *Career counseling, soft skills, well-being, self-management, self-presentation, students, university*

Abstract (CZ): Tato monografie zdůrazňuje význam kariérního poradenství a rozvoje specifických měkkých dovedností u vysokoškolských studentů v kontextu rychle se vyvíjející společnosti a trhu práce. Výzkum byl prováděn ve spolupráci čtyř univerzit, z nichž tři pocházejí ze zemí Visegrádské čtyřky: Jihočeská Univerzita v Českých Budějovicích (USB),

Slovenská zemědělská univerzita v Nitře (SUA), Budapešťská obchodní univerzita (BBU) a Arménská národní zemědělská univerzita (ANAU). Hlavním cílem monografie je posoudit význam kariérního poradenství a rozvoje vybraných měkkých dovedností studentů z uvedených čtyř univerzit. Dotazníkové šetření mezi 616 studenty poskytuje několik důležitých poznatků: Studenti považují rozvoj měkkých dovedností za klíčový faktor úspěchu na trhu práce a identifikují zvláštní potřebu podpory v oblastech sebeřízení a duševní pohody. Zároveň oceňují činnost kariérních center, ale vidí prostor pro zlepšení prostřednictvím individuálního poradenství, workshopů a úzké vazby na praxi. Monografie nabízí doporučení pro zlepšení služeb kariérních center a vzdělávacích institucí, které podporují systematický rozvoj měkkých dovedností a připravují studenty na jejich profesní kariéru. Výsledky a doporučení slouží jako cenný zdroj inspirace pro akademické instituce, kariérní poradce a další subjekty zaměřené na podporu osobního a profesního rozvoje studentů.

Klíčová slova: *Kariérní poradenství, měkké dovednosti, well-being, sebeřízení, sebeprezentace, studenti, univerzita*

Abstract (SK): Táto monografia zdôrazňuje význam kariérneho poradenstva a rozvoja špecifických mäkkých zručností u vysokoškolských študentov v kontexte rýchlo sa rozvíjajúcej spoločnosti a trhu práce. Výskum bol realizovaný v spolupráci štyroch univerzít, z ktorých tri pochádzajú z krajín Vyšehradskej štvorky: Juhočeská Univerzita v Českých Budějoviciach (USB), Slovenská poľnohospodárska univerzita v Nitre (SUA), Budapeštianska obchodná univerzita (BBU) a Arménska národná poľnohospodárska univerzita (ANAU). Hlavným cieľom monografie je posúdiť význam kariérneho poradenstva a rozvoja vybraných mäkkých zručností študentov uvedených štyroch univerzít. Dotazníkový prieskum medzi 616 študentmi poskytuje niekoľko dôležitých poznatkov: Študenti považujú rozvoj mäkkých zručností za kľúčový faktor úspechu na trhu práce a identifikujú osobitnú potrebu podpory v oblasti sebarozvoja a duševnej pohody. Zároveň oceňujú činnosť kariérnych centier, ale vidia priestor na zlepšenie prostredníctvom individuálneho poradenstva, workshopov a úzkeho prepojenia s praxou. Monografia ponúka odporúčania na zlepšenie služieb kariérnych centier a vzdelávacích inštitúcií, ktoré podporujú systematický rozvoj mäkkých zručností a pripravujú študentov na ich profesionálnu

kariéru. Výsledky a odporúčania slúžia ako cenný zdroj inšpirácie pre akademické inštitúcie, kariérnych poradcov a ďalšie subjekty zamerané na podporu osobného a profesijného rozvoja študentov.

Kľúčové slová: *kariérne poradenstvo, mäkké zručnosti, well-being, sebariadenie, sebaaprezentácia, študenti, univerzita*

Abstract (HU): Ez a monográfia hangsúlyozza a karrier-tanácsadás és a speciális soft skillek fejlesztésének fontosságát a felsőoktatási hallgatók számára a gyorsan fejlődő társadalom és munkaerőpiac kontextusában. A kutatást négy egyetem együttműködésével végezték, amelyek közül három a Visegrádi Négyek országaiból származik: a Dél-Csehországi Egyetem (USB) České Budějovicéből, a Szlovák Mezőgazdasági Egyetem (SUA) Nyitráról, a Budapesti Gazdasági Egyetem (BBU), valamint az Örmény Nemzeti Mezőgazdasági Egyetem (ANAU). A monográfia fő célja a karrier-tanácsadás és a kiválasztott soft skill fejlesztések fontosságának értékelése az említett négy egyetem hallgatói körében. A 616 hallgatót elért kérdőíves felmérés néhány fontos megállapítást hozott: a hallgatók a soft skillek fejlesztését tartják a munkaerőpiacon való siker kulcsfontosságú tényezőjének, és különösen az önirányítás és a mentális jólét területén érzik szükségét a támogatásnak. Ugyanakkor értékelik a karrierközpontok tevékenységét, de látnak lehetőséget a fejlesztésre az egyéni tanácsadás, a workshopok és a gyakorlati tapasztalatokhoz való szoros kapcsolódás révén is. A monográfia ajánlásokat tartalmaz a karrierközpontok és oktatási intézmények szolgáltatásainak fejlesztésére, amelyek támogatják a soft skillek szisztematikus fejlesztését, és felkészítik a hallgatókat szakmai karrierjükre. Az eredmények és ajánlások értékes inspirációs forrást jelentenek az akadémiai intézmények, karrier-tanácsadók és más, a hallgatók személyes és szakmai fejlődésének támogatására összpontosító szervezetek számára.

Kulcsszavak: *Karrier tanácsadás, soft skillek, well-being, önállóság, önbemutató, hallgatók, egyetem*

Abstract (AR): Սույն մենագրությունը շեշտադրում է կարիերայի խորհրդատվության և փափուկ հմտությունների զարգացման կարևորությունը ուսանողների շրջանում՝ ժամանակակից արագ փոփոխվող հասարակության և աշխատաշուկայի պայմաններում:

Հետազոտությունը իրականացվել է չորս բարձրագույն ուսումնական հաստատությունների համագործակցությամբ, որոնցից երեքը գտնվում են Վիշեգրադյան քաղաքի երկրներում՝ Չեխիա, Բուլղարիայի Հարավային Բոհեմիայի համալսարանը (USB), Նիտրայի Սլովակական գյուղատնտեսական համալսարանը (SUA), Բուդապեշտի բիզնեսի համալսարանը (BBU), ինչպես նաև Հայաստանի ազգային ագրարային համալսարանը (ANAU):

Մենագրության հիմնական նպատակն է գնահատել կարիերայի խորհրդատվության դերը և ընտրված փափուկ հմտությունների զարգացման կարևորությունը նշված համալսարանների ուսանողների շրջանում: 616 ուսանողի մասնակցությամբ անցկացված հարցման արդյունքները բացահայտում են մի շարք կարևոր միտումներ: Ուսանողները փափուկ հմտությունների զարգացումը դիտարկում են որպես հաջողության առանցքային պայման աշխատաշուկայում, և աշակցության տրամադրման անհրաժեշտություն են տեսնում հատկապես ինքնակառավարման և բարեկեցության ոլորտներում: Միաժամանակ, ուսանողները դրական են գնահատում կարիերայի կենտրոնների գործունեությունը, սակայն ընդգծում են անհատական խորհրդատվության, աշխատաժողովների, սեմինարների գործնականում ավելի սերտ համագործակցության ընդլայնման անհրաժեշտությունը:

Մենագրությունը ներկայացնում է առաջարկություններ՝ ուղղված համալսարաններում գործող կարիերայի կենտրոնների և ուսումնական հաստատությունների կողմից մատուցվող ծառայությունների կատարելագործմանը՝ նպատակ ունենալով ապահովել ուսանողների փափուկ հմտությունների շարունակական և համակարգված զարգացումը, ինչպես նաև նրանց արդյունավետ նախապատրաստումը մասնագիտական գործունեությանը: Ստացված արդյունքներն ու առաջարկությունները կարող են ծառայել որպես արժեքավոր հիմք՝ համալսարանների, կարիերայի խորհրդատուների և ուսանողների անձնական ու մասնագիտական առաջընթացը խթանող այլ կառույցների աշխատանքի կատարելագործման համար:

Հիմնաբառեր՝ կարիերային խորհրդատվություն, փափուկ հմտություններ, բարեկեցություն, ինքնակառավարում, ինքնաներկայացում, ուսանողներ, համալսարան

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1 INTRODUCTION

The development of soft skills (self-presentation, self-management, well-being) and career counseling are becoming an increasingly important topic in the context of a rapidly changing society and labor market. The ability to adapt, communicate effectively, organize one's time, and take care of one's mental and physical health is the key to successfully overcoming the challenges faced by students and graduates of higher education institutions. The monograph, which aims to evaluate these aspects in the environment of four universities cooperating within the framework of the Visegrad project, brings a current perspective on the issue of preparing students for professional and personal life.

The relevance of this topic is undeniable, especially at a time when digitalization, globalization, and the uncertainty of the labor market place ever-increasing demands on individuals. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how fundamental the issue of well-being, mental health, and the ability to adapt to a crisis is.

Although soft skills are essential for success in the labor market and their importance continues to grow, a gap often remains between employers' expectations and the actual level of these skills among recent university graduates. Employers frequently encounter a lack of graduates who can effectively solve problems, work in teams, or adapt to dynamic environments. This discrepancy makes it more difficult for students to transition smoothly from academic settings into professional life, reducing their overall competitiveness in a rapidly evolving society and labor market. At the same time, growing demands for flexibility and adaptability are increasing the need for systematic support of students' well-being and self-management abilities, which are crucial for their overall welfare and professional success. Research and practice suggest that career counseling and universities should play a proactive role in developing these essential skills. However, their approaches may vary, and students are not always sufficiently informed about the support available to them.

The main contribution of the implemented Visegrad project “Improving soft skills for the 21st century in career counseling: Transfer of V4 experience” is the connection of the theoretical basis with practical research, carried out through a questionnaire survey among students of four partner universities. This research brought valuable data on how students perceive their soft skills. Members of the following universities participated in the implementation: the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (USB), Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU), Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SUA), and Budapest Business University (BBU).

The monograph consists of a total of 5 chapters, which are logically divided into three main parts. The first part is devoted to the theoretical framework, in which key terms such as career counseling, soft skills, well-being, self-management, and self-presentation are introduced, including their definitions, meaning, and connection with the study and professional life of students. The second part describes the research methodology, including the creation of the questionnaire, the method of data collection, and analytical approaches. The third part brings the practical results of the questionnaire survey, their interpretation, and discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical foundations. The appendix includes the full text of the questionnaire, which was used as the main research tool of this work.

The aim of the monograph is to offer not only a theoretical overview of selected areas of soft skills but also a practical assessment of the level of their perception, development, and support among university students through a questionnaire survey. To achieve this goal and address the identified research gaps in the development of soft skills and career counseling provision in the V4 regions and Armenia, key research questions were defined and are elaborated upon in detail in Chapter 2.

The results and conclusions of this monograph can serve as a valuable source of inspiration not only for academic institutions but also for career centers and other entities focused on supporting student development. It can also be used by students themselves, teachers, or researchers who are interested in the development of soft skills in a higher education environment. It can thus serve as a basis for improving teaching, support services, and other research activities focused on the personal and professional

development of students. It can provide academic institutions with materials for a more systematic integration of soft skills development into taught subjects, taking into account the real needs of students. Career centers can use the results to innovate their services – for example, for more targeted counseling, creating new workshops, or for better promotion of existing tools that help students develop practical competencies necessary for entering the labor market.

2 AIM AND METHODOLOGY

The main aim of the monograph is to assess the importance of career counseling and the development of selected soft skills of students from 4 universities.

Partial aims:

- 1) Conduct a literature search focused on career counseling, soft skills, well-being, self-management and self-presentation.
- 2) Map the functions and activities of Career Centers in selected universities.
- 3) Define the various concepts of selected soft skills.
- 4) Conduct a questionnaire survey among students of four universities and evaluate the results.

The literature search was prepared in a systematic way in accordance with the thematic focus of the monograph. The literature review was based on the literature review of professional monographs and books in the field of career counseling, HR management and soft skills, as well as scientific articles indexed in the Web of Science, Scopus, EBSCO and Google Scholar databases, international research reports and materials of university Career Centers and reports from practice.

The literature review was divided thematically into five main areas: career counseling, soft skills, well-being, self-management and self-entertainment. Each chapter includes an overview of key terms and their definitions, current trends, approaches to developing the field, a review of research and examples from practice.

In order to define each soft skill precisely, we conducted a content analysis of 20 different definitions of each selected skill, drawn from peer-reviewed articles, and relevant academic publications. Based on these definitions, we identified key features and aspects of these soft skills. To visually analyze the linguistic content of the definitions, we used the word cloud method, which graphically represents the frequency of occurrence of each term in the analyzed texts.

A questionnaire survey was used to collect primary data and was conducted among students of four universities. The aim was to find out:

- How students perceive the importance of career counseling and what is their experience of Career Center services.
- How they evaluate their development in soft skills.

The questionnaire and the structure of the monograph were compiled by the research team during a workshop in České Budějovice in September 2024. The questions were based on a previous literature search (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Auerbach et al., 2018; Austin, 1962; Balcar et al., 2018; Barrett & Williams, 1995; Brown et al., 2020; Bruffaerts et al., 2018; Carden et al., 2022; Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2010; Cojocariu & Ciotir, 2015; European Commission, 2019; Ferguson & Rivera, 2022; Franco-Ángel et al., 2023; Guerra-Báez, 2019; Harrigan et al., 2008; Hirschi & Koen, 2021; Hooker, 2017; Howlett et al. 2013; Khurumova & Pinto, 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Lai et al., 2024; Lorig & Holman, 2003; Lorig & Holman, 2003; Lyu & Liu, 2021; Niagara Institute, n. d.; Searle, 1969; Shvedova et al., 2021; Tao & Jing, 2023; Windels et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2022) and reflected the most frequently discussed soft skills, their characteristics and importance. It contained a total of 56 questions, which were structured into the following thematic units:

- Students' experience with career counseling.
- Self-perception of the level and importance of soft skills.
- Attitudes towards well-being, self-management and self-presentation.

The questionnaire contained different types of questions that allowed us to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. Dichotomous questions (e.g., yes/no), closed-ended questions with one or more possible answers (single-choice and multiple-choice), and Likert scale-based items (most commonly ranging from 1-5) were used to measure levels of agreement, importance, or satisfaction. Open-ended questions were also included to give respondents the opportunity to express their own opinions, definitions of concepts or suggestions for improvement. There were also self-assessment questions focusing on subjective perceptions of one's own skills, mental state, motivation or life satisfaction. This diverse type of question contributed to a deeper understanding of the students' experiences, attitudes and needs. The survey was conducted online. The questionnaire was distributed through the online platform of Google Forms. Data

collection was conducted from October 2024 to January 2025. A total of 616 responses were obtained. The questionnaire is included in the appendix of this monograph.

Data were processed by quantitative analysis (using MS Excel and R Studio). Descriptive statistical methods were used: percentages, averages, frequencies. The open-ended responses were analysed qualitatively in the form of thematic sorting. Statistical analysis was also used to achieve the set goal. It investigated whether students from different universities have differing perceptions of career counseling and individual skills within respective disciplines according to their level. The chi-square test of independence (Rana & Singhal, 2015) was used to determine whether such differences existed. The issue of differences in the perception of soft skills among students across universities is a topic frequently observed in the professional literature, both across countries (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Baniismail & Juhász, 2024) and between faculties (Wesley et al., 2017). The issue addressed is not only that of soft skills themselves but also differences in career counseling (Thompson et al., 2023), well-being (Plakhotnik et al., 2021), self-management (Al-Abyadh & Abdel Azeem, 2022), and, among university students, the topic of self-presentation (Hayes et al., 2024) is also discussed. Therefore, the following Research Questions (RQ) were established:

- 1) Do universities differ in use of Career Center services?
- 2) Do universities differ in assessment of soft skills?
- 3) Do universities differ in well-being?
- 4) Do universities differ in self-management assessment?
- 5) Do universities differ in self-presentation assessment?

3 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

3.1 Theoretical Background and Research Gaps

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of the monograph and provides a systematic overview of key areas related to the development of soft skills and career counseling. It successively addresses five main topics: career counseling, soft skills, well-being, self-management, and self-presentation. Each subchapter defines the core concepts and outlines current research, approaches to skill development, international context, and practical examples. This chapter provides the theoretical foundation for the subsequent analytical sections of the monograph, enabling a deeper understanding of the significance of individual competencies for students' personal and professional development.

Although this chapter provides a structured summary of the core concepts under examination, it also highlights several gaps in the existing research that warrant further exploration. One of the main research gaps lies in the lack of comparative studies across different regions, particularly among the Visegrad countries and Armenia, the partner country. Most available literature focuses on general frameworks for soft skills development without a deeper understanding of country-specific factors – whether in terms of cultural norms, institutional support, or labor market expectations. For instance, the concept of well-being, often perceived as a universal element of personal comfort and mental health, may be understood differently in each country depending on societal openness towards mental health topics, the availability of psychological support at universities, or cultural interpretations of work-life balance. Similarly, the area of self-management is heavily shaped by national education systems – some countries emphasize student autonomy more strongly. In contrast, others maintain a more hierarchical structure in teaching and academic support.

Another significant research gap concerns the insufficiently described role of Career Centers in the examined regions. There is a lack of detailed

analysis of how Career Center services are implemented, the types of counseling and training that are most common, and the effectiveness of these services from the perspectives of both students and employers. Closely linked to this is the need to further investigate the quality and scope of soft skills development programs at individual universities – whether they are part of a systematic approach or rather sporadic initiatives. A further overlooked aspect is the analysis of gender, socioeconomic, and cultural factors that may influence not only students' access to soft skills development but also their motivation and perception of the importance of such competencies. Last but not least, it is worth noting that most studies focus on current students, with a notable lack of longitudinal research tracking how the development of soft skills impacts graduates' real-world employability.

While compiling the literature review, we were aware that the development of soft skills is significantly influenced by each country's cultural, historical, and institutional context. National environments approach soft skills development differently in terms of content and the methods of support offered by universities and Career Centers. Given that the primary aim of this monograph was to capture students' perceptions of soft skills and career counseling at the partner universities – not to conduct a comprehensive cultural comparison – it was beyond the scope of this research to delve deeply into national or regional specifics. A detailed comparison of historical trajectories, education systems, or institutional strategies in the field of soft skills development would require a separate investigation with a different research design. However, we consider the topic of cultural specificity and the varying levels of career center development to be highly relevant and inspiring for future studies. Going forward, it would be valuable to conduct a more in-depth comparative analysis of these factors and their impact on the perception and effectiveness of soft skills development across different national contexts.

3.2 Career Counseling

3.2.1 Introduction to Career Counseling

Education – especially higher education – has traditionally been considered a sphere that does not respond quickly to changes. This is due to the fact that the results of any educational process are not visible immediately, but often emerge after several years. However, a number of processes in the modern world particularly the rapid growth and adoption of technological innovations, the rise of Artificial Intelligence, and the broader trend of globalization (also in the field of education) have inevitably left their impact on education. These processes are evolving so rapidly and penetrating the educational sphere so deeply that modern higher education institutions cannot remain indifferent, and many of them require a quick response and adaptation.

Another striking example is the development of the concept of micro-credential education and its inclusion in modern education, as well as the development of the concept of the third mission of universities (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020) by the European Commission. Especially the development of the last two concepts implies the addition of new functions or further development in the list of university services. In particular, the role of universities has significantly increased not only from the perspective of providing classical education, but also in organizing outcome-based education in a short time, creating new professions, organizing hybrid learning, and other issues.

It is not difficult to notice that in the context of all this, the role and responsibility of universities are increasing not only from the perspective of training qualified specialists, but also from the perspective of providing the young generation with professional guidance, facilitating their entry into the labor market, and ensuring continuing education. To ensure the above-mentioned process, different departments or centers operate in different universities, but their main goal is: career counseling and ensuring continuous education. To ensure the above-mentioned process, various departments operate in different universities, but their main goal is one: career counseling and ensuring continuing education. The traditional model of Career Centers – where counselors simply conducted individual

consultations, directed students toward specific professions, or compiled lists of job vacancies – is no longer adequate. With the advancement of information technologies and the availability of online resources, many of these functions can now be performed more efficiently without in-person visits. Career Centers from this perspective have also been transformed and acquired other, no less important functions. First, they should not only conduct “passive” consultations and direct a person to study in this or that profession, but also actively engage in the process of revealing the scope of professional interests of a given person, as well as contribute to the fact that the future specialist’s entry into the labor market is easier and more convenient. It should not be forgotten that Career Center should be highly professional and aware of the dramatic changes taking place in the modern labor market. Especially now, as a result of the rapid development of technologies and the use of Artificial Intelligence, in a few years, various professions may disappear or be no longer in demand, while some professions may become highly relevant. So, Career Centers should not only be informed about the changes taking place in the labor market but also predict the changes expected in the near future. Only in this case will they be able to fulfill their main goal, which is to facilitate the entry of a future specialist into the labor market (CAEL, 2018; Khurumova & Pinto, 2024).

Career counseling is a process that assists people, particularly students, in discovering, selecting, and planning their careers according to their interests, abilities, values, education and job opportunities. It entails the assistance of expert counselors who guide students in realizing their strengths and weaknesses, discovering various career alternatives, and making appropriate choices for their future (Andronic & Andronic, 2011; Cojocariu & Puiu, 2014; Kirovova, 2010).

The purposes of career counseling are the following:

- Self-discovery – helps students identify their strengths, weaknesses, interests and capabilities, as well as encourages them to study hard.
- Career exploration – gives details regarding different career fields, vacancies, and job characteristics.
- Goal Setting – helps in establishing short-, mid-, and long-term objectives.
- Skill Development – prepares students with required soft skills for a smooth adaptation to the workplace.

Thus, career counseling plays a pivotal role in guiding students toward making career choices. The importance of career counseling is the following:

- Students discover their strengths and weaknesses, this enables them to focus on improving their weaknesses and becoming more competitive in the job market. On top of that, they will understand their strengths, which will allow them to choose a job and environment that suits their abilities the most.
- Most students have no idea that there are a lot of careers to choose from. Career counseling introduces students to various occupations and exposes them to new careers so that they can make intelligent decisions. Although students can also learn about it from various websites and platforms on the internet, it should not be forgotten that many employers directly apply to their respective universities or colleges in the hope of acquiring specialists. Thus, Career Centers of universities are usually more informed about top jobs and students can immediately find out about them from there.
- Uncertainty about the future often leads to stress and anxiety among students. Career guidance alleviates fear by allowing students to familiarize themselves with the work environment they may find themselves in the near future and increases their self-confidence. It is especially important for young people who have not had the opportunity to work during their studies and are completely unfamiliar with the work environment.
- Choosing the right academic path is essential for career success. Career counselors help students choose the right courses, degrees, or certificates that match their future career aspirations. Moreover, not all students understand the importance of elective subjects or modules during their studies, and their choices are often random. Through career counseling, students gain a better understanding of the additional skills and knowledge needed in specific work environments. Thanks to this, students can intentionally select subjects or modules aligned with their target professional fields and acquire essential hard (technical) skills. As a result, students will become responsible for his educational trajectory, which is so important in today's universities.
- Career counseling ensures the development of not only hard skills but also soft skills. Career counseling includes resume writing, interview

preparation, and job search strategies to equip students with the necessary tools to enter the job market successfully. As a result, the future specialist becomes more competitive in the labor market, more easily overcomes the interview stage of employment, and adapts more easily and quickly to a new workplace.

- Career counseling is also important for the development and clarification of short-term, medium-term, and long-term work plans and goals. It is important not only to get a job and work, but also for young professionals to clarify their medium-term or long-term goals related to their work activities. From this perspective, career counseling helps a young professional or student to understand the trends in their professional field, thanks to which they will better define their professional path and goals.

3.2.2 Role and Functions of Career Centers

Career Centers are one of the most important and helpful services for students, job seekers, and employed professionals looking to advance their careers (Cojocariu & Ciotir, 2015; Lai et al., 2024). The primary functions of Career Centers include the following:

- Career counseling and guidance – providing career counseling, helping individuals assess their interests, aptitudes, and values to determine the best career choices.
- Job search assistance – developing and providing job search strategies, resume writing, cover letter writing, and interviewing skills to make individuals more job-ready. They also provide expert feedback to improve resumes and cover letters for increased success in job searching.
- Internship and job placement – connecting students and job seekers with potential employers, to facilitate internships and employment opportunities.
- Workshops and training – conducting workshops on job search techniques and platforms, training on soft skills development, and industry-specific training.
- Networking and career fairs – organizing networking events, meetings and presentations with employers, career fairs to connect recruiters

with job seekers, while creating and strengthening university-employer connections.

- Mock interviews – conducting mock interviews to help job seekers improve their answers, reduce anxiety and stress, build confidence, and prepare for real job interviews.
- Alumni & Mentorship Programs – connecting current students and job seekers with alumni and mentors for career advice, professional knowledge transfer, strengthening professional connections and building networks.
- Promoting students' startups and entrepreneurship – encouraging students to create their own businesses by providing training and resources. Where possible, organizing competitions and funding opportunities.

3.2.3 Significance of Career Counseling

Career Centers not only help students on their professional growth path but also increase the reputation of the university, ensuring the successful professional activities of graduates. As a result, universities become more attractive to future students and employers. It is no secret that the number of graduates working in their specialty plays a significant role in the university ranking. Career Centers, with their correct and purposeful activities, significantly increase this indicator, since through them more students and graduates find their professional field and work.

A university's reputation is also heavily influenced by how well-prepared its graduates are to perform in the workplace, both professionally and generally. This is possible only if during their study, students receive not only theoretical but also professional abilities and soft skills. As already mentioned, Career Centers are responsible for creating and strengthening university-employer ties, as a result of which students can undergo internships in various enterprises and become skilled in their professional fields. On top of that, employers approach graduates of this university with great confidence. Employers trust the university which provides graduates with high professional competencies (Chircu, 2014; Cojocariu & Ciotir, 2015; Maree, 2016).

The reputation and trust of a university is also greatly influenced by the extent to which its educational programs and their outcomes meet

the requirements of the labor market. The latter are constantly changing, and universities must also make appropriate changes to their educational programs. Career Centers also have a great contribution here, since thanks to them, university-employer cooperation is carried out. They are mainly responsible for collecting and analyzing data from employers that are necessary to understand the adequacy of the services provided by the university to the requirements of the labor market. Thus, through the targeted activities of Career Centers, the rating and reputation of universities can be significantly increased.

3.2.4 Methods of Evaluation of Career Counseling

Different approaches can be used to analyze and evaluate career counseling. Which approach and format will be used depends on which activity of the Career Center is being examined and evaluated (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Raskin, 1989; Soares et al., 2022; Sönmez et al., 2024). The most common case is a mixed approach when different formats of evaluation are used to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the overall activity of the Career Center.

1) Students (or other clients) satisfaction

Since the students are the main beneficiaries of Career Centers, it is crucial to know their satisfaction from the services provided by those centers. There are some qualitative and quantitative indicators to measure this satisfaction and the main of them are:

- Feedback – feedback, mainly collected through online questionnaires, helps determine student satisfaction with the services provided by the Career Center. This is one of the most basic and widely used tools.
- Repeat visit rate of students and promoter scope – only satisfied students are likely to return to the Career Center for additional services. Additionally, their satisfaction level is reflected in how likely they are to recommend the center to others. This is also a key indicator when evaluating the center's effectiveness.

2) *Job placement rate*

This is also an important indicator, which assesses two important components: the quality of education provided by the university and the demand for particular specialties in the labor market. In the case of poor-quality education provided by the university, its reputation among employers will decrease, which will lead to a low percentage of graduates' employment, and vice versa. It has been already noted that employers' trust is an important factor for the normal functioning of the university.

- Job Placement Rate – this measures the employment rate of those who used the Career Center's services and serves as a key performance indicator.
- Average length they stayed in the job – in addition to placement, job duration must also be assessed to fully evaluate the center's impact.

3) *Career advancement*

It is an important indicator for assessing medium- and long-term performance.

- Salary growth – this indicator compares the salary before and after counseling.
- Promotion or career change – this is one of the long-term indicators because the Career Center employees have to track the career changes of individuals.

4) *Development of hard and soft skills*

This development covers the following points:

- Course and training attendance – the quantity and quality of training programs organized by the Career Center serve as strong indicators of the effectiveness of career counseling. In this regard, it is crucial to take into account not only the quantity but the quality of the training also. Quality indicators can be the participants' satisfaction, mock test results and so on.
- Number of certificates (or other equivalent documents) attained – this can indicate how effectively career counseling supports individuals in acquiring relevant skills, qualifications, and opportunities for advancement. However, it should be taken into account that the number of certificates issued does not always reflect the qualitative aspect of the

activity. Therefore, it is advisable to combine this metric with qualitative aspect of the activity.

- Pre- and post-assessment – this involves comparing students' or other clients' career knowledge, confidence, and goal clarity before and after counseling. This can be realized with both quantitative and qualitative indicators. In addition, pre-assessment helps trainers and/or employees of the Career Center to choose the right and needed direction for the consultation or training.

5) Employers' satisfaction and participation

Primarily two main characteristics are observed:

- Number of external stakeholders (employers) – the number of employers is a key indicator since Career Centers are responsible for establishing and enhancing the connection between universities, employers, and students or graduates.
- Employers' satisfaction – the employers are a central focus for the universities, as the core goal of education to prepare specialists for the labor market. In this regard, the satisfaction of employers is an essential tool to understand the quality of education carried out at the given HEI.

3.2.5 Career Centers in the Participating Countries

3.2.5.1 CAREER CENTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH BOHEMIA (USB, CZECH REPUBLIC)

The Career Center of the University of South Bohemia (USB) plays an important role in supporting students and graduates in their pursuit of a successful professional career. The motto of the USB Career Center is: *"Starting my career while still studying."*

The USB Career Center was established in 2020 thanks to support from the ESF project. Initially, it was necessary to define the activities it would offer and verify with students which services would generate the most interest. Many activities proved to be beneficial (workshops, consultations, panel discussions). The current offering is the result of four years of work by the center's team and continues to expand. The USB Career Center was established and is methodically led by the Faculty of Economics of USB.

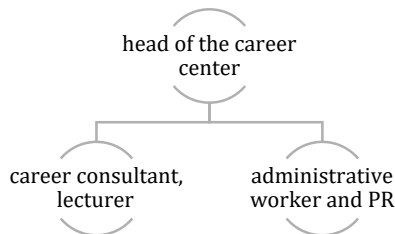
The USB Career Center is located on the ground floor of the Faculty of Economics dean's office building (specifically, Studentská 13, České Budějovice, 370 05). The location was chosen for its excellent accessibility for all USB students (near the USB canteen). It is newly and modernly renovated and equipped to meet the needs of both students and company representatives.

As of 2025, the center comprises three key roles:

- **Director of the Career Center**, focused on strategic management and activity development.
- **Lecturer and consultant**, specializing in professional seminars and student support.
- **Administrative worker**, responsible for ensuring the smooth operation of all activities and their promotion to students.

The team provides students and graduates with not only counseling but also professional workshops, collaboration with external partners, and individual consultations.

Figure 1. USB Career Center Structure



Source: Own processing

The Career Center aims to guide students toward informed decisions about their professional paths and connect them with potential employers. With the vision, *“We help students and graduates discover their career paths and develop the skills needed to achieve career goals,”* the center focuses on:

- Developing practical skills for students.
- Building relationships between the university, employers, and students.
- Providing opportunities for first work experiences.

The USB Career Center offers its services to all USB students and graduates completely free of charge. Newly, it also provides educational workshops for employees (two workshops per semester) at no cost. For 2025, the plan is to reach out to the general public, though these activities will be subject to a fee.

The following text summarizes key activities and achievements of the Career Center. **Career Counseling and Consultations.** The Career Center provides individual consultations focused on creating CVs, preparing for job interviews, optimizing LinkedIn profiles, and job searching. These services have an occupancy rate exceeding 80%.

Workshops and Educational Activities. Each semester, the center offers a wide portfolio of workshops. Every year, the team strives to introduce new and relevant topics that are appealing to students. Approximately 20–30 different workshops are conducted during an academic year. Topics have included “ESG – Discipline of the Future”, “Successful Women’s Career”, and “Labor Market and Labor Code Amendment”. Workshop capacities range between 20–40 participants, depending on the topic, with the aim of maintaining an informal atmosphere where every participant feels comfortable asking questions and contributing.

Workshops on Soft Skills. Feedback from HR professionals indicates that training new graduates in various software and applications is not usually an issue for companies. However, a common problem reported is the lack of soft skills among graduates. Employers expect graduates to be able to solve problems, work in teams, etc. Thus, the Career Center strives to offer a wide range of workshops focusing on these areas. Some specific topics include:

- Critical Thinking.
- Well-being.
- Time Management.
- The Word as a Tool – Internal Communication.
- Business and Communication Skills.
- Volunteering as a Tool for Well-being.
- Self-presentation.
- Storytelling as a Communication Tool.

Collaboration with Employers. The Career Center connects students with leading companies in the region, such as E.ON, Budvar a.s.,

Fronius, and Bosch, through workshops, job fairs, and professional discussions.

The Career Center also participates as an exhibitor at the annual JOB DAY event organized by the Faculty of Economics, highlighting opportunities for cooperation with various companies through internships, trainee programs, part-time jobs, or full-time positions. The center not only presents its activities but also contributes organizationally, inviting partner organizations to participate.

Experts from Practice. A large portion of the workshops offered by the Career Center are delivered by practitioners. Topics include the use of Artificial Intelligence in academic work, short videos for social media, assessment centers, and more. The center leverages its excellent contacts with employers to bridge the gap between students and businesses. For instance, during the “Meeting with HR Professionals” workshop, students have the opportunity to experience real job interviews. Such meetings are organized annually.

Educational Videos and Online Activities. These videos are available to students on the USB YouTube channel. They complement personal consultations and workshops. The Career Center has created a series of educational videos on the following topics:

- Creating a CV.
- Mock Interviews.
- Critical Thinking.
- Well-being.

Participation Statistics and Feedback. Interest in the Career Center’s services is growing, as evidenced by high attendance rates at workshops. The Faculty of Economics traditionally has the largest representation, but the center successfully attracts students from other faculties, such as the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science. The average workshop attendance rate is 80%, with the participant feedback response rate of 60%. Based on this feedback, workshop topics for the next academic year are planned.

Career Center Meetings and Conferences. The USB Career Center hosted representatives from 23 Career Centers across the Czech Republic. For career consultants, a rich professional and informal program was prepared. Sharing best practices among centers is a key element for continuous improvement and progress.

The Career Center also co-organized a significant conference titled *Nuclear Energy 2024: Vision and Sustainability for South Bohemia*, attended by over 200 notable guests. The discussions addressed key topics such as safety, innovation in nuclear energy, economic efficiency, and its potential contribution to energy independence and sustainable development in the South Bohemian Region.

The Career Center of USB has its own communication strategy. Initially, a Lean Canvas was created for the Career Center, providing a comprehensive overview of its structure and activities. This tool helps to understand the interconnections between various activities and allows continuous update of offerings based on student needs.

The Career Center has its own website (www.kc.jcu.cz), where visitors can find all the necessary information about its activities and services. The website includes a calendar of events organized by the center, job opportunities, and updates on interesting activities that may interest students. It also lists the center's location, contact information for all employees, and both telephone and email contacts.

Social media, particularly Instagram (profile name: kariérní_centrum_JU), plays an essential role in communication with target groups. Posts are typically published 1–2 times a week, depending on the activities offered. These include event invitations, news from the Career Center, and updates also available on the website.

The Career Center has also created a promotional video showcasing its services from the perspective of a student, available on the USB YouTube channel. Information about the center's activities is further disseminated through TV displays on campus via PowerPoint presentations. Additionally, the center participates annually in student enrollment events and orientation courses at USB faculties.

The Career Center strives to build a long-term positive reputation among students and proves that the best advertising is word of mouth. One example involves a student from the Faculty of Fisheries and Water Protection who attended an individual consultation at the Career Center. Based on this experience, the student enrolled in an elective course on entrepreneurial support. Through this course, the student later participated in the Invest Day competition and, with further support and connections provided by the course instructors, managed to secure funding for their idea.

In 2025, the Career Center plans to expand its activities to the public, offering some workshops beyond students and graduates of USB. These activities could become an additional source of income for the center, which is currently funded entirely by USB's budget or project grants.

The center also aims to increase the offering of courses for university employees, recognizing significant demand in this area.

The USB Career Center is a dynamic environment that continuously seeks new ways to support the professional growth of students and graduates of the University of South Bohemia.

3.2.5.2 UNIVERSITY COUNSELING AND SUPPORT CENTER (SUA, SLOVAK REPUBLIC)

The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SUA) has a long-standing tradition of educating highly qualified experts, not only within the agricultural sector but across various fields. Given the increasing demands placed on students and university staff, SUA strives to provide both high-quality education and a supportive environment that enhances the study and work experience. In this context, the University Counseling and Support Center (hereafter referred to as the "Center") was established on September 1, 2021. The Center's primary role is to ensure that students and staff have access to counseling and support services, as well as administrative resources, that cater to their diverse needs and facilitate both academic progress and personal and professional development. Within the framework of the university's internal policies, organizational structure, and processes, the Center guarantees that students have easy access to comprehensive counseling and support services. These services are tailored to meet their varied needs, thus contributing to their academic success and overall well-being. The Center is committed to providing individualized support and fostering an inclusive environment, while also maintaining strong collaborations with external stakeholders and practical sectors. Furthermore, the Center is an active participant in advancing the university's long-term strategic objectives, as outlined in its plan for 2022–2028, particularly in relation to the goals of sustainable development.

Figure 2. Sustainable Development Goals and University Strategic Objectives

Source: Report on the activities of the University Counseling and Support Center for the year 2022

The Center's core activities are organized around the following service areas:

1) Career Guidance, Coaching, and Mentoring

The Center's career counseling, coaching, and mentoring services are designed to assist students in clarifying their career aspirations and understanding the professional landscape. These services include individual and group counseling on career decision-making, job selection, career transitions, and reintegration into the workforce. Additionally, online platforms provide information on professions and employment opportunities. The Center places particular emphasis on collaboration with external organizations and industry partners.

Notably, the Center contributed to the establishment of the SuPerUni CoWork Center, a Coworking space aimed at facilitating innovation and collaboration. The Center also organizes the university's Career Days each spring and autumn, providing students with direct access to potential

employers. Services such as personality assessments, intelligence testing, and the “Career Anchor” test, along with individual consultations, form part of the Center’s comprehensive career guidance program. The Center collaborates with faculties to tailor career services to the specific needs of different academic disciplines. Furthermore, the Center actively maintains partnerships with external career coaches and counselors.

2) Social, Financial, and Legal Guidance

The Center offers counseling services in social, financial, and legal matters, focusing on the various forms of financial support available to students, such as social scholarships and other funding opportunities. In addition, the Center aims to provide ongoing financial and legal guidance to both students and employees, in collaboration with internal and external experts. One of its key objectives is to promote financial literacy and awareness of relevant legislative issues in the university community.

3) Health and Psychological Counseling

The Center’s psychological counseling services are designed to address a wide range of issues faced by students, including academic stress, personal and familial challenges, conflict resolution, and the psychological impacts of external crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The services are provided through both individual and group consultations, focusing on enhancing students’ mental health and well-being.

4) Support Services for Students with Special Needs

In alignment with Section 100 of Act No. 131/2002 Coll. on Higher Education Institutions, SUA is committed to creating an inclusive academic environment that accommodates students with special needs, without compromising academic standards. Since October 1, 2021, the study conditions for students with special needs have been regulated by Directive No. 8/2021, which outlines the university’s responsibilities to ensure accessibility. The Center’s mission in this area involves coordinating, managing, and providing information to meet the specific needs of students with special needs. The Center’s activities aim to remove physical, technical, and psychological barriers to education and improve the quality of life for both students and staff. Additionally, the Center is involved in the

preparation of university faculty and staff to effectively support students with special needs.

5) Additional Pedagogical Studies and Teacher Education

Supplementary pedagogical studies at SUA are offered as a four-semester concurrent program for full-time students pursuing engineering degrees, or as external studies for graduates in non-teaching study fields. The program provides participants with the pedagogical competencies required to teach subjects related to their field of study. Upon successful completion, graduates receive certification, which attests to their pedagogical competence.

The Center engages in collaborative partnerships with numerous public and private sector organizations. Over fifty partner institutions, including secondary schools specializing in business, services, information technology, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, and the arts, actively collaborate with the Center. The primary objective of these partnerships is to advance the development of vocational training programs. In addition to these collaborations, the Center maintains ongoing cooperation with marketing managers, career counselors, coaches, and mediators, facilitating the organization of professional workshops aimed at both students and university staff. The Center contributes to the academic environment by incorporating practical lectures into the curriculum and participating in the training of driving school instructors. Furthermore, the Center plays a pivotal role in organizing the annual summer children's university. The Center's project activities focus on both domestic and international initiatives within the fields of science and education, with particular emphasis on consumer psychology. This includes research into psychological traits as predictors of behavioral tendencies.

In the context of higher education, the Center conducted a survey focused on assessing the mental health and overall well-being of university employees and students over the past academic years. The survey targeted a sample of 5,964 individuals, including 1,097 employees and 4,867 students. A total of 1,050 respondents (17.6%) participated in the study, comprising 199 employees (18.1%) and 851 students (17.5%), among which 15 students identified as having special needs.

The mental health status of participants was assessed using nine psychological indicators: somatization, hypersensitivity, compulsivity,

depression, anxiety, hostility, paranoid tendencies, phobia, and psychoticism. Most previous studies have found that speaking anxiety can influence student performance negatively (Mohd Naser, & Mat Isa, 2021). The results revealed concerning trends, with 49% of respondents – both students and employees – reporting significant mental health challenges or discomfort. Furthermore, only 30% of the surveyed population indicated a high quality of life, suggesting a notable gap in perceived well-being across the university community.

A second survey focused on the prevalence and nature of bullying at the university, examining both peer-to-peer bullying among students and bullying by faculty members. The primary aim was to ascertain the frequency and forms of bullying experienced by university students. When considering only repeated and persistent instances of bullying, the most prevalent form identified was social exclusion and slander among peers. In terms of faculty-student bullying, the most commonly reported behaviors included deliberate neglect, followed by continuous criticism, humiliation, and ridicule by instructors. Sexual harassment, in its various forms, was also reported among students. Approximately 11% of respondents (44 individuals) experienced repeated sexual harassment from peers, primarily manifesting as sexist remarks and unwanted sexual attention. Additionally, 6 cases of sexual coercion were documented. Among faculty-student harassment, 5% (20 students) reported repeated instances of sexual harassment by faculty members, which included sexist comments and unsolicited sexual attention. One case of sexual coercion was also noted.

In total, nearly 40% of students reported experiencing some form of bullying, with varying degrees of severity. Further insights were gathered from open-ended responses, which provided more detailed descriptions of bullying incidents. Notably, some students interpreted actions such as the prompt return to in-person teaching after pandemic-related restrictions or faculty refusal to accommodate non-health-related study plan exceptions as bullying. This suggests that a portion of the respondents might be more sensitive to perceived negative changes in their academic environment, possibly influenced by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also possible that these respondents will have lacked a clear understanding of what constitutes bullying or may have exhibited behaviors that could be interpreted as bullying themselves. It should be noted that

this survey did not address instances of bullying directed at faculty or staff by students.

Both surveys provide significant insights into the challenges faced by the university community regarding mental health and bullying. The findings suggest a need for enhanced support systems to address the mental health concerns of students and employees, as well as the implementation of comprehensive strategies to reduce bullying and harassment in all its forms. Future research may focus on identifying specific interventions that can mitigate these issues and improve the overall well-being and academic experience at the university.

Based on the activities and findings described in relation to the University Counseling and Support Center, several challenges for future studies that could help further develop and improve the Center's services and support for the university community can be demonstrated:

- Impact of Counseling Services on Student and Staff Well-Being – to conduct a longitudinal study to evaluate the long-term effects of the Center's mental health services, such as psychological counseling, career guidance, and mentoring, on the academic performance, mental health, and career success of students and employees.
- Evaluating the Effectiveness of Career Guidance Programs – to assess the impact of career guidance, coaching, and mentoring services on students' career outcomes and job satisfaction after graduation.
- Analyzing the Prevalence and Impact of Bullying on Mental Health – to conduct a detailed study on the relationship between bullying (peer-to-peer and faculty-student) and the mental health of students, examining how bullying influences academic performance and psychological well-being.
- Assessing the Needs of Students with Special Needs – to conduct research into the specific challenges faced by students with special needs at the university, particularly regarding accessibility, academic adjustments, and overall support.
- Examining the Effectiveness of International Partnerships in Advancing Educational Support – to evaluate the role and effectiveness of international collaborations in enhancing the Center's services, particularly in areas such as vocational training, psychological support, and career guidance.

- Investigating the Role of Peer Support Networks in Mental Health and Well-Being – to explore the potential of peer-to-peer support networks in promoting mental health and well-being among students.
- Addressing the Underreporting of Bullying and Mental Health Issues – to examine the reasons why some students might underreport bullying and mental health issues and propose strategies to encourage reporting and intervention.

3.2.5.3 OFFICE FOR STUDENTS SUCCESS (BBU, HUNGARY)

Budapest Business University (BBU) is one of Hungary's leading higher education institutions, which plays a prominent role in the field of economic and business education. The university is regularly ranked among the top Hungarian and international universities and is one of the most respected institutions in the country in the field of economics. The university has more than 19,000 students enrolled in various bachelor, master, and doctoral programs. BBU has a broad portfolio of courses, including business, finance, economics, management and marketing, as well as international studies. The university focuses on innovative teaching methods and practice-oriented courses, ensuring students' successful careers in the domestic and international labor market.

1) Office for Students Success

The Office for Student Success was established at BBU in October 2023 to support student life pathways, develop and implement methods to reduce dropout rates and support students' career paths. In January 2025, the office has five full-time staff and a wide range of partnerships across the institution, working with many other colleagues to achieve its goals.

With the establishment of the office, a number of specific tasks previously handled by other departments were transferred to the Office for Student Success. One of these tasks is the area of equal opportunities for students and support for students with disabilities. The Hungarian Higher Education Act makes it compulsory for all Hungarian higher education institutions to employ a disability coordinator, and also regulates at the statutory level the benefits and exemptions that students with disabilities can receive in relation to their condition. The number of students with

sensory and mobility disabilities is not very high at the institution, but the number of students with learning difficulties (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, etc.), autism, hyperactivity, ADHD or ADD has been on the rise for years. This is reflected in the diversification of education, as well as in career guidance and support, as these students with special needs also require support in the labor market. Students have the opportunity to have a one-to-one consultation with an equal opportunities expert who can help them to fulfill their potential both in their studies and in employment.

One of the main activities of the office is mental health counseling, which is currently provided by two full-time staff and 7–8 external professionals and part-time staff. All counselors have a minimum of a higher qualification in mental health counseling or a diploma in psychology, and service is provided in both Hungarian and English. Our counselors focus on moving on from the stuck cases they are referred to within 3–5 sessions, or if this is not possible, offering additional, external intervention to the students. The system is not optimized for long therapies but for dealing with acute problems of the present, with colleagues able to see roughly 350 different students in an academic year. While one of the objectives of the Office for Student Success is to increase this number, it is important to see that the number of students reached can only be increased up to a certain level with the existing capacity of counselors, and that after a certain period, further growth will require the recruitment of additional counselors.

Individual counseling includes the possibility of career counseling, and some of our students take advantage of this opportunity, but in less than three percent of all cases. The experience of recent years is that students tend to bring their personal problems and crises to the counseling sessions, very often, they come to our colleagues with family or relationship issues, while career counseling or learning methods counseling are much less frequent. There are a number of reasons for this, one of which is of course the low level of awareness of career guidance. On the other hand, it should also be considered that, as the cost of services increases, free psychological counseling at university becomes very attractive, and many students are likely to feel that it is more important to solve their personal problems than to discuss possible career or learning-related issues.

The Office for Student Success also coordinates a career development mentoring program and runs courses and workshops on career topics,

which will be discussed later. It is important to note that before the office was established, career management activities took place in the faculties, with students having a choice of compulsory and optional courses in areas such as business communication, career management, learning methodology and time management. Students can gain credits while studying these courses and can take the course in a way that fits in with their timetable and does not interfere with their work, which is also very important: two-thirds of our students work while studying at university.

It is also important to note in preparing this summary that Budapest Business University is currently undergoing a major organisational and curricular transformation, with significant changes in the roles of the newly created faculties, departments and support area offices expected to take place from September 2025.

2) Compulsory professional internship

At Budapest Business University, the award of a degree is conditional on the completion of a professional internship of a specified duration and worth credits. The relevant department decides whether a company is suitable to certify that the student has completed an internship in its field of training. The administration of the internship is entirely online, the university has an internal website called Career Platform, where students can log in with their study system code and companies can create their own registrations. The verification of the completion of the internship is carried out in this system, under the control of the Student Service, so that the credits are automatically counted. Students can use the system to evaluate the company after completing the placement, and the database of companies registered on the website is searchable by all students, so they can find a suitable placement for themselves.

There are questions about the future of compulsory internship placements at our university. When it was first introduced, it was a novelty that further strengthened the practical focus of our courses and created a real link between employers and students. However, our general experience over the last few years, especially since COVID-19 epidemic, is that our students tend to take up a job from the second semester of their studies and often seek to be supported in their career development by the workplace, not just casual work. There seems to be a growing expectation that in

the final year of their studies, our students should be asked to trade their familiar, well-established money-earning opportunities for an often unpaid internship in order to obtain their degree. Of course, the workplace itself often certifies the internship for the student, but there are cases where the classification of the workplace and the work the student has done there do not exactly match the degree course they are doing, and the department does not accept the certification. In such cases, our students have to make difficult choices and, in order to better support this process, we will certainly need to review the previously well-established system of work placements in the future.

3) Business Partnership and Corporate Mentoring

At our university, we have a dedicated office for managing business partnerships, and we also work closely with the Office for Student Success, for example at the annual Job Fair, where we organise job search workshops, CV photography, and similar activities for students, in addition to the exhibiting companies' programs.

Another jointly coordinated program is the BBU Corporate Mentoring Program, in which mediator and senior managers from company's mentor students individually for a semester. The student has the opportunity to learn about the internal workings and culture of the company, the day-to-day life and the specific tasks of the manager, while at the same time asking the mentor for help in achieving their own goals. We find that the program also has a lot of added value for the mentors, who appreciate the direct experience of working with Generation Z. But successful mentoring is often followed by an offer of an internship or junior position, with several former mentees now working in their mentor's company.

This is also important for the university because a recent internal focus group study showed that the majority of our students get their first (or first few) jobs through their parents, older relatives or family friends. They say that it is very difficult to stand out from the crowd in job advertisements for young people, because there are hundreds of applicants for each job advertisement, and that more important than academic or public achievements is the fact that someone can guarantee that the applicant is reliable and can be counted on if they are hired.

4) Support for International Students

However, family ties are not equally strong and effective for all students. Many foreign students in Hungary study on international scholarships. Almost a thousand students, usually from Asian and African countries, study at Budapest Business University under the so-called Stipendium Hungaricum program. They often come to Hungary from a completely different cultural background, and although they are legally adults, they find it very difficult to cope at the age of 19 or 20 with the distance from their family, former friends and older mentors. They are not recommended for jobs by relatives and cannot be guaranteed jobs in English-speaking companies. The Office for Student Success has a number of programs that specifically support international students. One of these is our Career 101 course, which takes place every semester during what is called Intensive Week. Intensive Week is a one-week-long school break, where students can take 3-5 credit courses during this period and complete them in blocks of 3-5 days. These courses are based on intensive group work and individual work and provide an excellent opportunity for international mobility programs and for students to deepen their knowledge in a particular area of interest.

The Career 101 course is not only open to international students, but we aim to have a majority of them in the class. The course will naturally include a focus on updating CVs and LinkedIn profiles, as well as training exercises to help them better understand their strengths and areas for improvement, which will later help them prepare for job interviews. Together with the students, we will gather information on the big English-speaking companies in Hungary, the dates of upcoming job fairs and websites where they can search for jobs. In a separate block, they will be assisted by a non-profit organisation supporting migrants, with whom they can discuss residence permits and other legal regulations. A workshop will prepare them for possible job interview questions and topics, and the course will end with a mock interview where they will have the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned during the three days in a playful way. The course is very popular at the university and we get very good feedback.

3.2.5.4 CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING DIVISION (ANAU, ARMENIA)

The Career Development and Lifelong Learning Division of Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU) is the university's key units dedicated to supporting students and graduates in their professional development and career planning. The division aims to bridge the gap between education and employment by providing comprehensive services that enhance employability, promote lifelong learning, and foster collaboration with local and international employers.

Having undergone a series of transformations over time, it acquired its current form following organisational reforms implemented in 2018. This is because ANAU attached great importance to the qualitative improvement of the organization of student internships, as well as the university had set a strategic goal to increase not only the number of students, but also the qualitative aspect of their learning. The goal was to equip students with practical skills, prepare specialists who meet modern labor market requirements, and strengthen the connection between the university and employers.

The ANAU Career Development and Lifelong Learning Division focuses on the following key tasks:

1) Career counseling and guidance

The division provides personalized career counseling to help students identify their strengths, set career goals, and develop action plans for achieving their professional aspirations. This includes:

- One-to-one career consultations.
- Resume and cover letter writing assistance.
- Interview preparation sessions.
- Career assessments and self-evaluation tools.

Numerous students apply to the Division annually, seeking guidance on their current or future career plans. The Division carries out this function through face-to-face and e-mail communication. Experience shows that the majority of ANAU students do not have sufficient skills to create and present a resume or CV in the appropriate quality and standard. In addition, many of them do not have enough skills to present themselves, their

capabilities and goals during a job interview. From this point of view, the importance of the Division in helping students to compile their resumes and preparing them for interviews is extremely important.

The ANAU Career Development and Lifelong Learning Division conducts interview preparation sessions to equip students with the skills and confidence needed for successful job interviews. These sessions include mock interviews, personalized feedback, and techniques for handling common and challenging questions. They also cover body language and professional etiquette. Additionally, students receive guidance on researching employers, understanding job roles, and tailoring their answers accordingly. The soft skills mentioned above can be additionally improved and gained during the training organized by the Division.

One of the important functions performed by the Division is career assessments and self-evaluation. This allows staff to analyze the university's educational offerings and assess how well students are prepared to meet labor market demands. Through constant feedback, which is mainly carried out in the format of online surveys or face-to-face meetings, the strengths and weaknesses that exist in the university's educational process are complemented, while at the same time, the changes that need to be made in the educational process are proposed in order to prepare more competitive specialists.

Practice shows that such surveys have revealed numerous suggestions made by employers and former graduates, which were especially related to the improvement of students' practical skills. Based on such suggestions, the university faculties and education management bodies have undertaken appropriate changes in the current curricula and educational programs. As a result of such changes, the quality of educational services provided by ANAU has significantly improved, and the educational and research needs of students have been more closely aligned with the requirements of the labor market.

2) Internship and job placement

The division collaborates with companies and organizations to facilitate internship and employment opportunities for ANAU students and graduates. Key activities include:

- Organizing job fairs and career days.

- Partnering with employers for internship programs.
- Maintaining a job portal for students and graduates.
- Coordinating placement processes between students and employers.

The role of this Division became especially important after 2020, when the university implemented a new work-semester-based curriculum format. Even before that, the Division's employees were responsible for establishing contacts with various employers in the agri-food system to conduct student internships. However, after 2020, when the requirements for internships for ANAU students changed, one of the Division's main functions became the conclusion of contracts in accordance with these new standards, updating the existing agreements, finding new partners, and the establishing new partnerships. One of the significant innovations in this direction is that after the internship, the student is assessed not only by his or her professors, but also by the person in charge of the internship. This further increases the responsibility of the students in terms of participating in the internship, as well as contributing to the development of their professional skills and knowledge.

Emphasizing the role of job fairs in the employment of future specialists, the Division actively participated in such events organized in Armenia. Moreover, with the help of the Division, ANAU also organized job fairs, where ANAU students got acquainted with the leading Armenian organizations seeking and offering jobs in their field and with the offers of vacant positions. Through feedback, it was found that these events organized by the Division were quite effective and many students found jobs thanks to them. In addition, such events and job fairs have helped future professionals gain a deeper understanding the specifics of their future profession, realize the practical aspects of the subjects they are studying, as well as orient themselves in terms of finding a suitable job in the future.

As already mentioned, one of the main functions of the Division is to ensure the students' internships. From this perspective, the Division not only finds partners, establishes contact with them, and makes agreements, but also ensures the qualitative aspect of students' internships. That is, the Division consistently, using the feedback principle, identifies the weaknesses and strengths of the internships conducted, analyzes their effectiveness, and also makes suggestions to eliminate shortcomings. As

a result of such a survey, the university has acquired partners who are interested in sustainable mutually beneficial cooperation with ANAU.

3) Networking and employer engagement

The division works to build strong partnerships with local and international employers to create a network of career opportunities. It actively engages with employers through:

- Memorandums of cooperation.
- Employer presentations and workshops.
- Alumni networking events.
- Alumni Relations.

The Division is one of the main subdivisions of the ANAU, which is responsible for establishing and strengthening relations with potential external partners. From this point of view, the department is responsible for concluding cooperation agreements, the main purpose of which is to ensure the practical training and internships of students in these organizations. Such partners are various agro-industrial enterprises: farms, veterinary clinics and pharmacies, food processing enterprises, food quality assurance laboratories, horticultural farms, plant breeding centers, as well as banks and other agricultural enterprises.

One of the most important functions of the Division is also the provision of employer presentations and workshops. The goal of this is the presentation of potential employers to students, which is especially important for graduate students who are preparing to work in their specialty. Unlike job fairs, where employers personally participate in the event, this type of event is more flexible and easier to implement, since in this case the employees of the Division themselves present everything about the employers that may be of interest to students.

Alumni networking events are another function that ensures the establishment and strengthening of alumni networks, promotes the establishment of interdisciplinary professional ties, interdisciplinary discussion of sectoral problems and the proposal of solutions. They also ensure constant university-alumni communication, which is very important for the university in terms of being constantly informed about the processes taking place in the agricultural sector. It also makes a great contribution to the renewal of the university's curricula and educational outcomes, since alumni play

a key role in informing the university about changing requirements in the professional field.

Alumni success stories and mentorship programs play a key role among students in terms of increasing interest in their profession, learning better and getting motivated. The Division's employees regularly organize meetings with people who have achieved success in the agricultural sector and not only. They can be farmers, entrepreneurs, developers of agricultural innovations, startup founders and other successful specialists. They are mainly graduates of ANAU, but not only. Experience shows that such meetings in particular have a great positive impact on students and motivate them to learn better and develop professional skills during internships.

4) Skills development and training

To ensure that students possess the skills required in the job market, the Division organizes various training programs and workshops. These programs focus on:

- Soft skills development.
- Entrepreneurial skills and innovation.

Currently, all universities highlight the importance of providing not only professional skills and competencies (so-called "hard skills") during education, but also of developing soft skills among students. Thanks to them, future specialists acquire the necessary abilities to adapt to the work environment and carry out their activities in a normal manner, maintain normal relationships with other people, resolve personal and work conflicts, prepare professional documents, work in a team, etc. Through workshops, training sessions, and mentoring programs, the Division enhances students' interpersonal and professional competencies. Mock interviews, resume building and teamwork exercises, training and networking events further refine their confidence and preparedness for the job market.

Another aspect, which is very important, especially for agricultural specialists, is the development of entrepreneurial skills. Agriculture, being a highly applied/practical field, requires specialists who will also be endowed with these abilities. The development of entrepreneurial skills is partly helped by certain modules studied in various educational programs (formal education). However, the Division also plays a significant role here,

which strengthens these abilities among students through non-formal education.

3.2.6 Conclusion

Career counseling has evolved into a crucial component of modern higher education, playing a significant role in guiding students towards successful professional paths. The rapid advancement of technology, globalization, and changes in the labor market have heightened the need for universities to not only provide quality education but also to equip students with the necessary tools for career success. Traditional career counseling, which focused mainly on directing students toward specific professions or providing job listings, has transformed into a dynamic process that involves career exploration, skill development, and labor market adaptation.

Career Centers now serve as essential hubs within universities, facilitating students' transition from education to employment. They provide a range of services, including career counseling, job placement, networking opportunities, and soft skill development. These functions enhance students' employability, reduce anxiety about career choices, and enable them to make informed decisions about their professional future. Moreover, Career Centers play a pivotal role in connecting universities with employers, ensuring that academic programs align with labor market needs.

The effectiveness of career counseling can be assessed through various methods, including student satisfaction, job placement rates, career progression, and employer feedback. A well-functioning Career Center not only benefits individual students but also enhances the university's reputation and attractiveness to prospective students and employers. By continuously adapting to labor market trends and technological advancements, career counseling ensures that graduates are well prepared to meet the challenges of the evolving professional landscape. Ultimately, career counseling is not just a service but an investment in students' futures and the long-term success.

3.3 Soft Skills

3.3.1 Introduction

The modern world is undergoing rapid changes, with increasing demands in nearly all fields of employment. To remain competitive, graduates must not only have solid professional knowledge but also develop a range of additional competencies known as “soft skills”. These skills enable individuals to perform tasks creatively, make autonomous decisions, and collaborate effectively within teams—qualities essential for advancing science, industry, and the economy. In recent decades, soft skills have emerged as a cornerstone of modern education. These skills, often referred to as “skills for employment”, “people skills”, “non-professional skills”, “extra-professional skills”, “key skills”, “skills for social progress” or “skills of the 21st century”, emphasize the ability to adapt, innovate, and lead in dynamic environments (Kostikova et al., 2021).

Soft skills encompass a broad range of interpersonal and emotional abilities, such as communication, teamwork, empathy, and leadership. Their importance grows as the labor market increasingly values adaptability and human-centric qualities that cannot be replicated by machines. This has led to an important question: which skills matter the most? To address this, recent research suggests dividing competencies into “soft” skills, focused on interpersonal and emotional intelligence, and “hard” skills, related to technical expertise and specialized knowledge. Understanding the distinct roles these skill types play is critical for shaping the workforce of the future (Klaus et al., 2009).

In the era of digital transformation and growing reliance on Artificial Intelligence (AI), soft skills have become a decisive factor for professional success. Structural changes in the global economy have accelerated the need for digital competencies while simultaneously highlighting the importance of emotional and social intelligence. The unpredictable nature and pace of technological and societal shifts require individuals, organizations, and societies to cultivate the ability to navigate uncertainty and complex relationships. Emotional and social competencies, in particular, are crucial for fostering resilience and collaboration in an AI-driven world (Coelho & Martins, 2022).

Soft skills play a vital role across diverse professions, including academic librarianship, management, and customer service. These people-focused abilities are essential for managing teams, resolving conflicts, and fostering productive collaboration. However, despite their importance, the concept of soft skills often lacks clear definition, structured frameworks, and systematic education or training programs. This underscores the need for integrating soft skills development into educational programs and professional training to prepare individuals for the complexities of the workforce.

3.3.2 Definition of Soft Skills

The following list begins with fundamental definitions of the term “soft skills” and transitions to more detailed and applied descriptions, thereby facilitating an understanding of the progressive complexity of the concept of soft skills:

1) *Basic definitions and general delineation of soft skills:*

- The dictionary defines soft skills as “*personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people*” (Lexico, 2020).
- In general terms, soft skills are defined as „*the interpersonal, human, people, or behavioral skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace*” (Weber et al., 2011, p. 98).
- Moss & Tilly (2001) provide another perspective, describing soft skills as skills, abilities, and traits that pertain more to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than formal or technical knowledge.

2) *Personal characteristics and behavior as the foundation of soft skills:*

- “Soft” skills refer to skills that enable employees to fit in at the workplace, including skills related to individual personality, traits, flexibility, motivation, goals, and preferences (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).
- Soft skills are skills, behaviors, and personal qualities that help people navigate their environment, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals (Lippman et al., 2015).
- Soft skills are internationally recognized as important personal characteristics that promote an individual’s well-being and success (Heckman, 2011).

3) *Interpersonal skills and teamwork:*

- The term “soft skill” encompasses the ability of people to communicate with each other and work well together (Andrews & Higson, 2008).
- Another definition of soft skills is provided by Kechagias (ed.) (2011, p. 33), who suggests that soft skills are “*intra- and interpersonal (socio-emotional) skills, essential for personal development, social participation, and workplace success. They include skills such as communication, ability to work on multidisciplinary teams, adaptability.*”
- Grugulis & Vincent (2009, p. 598) list “*communication, problem-solving, team-working, an ability to improve personal learning and performance, motivation, judgment, leadership, and initiative*” as soft skills. However, many of these tasks do require some form of abstract reasoning, in contradiction to the definition given earlier.

4) *Emotional intelligence and its relationship to soft skills:*

- Newell (2002) states that soft skills are a behavioral reflection of one’s emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-governance, emotional control, and social skills.
- Laker & Powell (2011, p. 112) explain that soft skills are “*intrapersonal skills such as one’s ability to manage oneself as well as interpersonal skills such as how one handles one’s interactions with others.*”

5) *Combination of cognitive, practical, and ethical values:*

- This part is based on Succi’s (2019) and Succi & Canovi’s (2020) definitions of soft skills as a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills; interpersonal, intellectual, and practical skills; and ethical values. These soft skills play a crucial role in enabling individuals to adapt and respond positively to challenges in both their professional and everyday lives.
- According to the definition chosen for the final Handbook, “*soft skills represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills and ethical values. Soft Skills help people to adapt and behave positively so that they can deal effectively with the challenges of their professional and everyday life*” (Rao, 2018).

6) *Practical application of soft skills in the workplace:*

- Parente et al. (2012, p. 1007) define soft skills as people management skills. Their list includes “*clear communication and meaningful*

feedback, resolving and/or managing conflicts, and understanding human behavior in group settings.”

- Hurrell et al. (2013, p. 161) define soft skills as *“nontechnical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intra-personal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts.”*

3.3.3 Classification of Soft Skills

European Union (EU) member states have adopted various documents aimed at establishing a unified framework for the classification of “soft skills.” In 2018, 11 directives were passed, which mandated the implementation of new teaching and learning approaches for developing “soft skills” among university students by 2020. Another significant document is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In 2017, an official classification system was created for EQF, accompanied by the explanatory document “European Skills, Competences, Qualifications, and Occupations” (ESCO), which cataloged 1384 soft skills sought after in the labor market (European Commission, 2019).

Franco-Ángel et al. (2023) highlight specific types of soft skills that hold particular significance in today’s world:

- 1) Interpersonal relations, which include objective self-assessment, the ability to establish contact, empathy, and compassion for others.
- 2) Personal dynamics, encompassing a drive for achievement, a strong sense of responsibility, high levels of motivation, and self-confidence.
- 3) A desire for success, involving motivation to maintain one’s status, self-sacrifice, initiative, and a systematic mindset.
- 4) Endurance, referring to resilience against failure and criticism, maintaining positive emotional focus, and persistence.

One of the most widely recognized frameworks for categorizing soft skills divides them into three overarching groups:

- 1) Social and communicative skills, such as interpersonal skills, leadership, group work, ethical communication, and responsibility.
- 2) Cognitive skills, which include problem-solving, critical thinking, innovative thinking, time management, and self-learning abilities.

- 3) Emotional intelligence and personality traits, like creativity, optimism, honesty, flexibility, empathy, and motivation (Guerra-Báez, 2019). It is worth noting that qualities and skills often overlap both within and across these categories (Shvedova et al., 2021).

Levasseur (2013, p. 570) identifies four main categories of soft skills: “*personal, interpersonal, group and organizational*.” Organizational soft skills, such as leadership, are most effectively cultivated through coaching and mentoring, whereas interpersonal skills benefit from context-driven education, self-directed learning, and mentoring.

Bernstein et al. (2014) classify soft skills into three fundamental domains:

- Autonomous capacity, including skills like active learning, autonomous learning, research skills, and critical thinking.
- Digital interactivity, encompassing digital skills and ingenuity.
- The ability to work in diverse groups, including effective communication and collaboration.

The term “soft skills” has evolved to include a broad spectrum of categories, as outlined by Touloumakos (2020):

- 1) Qualities such as adaptability, flexibility, responsibility, integrity, professionalism, and work ethic (Robles, 2012; Ballesteros-Sánchez et al., 2017).
- 2) Attitudes and predispositions, including a willingness to learn, working under pressure, and embracing uncertainty (Cinque, 2017).
- 3) Cognitive abilities, such as analytical thinking, decision-making, creativity, and critical judgment (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Thompson, 2019).
- 4) Leadership and self-management skills, including self-awareness, resilience, and the ability to manage oneself effectively (Cinque, 2017; Thompson, 2019).
- 5) Social and interpersonal skills, enabling productive interactions within teams and social settings (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Thompson, 2019).
- 6) Communication skills, involving negotiation, conflict resolution, persuasion, and effective articulation of ideas (Cinque, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020).
- 7) Emotional labor, a concept derived from Hochschild (1983), particularly relevant in service industries.

- 8) Aesthetic attributes, such as professional appearance, often referred to as “lookism” (Robles, 2012).
- 9) Planning and goal achievement, critical for navigating both personal and professional environments (Cimatti, 2016).

3.3.4 The Importance of Soft Skills

Soft skills have gained increasing recognition as critical factors for personal and professional success. Heckman & Kautz (2012, p. 451) demonstrated that *“soft skills predict success in life, causally cause this success, and that programs that improve soft skills occupy an important place in the effective portfolio of public policies.”* These skills, ranging from motivation and social skills to critical thinking and leadership, play an essential role in shaping individuals who can adapt, innovate, and lead in dynamic environments.

The significance of soft skills for the labor market and young graduates. Various documents issued by the European Commission (2013) and numerous human resources experts (Grugulis & Vincent, 2009) highlight the strong connection between soft skills and employability, particularly for young graduates entering the labor market. Companies increasingly demand a highly skilled workforce, and young people must be provided with opportunities to develop essential soft skills. These include entrepreneurial abilities, coping skills (the capacity to address problems creatively), and skills such as teamwork, effective communication, cultural adaptability, conflict management, and resilience in stressful situations. These competencies are vital for a smooth transition from education to employment.

Benefits of soft skills for individuals and organizations. Soft skills offer a wide range of benefits to individuals and organizations alike. They create a positive impression, foster strong relationships, and enhance employability while ensuring long-term career success. They improve communication and empathy, reduce employee turnover, and increase employee engagement, leading to better organizational performance and productivity. Furthermore, soft skills maximize human capital by offering higher returns on investment. They enable leaders to manage teams

effectively, resolve conflicts amicably, and make sound decisions. These transferable skills apply to any job, industry, or organization, making them invaluable assets in a globalized workforce.

Soft skills as a response to global challenges. The growing global emphasis on soft skills reflects their role in addressing current and future challenges. With the rise of the “war for talent”, organizations are increasingly investing in leadership and soft skills training programs. As baby boomers retire, a leadership talent gap has emerged, highlighting the need to equip millennials with the necessary leadership and interpersonal skills. Rao (2018) underscores that the importance of soft skills increases as leaders advance from operational to strategic levels of management. Leadership development and soft skills training are crucial to bridging this gap and fostering the next generation of effective leaders.

Soft skills as drivers of innovation and social progress. Soft skills, such as critical thinking, leadership, and problem-solving, contribute positively not only to organizations but also to society at large (Asonitou, 2015). These skills foster creativity, innovation, and adaptability, enabling individuals to navigate complex challenges in the labor market, organizations, and beyond. As Marques (2013) points out, soft skills like motivation and social intelligence are fundamental for future leaders who must guide teams and organizations through rapid and unpredictable changes.

3.3.5 The Role of Higher Education in Developing Soft Skills

Raciti (2015) emphasized that developing soft skills and training students in higher education institutions should be a priority task within the educational environment. Soft skills are strongly linked to social adaptation, personal well-being, and professional adjustment. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills, ensuring students are adequately prepared to meet the demands of their future careers. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of soft skills, a disconnect persists between the skills students acquire during their studies and the expectations of employers (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

The need for soft skills in a competitive employment landscape.

In today's competitive job market, postgraduate education, particularly master's degrees, has become increasingly significant. These programs are essential for equipping individuals with advanced technical and social skills (Kraja et al., 2023). Success for college graduates depends on a combination of technical/hard skills and soft skills, both of which are reported to be in short supply among graduates. However, empirical evidence suggests that the gap in soft skills is even more pronounced than that of technical skills (Succi, 2019). The inadequate integration of soft skills into higher education curricula, compared to the focus on technical skills, has been widely criticized (Tang, 2018). This gap may explain why graduates are often perceived as lacking essential soft skills, which are vital for career success (Succi & Wieandt, 2019).

Challenges in soft skills development in higher education. Higher education institutions have faced criticism for their insufficient emphasis on skill development that aligns with labor market needs (Aleixo et al., 2018). Research shows that many graduates enter the workforce without the necessary soft skills to thrive in their careers (Succi & Canovi, 2020). This gap persists despite efforts by universities to adapt their teaching methodologies and address these shortcomings. Employers frequently report that graduates lack competencies such as communication, adaptability, and teamwork, all of which are crucial in modern professional environments.

Education as a driver of social and professional skills. Education, as noted by Kraja et al. (2023), plays a vital role in fostering social skills, preparing students for continuous learning, and responding to labor market demands (Capogna, 2019). It helps students develop versatile and constructive behaviors, enabling them to adapt to change effectively (Chandhok, 2021). These behaviors not only support skill acquisition but also expand students' professional networks. In contrast, the absence of soft skills often limits individuals from reaching their full potential (Quispe, 2022).

The growing importance of flexible learning in modern times.

Given the rapid pace of contemporary life, many professionals find it challenging to dedicate time to traditional face-to-face study while managing work responsibilities. To address this, higher education institutions

have developed online specialization programs, allowing professionals to access high-level instruction. These programs make education accessible to those who might otherwise be unable to pursue advanced studies (Bedoya-Guerrero et al., 2024). Such programs not only provide technical skills but also facilitate the acquisition of advanced social skills, which are critical for thriving in today's dynamic employment landscape.

3.3.6 Formation of Soft Skills

Expanding soft skills through innovative activities. Hackathons and meetups have emerged as effective platforms for fostering the development of soft skills. These activities provide opportunities to practice public speaking, answer questions with confidence, motivate team members, and improve self-organization and planning abilities (Pichugina & Bondarchuk, 2019). Similarly, interactive learning methods such as Case-Based Instruction (CBI), which involves group case studies, are highly beneficial. This pedagogical approach includes phases like problem recognition, exploring alternatives, developing action plans, and evaluating progress. These steps inherently require and cultivate essential soft skills, including leadership, communication, and collaboration (Lyons & Bandura, 2020).

Integrating soft skills training in education. Higher education institutions must integrate relevant soft skills training into existing courses. For example, team projects can help students enhance teamwork and communication, while oral presentations and case studies refine their abilities to analyze, persuade, and solve problems effectively (Chiu et al., 2024). Almeida & Morais (2023) stress the importance of embedding soft skills into the curriculum through teaching and evaluation strategies, ensuring students are well-equipped for their professional futures. Institutions can employ diverse assessment measures to seamlessly incorporate soft skills training across different subjects, increasing student competitiveness and proficiency.

Practical techniques for developing soft skills. Understanding soft skills is only the first step; applying them is equally critical. Workshops and training programs are invaluable for teaching individuals how to acquire these skills through role-playing and behavioral exercises. Techniques to

develop soft skills include self-awareness, maintaining positive body language, active listening, making eye contact, and showing empathy (Rao, 2018). Adaptability, constructive feedback acceptance, and interacting with diverse personalities are also crucial. Training through role plays, sports, drama, and art fosters self-esteem and confidence. John Dewey aptly noted that *“experiential learning occurs when a person reflects on their actions, evaluates their usefulness, and applies this knowledge to new situations.”*

Activities that facilitate experiential learning include:

- Project-based learning and organizational problem-solving.
- Role plays, debates, decision-making exercises, and interactive lessons.
- Internships, apprenticeships, and workplace-based learning.
- Extracurricular activities like performing arts and outdoor adventures (Rao, 2018).

Teaching strategies for soft skills development. Soft skills training can be delivered through three main strategies: expository, guided, and active. Expository strategies, such as lectures and seminars, provide foundational knowledge. Guided strategies, like discussions and workshops, involve moderate participation. Active strategies, including role plays, brainstorming, and business games, emphasize experiential learning (Rao, 2018). To maximize soft skills acquisition, individuals must engage in physical interactions, take intrapersonal and interpersonal feedback seriously, and proactively build relationships.

USAID (2019) identifies six principles for building soft skills in adolescents and young adults:

- 1) Encourage experiential learning through challenge, practice, and reflection.
- 2) Address multiple skills simultaneously rather than in isolation.
- 3) Foster strong relationships among youth and with mentors.
- 4) Support positive staff practices like modeling and reinforcement.
- 5) Develop a safe and supportive learning environment.
- 6) Integrate soft skills training across diverse contexts.

The role of teachers in fostering soft skills. University teachers play a pivotal role in equipping students with the soft skills necessary for today’s evolving society. Effective teachers exhibit passion for their subject (Chiablaem, 2021), demonstrate initiative, and employ diverse

and adaptive teaching methods (Bergdahl et al., 2020). Teachers must be innovative, emotionally stable, and self-confident to foster a positive learning environment (Kleinsasser, 2014). Students report that their learning improves significantly when teachers meticulously plan lessons and create a safe, engaging classroom atmosphere (Porter et al., 2020).

Among the soft skills valued in educators are the ability to stimulate critical thinking, creativity, leadership, and teamwork (Sultanova et al., 2021). Effective teachers also foster meaningful interactions and communication among students, although some studies suggest an average level of sociability and empathy among educators (AlHouli et al., 2020). To address this, teachers must undergo regular training to develop the soft skills essential for impactful teaching (SA et al., 2021).

3.3.7 International Research

The increasing importance of soft skills in the energy sector. Using a proprietary database of online job postings from 2010 to 2019, Lyu & Liu (2021) found that job vacancies in the U. S. energy sector increasingly demand high levels of “soft” skills, such as social, cognitive, people management, project management, and customer service skills. This trend reflects an “upskilling” pattern over the past decade, demonstrating that soft skills are becoming critical for success in this field.

Employer preferences and the demand for soft skills. Research by the Boston Consulting Group revealed the most important soft skills valued by employers. According to the study:

- Communication skills are most in-demand (79%).
- A proactive attitude (78%).
- Analytical thinking (77%).
- Endurance (75%).
- Teamwork (74%).
- A desire to achieve goals (70%).
- Inspiration from new ideas (54%).
- Conflict resolution abilities (54%).
- Personal creativity (43%).
- Reliability as a person and specialist (42%) (David et al., 2021).

Similarly, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2018) and Times Higher Education (Bhardwa, 2021) identified key attributes employers seek, including passion for the role, problem-solving abilities, curiosity, strong communication skills, innovation, self-management, adaptability to social cues, and a strong work ethic.

Research methods and key findings on soft skills. Research on soft skills often involves identifying discrete skills through surveys, interviews, or expert panels. For instance, Matteson et al. (2016) used the Delphi methodology to compile expert opinions on soft skills. Marcel Robles (2012) conducted a study with business executives, identifying integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, interpersonal skills, professionalism, positive attitude, teamwork, flexibility, and work ethic as the most important soft skills for employees.

Ethnographic methods also offer valuable insights. Windels et al. (2013) explored the advertising industry, identifying critical thinking, interpersonal communication, presentation, and persuasion as key soft skills. Similarly, Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2010) developed an inventory of 15 soft skills, including emotional intelligence, teamwork, creativity, and responsibility. Their research showed that soft skills significantly predict academic performance, independent of personality traits or IQ.

The role of soft skills in employment success. Research demonstrates that soft skills significantly impact employability. For instance, the Stanford Research Institute International and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation found that 75% of long-term job success depends on soft skills, with only 25% reliant on technical knowledge (Rao, 2018). This highlights the growing need for educational institutions to prioritize soft skills development.

Balcar et al. (2018) evaluated Czech university graduates and found that employers require a 42% higher level of soft skills from graduates compared to the general workforce. However, graduates' actual soft skills levels were 16.46% to 31.15% lower than employer expectations. This discrepancy underscores the need for universities to adopt systematic approaches to soft skills training.

Industry-specific insights into soft skills. Soft skills are not only critical in broad employment contexts but also within specific industries. For example, the energy sector demands a blend of technical knowledge and advanced interpersonal skills to address evolving challenges (Lyu & Liu,

2021). Similarly, in the advertising field, critical thinking and persuasive communication are essential for success (Windels et al., 2013).

Recommendations for closing the soft skills gap. The findings suggest a clear need for educational institutions to integrate soft skills into curricula. Institutions should emphasize experiential learning, project-based activities, and role-playing exercises to foster competencies such as leadership, teamwork, and communication. Employers, in turn, must provide opportunities for continued professional development in these areas. By addressing the soft skills gap, both universities and employers can better equip graduates for the demands of the modern workforce.

3.3.8 Conclusion

The growing emphasis on soft skills across industries and educational systems highlights their critical role in shaping individuals who can thrive in dynamic, fast-paced environments. From the U.S. energy sector's demand for social and cognitive skills to the advertising industry's reliance on critical thinking and persuasion, soft skills have proven to be essential across diverse fields. Employers consistently rank communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability as top priorities, emphasizing that these competencies are often more decisive for long-term success than technical expertise alone. The research underscores that soft skills are no longer optional but a fundamental requirement for employability and career advancement.

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academic knowledge and workplace demands. Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of soft skills, many universities fall short in adequately integrating these competencies into their curricula. Research indicates that graduates often lack essential soft skills, such as leadership, communication, and critical thinking, which employers expect at a higher level. Strategies such as experiential learning, project-based activities, and online training programs offer effective solutions for fostering these skills. By adopting these methods, universities can equip graduates with the tools needed to meet modern job market expectations.

For individuals and organizations alike, investing in soft skills development yields significant benefits. Employees with strong interpersonal and self-management skills contribute to higher productivity, improved team dynamics, and improved workplace environments. At the same time, organizations benefit from reduced attrition, enhanced innovation, and stronger leadership pipelines. Closing the soft skills gap requires a collaborative effort among educational institutions, employers, and individuals, but the rewards – both for personal success and organizational performance – make it a necessary and worthwhile pursuit.

3.4 Well-being

3.4.1 Introduction

We describe well-being as mental peace of mind. Well-being is an important attribute in mental health care. In their publication, Kočí & Donaldson (2022) used an apt quote from Noam Spencer, Ph. D., to explain mental health: *“Mental health is not a destination, but a process. It’s not about where you’re going, but how you’re driving.”*

In their debates on well-being, philosophers focus on the analysis of what constitutes well-being as the ultimate goal of our actions. Philosophers’ approaches to well-being are very diverse. They view the issue in a procedural and holistic way. According to Engelsen (2022), it is important to realize in connection with well-being that each individual has a unique competence for well-being, both in terms of creating well-being for themselves and in terms of creating well-being for other people. Well-being competence is the ability to lead a good life and help others to live a good life. It is the ability to continuously monitor and adjust attitudes and actions with regard to epistemic uncertainty and constantly coming changes. Well-being competence is the knowledge and skill of how to promote well-being in a way that includes not only one’s own well-being, but above all the well-being of specific others. The competence for well-being is made up of four central and in most social contexts typical components: empathy, emotional awareness, flexible perspective and metacognition. Engelsen (2022) draws attention to the need to include specific social and

time-structured conditions in the complicated and ever-changing conditions of real life in considerations about well-being.

According to Hooker (2017), student well-being is becoming an increasingly important attribute in assessing school effectiveness. At many universities, university Career Centers are also dedicated to student well-being. This is also the case at the Career Center of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. One of the reasons for the enormous interest in student well-being is the enormous increase in the number of students suffering from mental and emotional disorders. Auerbach et al. (2018) and Bruffaerts et al. (2018) state, based on their research, that one in three university students shows one or more mental health problems. Auerbach et al. (2018) conducted a study at 19 universities in 8 countries and found that the most frequently diagnosed mental health problems among university students are depression and anxiety disorders. Among other factors, the relationship between teachers and students and the mental health of teachers have a direct impact on student well-being. According to Hooker (2017), the literature clearly identifies a significant need for an educational environment that explicitly supports and develops students' well-being. One reason for this is that students with higher levels of well-being tend to have greater social and emotional competence, better academic performance, and lower rates of academic failure or non-completion of higher education. The role that teachers play in influencing students' well-being is undeniable. Anderson & Graham (2015) defined well-being in students as a sense of security, happiness, love, respect, and health. There is a need for a modern education system to produce graduates who are not only academically proficient but also able to meaningfully collaborate with others from different social backgrounds, manage emotionally challenging situations, behave in a healthy, responsible manner, and respect their surroundings (Durlak et al., 2011).

3.4.2 Dimensions of Well-being

The components of well-being according to the World Health Organization (2022) and Grant et al. (2007) are: **psychological, physical, and social well-being**. Psychological well-being focuses on the subjective

experiences of individuals and has two main components: **hedonic and eudaimonic**. The hedonic component focuses on subjective experiences of pleasure and the balance between positive and negative feelings. In organisations, for example, this is research into job satisfaction, which is defined as a subjective assessment of the work situation. However, some experts point out that job satisfaction does not always mean true fulfilment. In contrast, the eudaimonic component focuses on the fulfilment and realisation of human potential. In organisations, this component includes research into meaning and engagement. Meaning at work is defined as a sense of fulfilment and purpose that employees feel in their work.

Physical well-being is examined both objectively (through physiological measurements) and subjectively (through personal experiences). In the workplace, it focuses on three main areas: work as a source of injury and illness, work as a source of stress in the case of excessive work demands, and work as a means of obtaining health care in areas without universal health care, where work provides access to health care.

Social well-being focuses on the quality of relationships between individuals and communities. Relationships between employees are key to their well-being. Research in this area includes both trust and social support (relationships between employees, cooperation and coordination), and information exchange and mutual support between superiors and subordinates.

3.4.3 Well-being in the Workplace

According to Madero-Gómez et al. (2023), employee well-being often includes a state where employees are able to achieve a balance between work and personal life, have access to health-promoting conditions and feel motivated and valued in their work. This state includes both physical and psychological aspects and takes into account not only working conditions but also personal well-being and relationships between employees. Practices such as selective recruitment, sustainable leadership, fair compensation and skills training contribute to ensuring good mental and physical health of employees. This is key to their well-being and overall satisfaction in the workplace. Ensuring EWB has a positive impact

on the long-term viability of the organization and supports sustainable development goals such as health, gender equality, economic growth and sustainable cities. Students also need to be prepared for such a corporate culture in university Career Centers.

Grant et al. (2007) describe four basic methods aimed at increasing EWB. These are work redesign practices, incentive compensation, team activities, and safety measures.

Work redesign practices involve enriching work tasks, increasing skill variety, task significance, task identity, autonomy, and feedback. This approach creates a work environment that is psychologically engaging and can positively affect employee job satisfaction. In this way, employee motivation and engagement are increased, leading to better performance and job satisfaction.

At incentive compensation from both a monetary and non-monetary perspective. Rewards are essential tools for supporting employee performance and satisfaction. When employees perceive that their efforts lead to valuable rewards, their motivation to achieve better results increases. This approach is consistent with expectancy theory and equity theory, which emphasize the importance of fair and motivating rewards.

Team activities are aimed at improving interpersonal relationships and team cohesion. Practices such as collaborative problem-solving, brainstorming, and goal setting can improve collaboration among employees and strengthen team dynamics. These measures contribute to creating a positive work environment and support not only professional but also personal relationships among colleagues.

Implementation of safety the key measure for protection physical health of employees. Mandatory use of protective equipment tool and regular training in areas safety contribute minimization occupational injuries. This measures can to have positive influence on physical health, but if are perception like limiting autonomy, they can to negatively affect psychological well-being employees.

3.4.4 Individual Strategies for Improving Well-being

Individuals can develop their own well-being strategy or be guided by a trainer. Career Centers, or other specialised departments of universities and organisations, should organise practical workshops where participants can set up their own individual strategy with the support of a group. It is advisable to carry out workshops on well-being in a pleasant, well-ventilated, and illuminated environment that will provide participants with comfort, safety and promote a sense of well-being. The maximum capacity of participants should be chosen with regard to compliance with hygiene rules related to the size of the training space in individual countries, and with regard to the possibilities of interactivity and safe self-disclosure of participants. The optimal number of participants is between eight and twelve people and the maximum is twenty, according to current practice. The time required for the workshop depends on the capabilities of the participants and organizers and on the requirements for practical training of individual techniques, opening discussions, etc. According to experience, the minimum time allowance for a workshop is ninety minutes, however, the optimal time allowance is at least 180 minutes, with the workshop always interrupted by a break associated with airing the space no later than after 90 minutes.

Workshops focused on well-being, whether they are intended for a target group of students, graduates or employees, must be implemented in a trustworthy, friendly atmosphere that allows participants to establish contact with the lecturer and other participants, share their own experiences, opinions, ask questions and not be afraid to interact with others in order to fulfill their expectations associated with the workshop. For this reason, after the initial rules have been set and the lecturer has been introduced, it is appropriate to ask the participants to briefly introduce themselves and communicate their own expectations. The lecturer writes the expectations on the board so that after the participants have introduced themselves, it is possible to summarize the individual expectations and communicate whether, when and in what form they will be fulfilled. At the end of the workshop, the lecturer takes the time to return to the list of expectations and summarize whether the expectations have been fulfilled. By returning to the original expectations, he strengthens the participants' sense of trust and security, which indirectly supports their sense of well-being.

The main part of the workshop (which includes a summary of findings, an evaluation of the fulfillment of expectations, and planning of further steps in the form of a “call to action”) is suitable to be divided into the following logically connected phases that will enable a deep understanding of the participants:

Explanation of the concept of well-being and its individual components in order to understand the logical connections of the topic.

Presenting practical examples for reflection and for creating individual ideas.

Description of specific techniques that help to achieve a sense of well-being and their demonstration by the lecturer so that participants can learn by observation (highly active participants with a need for attention can also be involved in the demonstration).

Practical testing of the selected techniques by the participants, thanks to which they will gain their own experience, an invaluable experience. Less courageous participants can passively watch and learn by observation at this point. Subsequently, it would be appropriate for all participants to voluntarily participate in gaining an active experience.

3.4.5 Explanation of the Concept and its Components

It is desirable that participants maintain maximum attention throughout the workshop. The goal is for them to realize the importance of well-being, to look for opportunities in their lives to increase mental well-being and to have a desire to improve their mental well-being. Therefore, it is not appropriate to use precise and lengthy academic definitions. A simple explanation of the concept and its individual components is sufficient. Subsequently, it is appropriate to communicate about practical situations, ask about the experiences of the participants and give them practical recommendations from a qualified and experienced lecturer to achieve maximum understanding.

Meaningfulness in life is best explained through activities that, although they may tire us, fill us with joy. It is appropriate to mention different types of motivation: literary, creative, social, performance, scientific, practical and administrative (Barrett & Williams, 1995) and motivate

participants to remember in which activities they feel the meaning of their actions. Subsequently, they should be led to regularly include in their daily schedule activities that give them meaning and to be aware of the effect that the meaning of their actions has on them. It is appropriate to guide those participants who are already mature enough to think about what their mission is, what they want to achieve and spread in their lives, when they will evaluate their lives as fulfilled. It is also appropriate to make participants remember in which activities they get into “flow”, i.e. they are fully immersed in their actions.

Maintaining good **relationships** with loved ones is very important. It is appropriate to emphasize to participants the need to balance time alone and time with people. Even introverts need to spend some time with other people for their mental well-being, to interact with them, to be inspired, to communicate.

Finances as an integral part of well-being could be devoted to many hours and the principles of financial literacy and responsible management could be explained. However, if this area was not mentioned by the participants in their expectations, it is not desirable to discuss hard data related to finances too much at the well-being workshop. It is essential to mention the importance of financial health, the need to create financial reserves for a sense of inner peace and awareness of one’s own responsibility for finances, which should not be fully delegated to other household members. It is also appropriate to provide contact information for a free counseling center for people in financial distress, where possible problems can be discussed anonymously.

Health, like finances, is one of the topics that generally deserves a lot of attention. However, in well-being workshops, it is enough for participants to realize the importance of prevention and their own responsibility for building physical and mental health. Participants usually have a very positive perception of the practical exercise in which they graphically illustrate activities and events that replenish their energy and those that drain their energy. In connection with this exercise, the lecturer will again draw attention to the importance of balance and consciously fulfilling one’s own responsibility for regulating activities and events that have an impact on their energy balance.

The awareness that a person is part **of society, a certain community**, and a sense **of belonging** is another of the cornerstones of mental well-being. Participants can fulfill this through volunteering, joining local or professional associations, volunteer work, helping those in need who need help. Participants can invite each other to functioning communities, share the joy that membership in the community has brought them, and thus inspire others to see the opportunities that belonging to a group beyond their close ones offers them.

3.4.6 Practical Examples

When explaining the concept of well-being and its components, the lecturer made extensive use of the logical understanding of causes and effects. It is appropriate to refresh this method of communication with the participants with a specific, well-visualized example. It can be a visual demonstration, video, etc. (in the Czech language, the video by psychiatrist Max Kašparů works very well). One possible demonstration is an adaptation of the above-mentioned video. If the safety conditions of the classroom allow it, the lecturer lights a candle. He places walls in front of it, behind it, on the right, left, above and below and clearly shows the importance of the following attributes in life: looking forward to what is ahead of us, solid supports in the background that we can lean on, close friends, good relationships at the workplace, acceptance of our own place in life and the presence of something that surpasses us, which can be, for example, culture, nature, faith. The lecturer draws attention to the fact that when we lack one of these walls, the flame of our life energy is threatened. However, if two walls are missing, there is a high risk of burnout. It is possible to choose another example that is visually attractive, easily remembered, and simulates the need for self-care in the areas described above.

Depending on the time available, the lecturer will include a demonstration of specific **techniques**. If there is a shortage of time, this part can be reduced to a demonstration of breathing techniques that he himself has properly studied and tested in practice. The common principle of all these techniques is full concentration of attention on the current moment, on one's own body, the life-giving power of the breath and the release

of tension in the mind and body. The lecturer himself or with the help of active participants demonstrates the selected techniques.

The demonstration of techniques by the lecturer is followed by an opportunity for participants to gain their own experience. The accompanying presentation to the workshop, which draws on literature and from it, offers a whole range of techniques that help to induce a feeling of relaxation, allowing them to gain energy and a desire to cope with life with all its beauties and pains. The lecturer gently guides the participants in training the techniques and gives them enough time to master them. The lecturer can divide the techniques into those that focus on physical training (e.g. breathing techniques or body scanning) and mental training (e.g. an adventure journey or a diary for joy) and let the participants choose a technique from the group that is closer to them. However, it is most appropriate to include training in at least one technique from both of these groups and, when meeting with the participants again, to train other techniques as well, so that everyone has the opportunity to find the one that is closest to them and most suitable for their current situation.

After the final repetition, summary and recapitulation of the fulfillment of expectations, the lecturer can give the participants the opportunity to express a possible need to return to a topic that they individually consider important. This will give them an overview of the topics that interest the participants, and they can also capture more difficult cases to solve, which are suitable to pass on to experts. A decorative bottle has proven to be effective for this purpose, where the participants drop their messages before leaving.

Those interested in building their own well-being strategy will achieve success if they regularly practice in their daily lives what they set out to do during the workshop. It is advisable to return to the set goals after some time, check their fulfillment, or revise the goals and continue to fully adopt all components of well-being into daily life to an extent that helps balance and does not contribute to an increase in stress factors.

3.4.7 Examples of Well-being

According to Vendel (2008, p. 11) “*occupation influences how satisfied we are with life, lifestyle, and even the way we spend our free time*”. The right choice of occupation, or rather its change, is an integral part of mental well-being, and therefore, career guidance contributes secondarily to the well-being of its clients through its activities. In addition to this secondary assistance in choosing a suitable occupation, obtaining it, and implementing it appropriately, Career Centers can also implement specific activities with the primary aim of increasing the feeling of mental well-being of their clients. People who perceive good mental well-being will be able to combine their work, personal or study needs and thus achieve the desired work-life balance. University Career Centers can contribute to the development of the well-being of students, and subsequently workers on the labor market, in the following ways:

- Organizing workshops to develop well-being competencies among students.
- Organizing workshops, seminars, lectures, and panel discussions on well-being for university employees as part of their lifelong learning.
- Organizing educational awareness activities for corporate partners of universities.
- Strengthening the mental health of students coming for individual consultations in Career Centers (here it is important to distinguish between preventive strengthening of well-being competencies, which Career Centers can offer, and solving pathological mental health deficiencies in students, which is not within the competence of Career Centers and which must be sensitively and consistently referred for resolution to university psychological counseling centers or to psychological clinics chosen by the client).

The quality preparation of workshops for students is based on the above theoretical assumptions. The practical basis for creating the workshops described below is drawn from the findings of David S. Rosenthal Center for Wellness and Health Promotion at Harvard University Health Services (2021); Kočí & Donaldson (2022); Šauerová (2019). Kočí & Donaldson (2022) point out the different perceptions of well-being. If we assess well-being in a hedonistic way, we may come into conflict with the

demands of mastering university studies. It is necessary to clearly state that mastering university studies and the subsequent demands of the labor market require long-term effort and diligence. Basing mental well-being only on achieving hedonic well-being and fun would be wrong. Therefore, we recommend building Career Center workshops focused on well-being on an eudaimonic approach, which conditions the achievement of well-being through an active life following one's own, deeply rooted values. Mental well-being is very important for the healthy development of society. However, it is not appropriate to build it on the basis of the complete elimination of stress, which could subsequently lead to a decrease in the psychological resilience of the population, which in the longer term would cause a decrease in mental well-being in society. As stated by Šauerová (2019), increasing psychological resilience is a prevention of burnout syndrome both during university studies and in future working life.

Kočí & Donaldson (2022) provide a set of recommendations for creating a sense of well-being. This set of recommendations is intended primarily for distance learning. However, the guidelines are general enough to be the basis for developmental educational activities of well-being led by Career Centers. Šauerová (2019) identifies a sense of meaning during studies as a basic condition for the prevention of burnout. She gives useful recommendations for increasing psychological resilience and self-efficacy in the form of a regular daily schedule, cutting yourself off from stress in the form of meditation or focusing on the breath, rewarding yourself for completing a task as self-motivation, checking off completed duties, a positive life scenario, the sun behind the clouds, my successes, a diary for joy, an adventurous journey, a boat, a list of my wishes, one little joy every day. All these recommendations are included in the proposed structure of a Career Center workshop on the topic of well-being. In order to increase psychological resilience, Šauerová (2019) also recommends developing time management skills. Time management skills are developed within the self-management workshops, which are described in the Self-management chapter.

3.4.8 International Research

The period of intense global economic competition, turbulent changes, the rapid spread of an unprecedented amount of information, and the arrival of uncertainties associated with Covid-19 have brought a high mental and emotional burden to the entire society and to the workplace. This situation has increased the need for well-being not only among students, as described above, but also in companies. University Career Centers connect the world of universities with the labor market, and therefore, it is important to view well-being in them through the prism of both the educational system and the labor market. Organizations in the labor market are trying to support the mental health of their employees. Organizations are more interested in employee well-being (EWB) than before 2010. Thus, the interest of human resource management (hereinafter referred to as HRM) in well-being is growing. The increase in interest in well-being is also evident from the increase in the number of professional publications in the field of HRM dedicated to the topic of well-being. Between 2010 and 2023, the number of articles published annually on the topic of employee well-being increased from 20 to more than 150 (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). Until then, HRM journals focused mainly on the topic of high-performance work systems. Despite the described development, the authors note that there is a large gap in the number of professional articles and publications devoted to the issue of well-being. The articles published on the topic of well-being confirm the fact that managers of organizations, and especially HR managers, have a crucial role in promoting well-being in organizations and that insufficient support for well-being in organizations has a negative impact on the long-term sustainability of the performance provided in organizations. However, this concept is still the subject of discussion because its importance is not always sufficiently appreciated by managers and is often considered a secondary aspect of organizational performance.

3.4.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the increasing prevalence of anxiety among students and employees highlights the pressing need to prioritize well-being in both

educational and professional settings. The multifaceted nature of well-being, encompassing physical, emotional, social, and mental dimensions, underscores the importance of a holistic approach to addressing stress and anxiety. Integrating well-being strategies and techniques into daily routines and life strategies can foster resilience and improve overall quality of life.

Organizations are recognizing the significance of employee well-being and are increasingly implementing comprehensive well-being programs in the workplace. These initiatives not only support individual health and happiness but also contribute to a more productive and engaged workforce. Furthermore, the growing body of academic research dedicated to well-being reflects a broader societal commitment to understanding and enhancing the well-being of individuals.

Overall, the emphasis on well-being in both academic and professional spheres is a positive trend that promises to yield significant benefits for individuals and organizations alike. By continuing to explore and implement effective well-being practices, we can create environments that support the flourishing of all members of our communities.

3.5 Self-Management

Self-management, a concept encompassing personal autonomy and resilience, has become a vital research focus across various domains such as healthcare, education, and organizational development (Kim et al., 2024).

In the contemporary age, with the proliferation of social media, the development of an online presence has become an integral component of the process of constructing one's identity. This phenomenon can be conceptualised as both indirect and direct self-branding activities, contingent upon the individual's level of awareness (Szász, 2023).

3.5.1 Introduction to Self-Management

Self-management is a term comprised of the words “management” and “self”. The term can be defined as follows: self-management is the ability to:

- Consciously manage oneself to set goals.
- Plan one's life and professional activities in a goal-oriented, systematic and rational way.
- Solve problems using proven methods and tools.
- Allocate and use energy, time and resources efficiently and effectively (Matkó, 2014).

The concept of management, or direction, encompasses a range of activities including motivation, planning, goal setting, mobilising resources, implementation, control, regulation, and more, depending on the specific task at hand. The term 'self' is employed in two distinct senses: firstly, as an individual who is both an actor and a manager, and secondly, as the entity that is the focus of management. The focal points of self-management can be summarised as follows: the development of effective and successful strategies for planning and self-management; the enhancement of autonomy; and the integration of self-actualisation (Hirschi & Koen, 2021).

Self-management can be defined as the conscious management of oneself, encompassing the setting of goals, the planning of lives and professional activities in a systematic and rational manner, utilising proven methods and tools to solve problems, and the efficient and effective allocation and usage of energy, time, and resources (Ferguson & Rivera, 2022).

An alternative formulation of this concept is that self-management is, in essence, a self-aggrandising and self-promoting endeavour pursued for one's own benefit (Harari et al., 2021).

Another definition of self-management is that it is a set of life-enriching actions that are in harmony with an individual's innate qualities and characteristics, as well as the fulfillment of desires that stem from one's own talents and aptitudes. Self-realisation can be defined as a continuous endeavour to act, develop, and experience oneself in accordance with one's own conscious self-image (Nehring & Röcke, 2024).

In the contemporary era, it is imperative for individuals to evaluate their capabilities and principles, and to effectively market themselves. A prevalent perspective holds that self-management is a validation strategy for individuals who are perceived as self-important, assertive, and career-oriented (Toscano, 2023). However, the transition from one to two is challenging without assertiveness. This transition necessitates

a personality that is socially accepted, facilitating seamless adjustment to new environments. Furthermore, there is a necessity to enhance one's performance to optimise the utilisation of time. A positive outlook and a willingness to embrace change are also essential components of self-management (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). Career self-management can be a beneficial strategy for self-motivated and highly skilled workers attempting to adapt to the evolving landscape of the workforce. However, for less advantaged workers who encounter challenges in mobilising the personal resources necessary for effective participation, career self-management can, in some cases, impede rather than facilitate career progression (King, 2004).

In the context of career development, Liu et al. (2024) constructed a mediating model to examine the relationship between self-awareness and career adaptability among new nurses. Their findings revealed that creative self-efficacy and work readiness mediate the influence of self-awareness on career adaptability, suggesting that self-management skills are essential for career resilience.

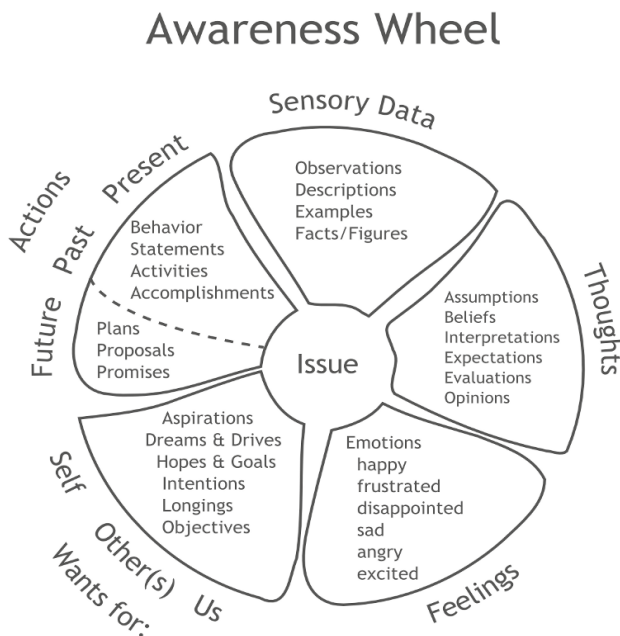
3.5.2 Key Components of Self-Management

Figure 3 shows the most typical skills of self-management. Some of these features are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Figure 3. Seven self-management skills



Source: Niagara Institute (n. d.)

1) *Self-Awareness***Figure 4.** Awareness Wheel

Source: Dundee Counseling (n. d.)

It is evident that individuals also exercise a certain degree of autonomy in the management of their personal lives. This process is predicated on the fundamental principle of self-knowledge, a component that is often overlooked in the pursuit of personal development. The endeavour to assist oneself, often met with failure, can be attributed to a lack of awareness regarding one's own capabilities. The acquisition of self-awareness, defined as the ability to understand and evaluate one's own thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, is a prerequisite for effective self-management. The acknowledgement of uniqueness, a concept that emphasises the distinctiveness of everyone, is paramount for personal growth. The pursuit of self-confidence and self-management is not merely an aspiration but

a necessity, particularly in the context of enhancing one's employability and marketability (Carden et al., 2022; London et al., 2023). To exercise effective self-management, it is first necessary to possess adequate self-awareness. This, in turn, enables the adaptation of various self-management methods to one's own personality, thus facilitating the achievement of desired results. The acquisition of good self-knowledge entails the recognition and understanding of one's abilities and potential, the capacity to adapt to physical, mental and social realities, the ability to identify the most effective methods of adapting to individual and social needs, and the capacity to lead a life that is receptive to joy and achievement, creative development and change (Da Fonseca et al., 2022).

The concept of the self-awareness wheel (Figure 4) was originally developed by Miller et al. (Couple Communication, n. d.), and it focuses on areas that are of particular importance for self-awareness and personality development. The self-awareness wheel is a theoretical model that represents the five domains of the cognitive and information processing process: sensation, interpretation, emotion, intention, and action. These domains are distinct but closely interrelated. A comprehensive self-awareness, encompassing all five domains, is essential for optimal functioning. Individuals with incomplete knowledge, i.e. blind spots, in any of these areas may experience impaired internal balance, leading to ineffective and unsuccessful social relationships (Fulmore et al., 2023). Failure to attend to one's own intentions, goals, and will lead to a life governed by the ideas and expectations of others. Conversely, excessive focus on intention can result in perpetual idealism, planning, and analysis, with a lack of realization and action, perpetuating an oscillation between these two states. As illustrated by the above examples, any one of these areas can assume a dominant or marginal role. The absence of balance or harmony can result in stagnation at specific points. The objective of self-awareness work is to achieve equilibrium among all five areas, ensuring equal intensity. When all the spokes of the wheel of self-awareness are equally stable, life progresses seamlessly and without interruption (Carden et al., 2022).

2) Time and Priority Management

Time and priority management are pivotal, as efficiency is contingent on effective time management. Inefficient time management can have a detrimental effect on business results, including, but not limited to, missed deadlines, additional work to meet deadlines, stress, low productivity, cancelled customer meetings, and consequently, lost customers. Indicators of inefficient time management include a lack of priorities and a lack of a clear plan for the day, which is often manifested by dealing with a number of trivial tasks, wasting time on trivial activities or starting new projects without finishing anything. It is imperative to assess what is of utmost importance and to prioritise accordingly (Lorig & Holman, 2003). Furthermore, multitasking and perfectionism have been shown to be detrimental to effective time management, particularly by extending the time required to complete a task. Constant interruptions, such as emails or noisy environments, have also been identified as a contributing factor to inefficient time management, as they disrupt concentration and prolong the duration of tasks (Kirillov et al., 2015). Procrastination, a common phenomenon characterised by the intentional deferral of tasks, is another consequence of poor time management. Procrastination can lead to rushed work, delayed completion, reduced quality and missed deadlines, which can have a detrimental effect on business. In addition to the negative impact on business, inefficient time management has a significant impact on the mental state of employees, resulting in poor performance and low motivation. Unfortunately, it also has a negative impact on personal life, as working overtime can lead to burnout and depression (Aeon & Aguinis, 2017).

3) Stress and Emotional Management

It is evident that stress and emotions represent two critical elements that exert a significant influence on one's perception of external stimuli (Nimmi & Donald, 2022). Stress is defined within the field of psychology as the body's response to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment or response (Smith et al., 2020). It is an inevitable part of life. Stressors are defined as events or circumstances that trigger a stress response by raising adrenaline levels and triggering a physical or mental reaction (Feinberg et al., 2019). It is important to note that stressors do not necessarily have a negative impact on an individual. While the presence

of a few stressors in one's life is not inherently problematic, the accumulation of stress over time, due to numerous stressors, can lead to adverse consequences (Smith et al., 2021). The identification of potential stressors is crucial for the development of effective stress management strategies, which can help to mitigate negative outcomes (Brown et al., 2020).

According to Rhineberger-Dunn & Mack (2019) a significant category of workplace stressors pertains to role demands, signifying that certain occupations and working environments may exert greater levels of stress compared to others. Role ambiguity, defined as the vagueness of responsibilities, has been shown to be associated with several issues in the workplace. These include increased emotional exhaustion, thoughts of leaving the organisation, and a decrease in job satisfaction and performance. Role ambiguity refers to facing conflicting demands at work, and role overload is defined as a lack of time and resources to complete a task. When an organisation makes redundancies, the remaining employees often have to perform the tasks previously performed by the redundant employees, leading to role overload. As with role ambiguity, both role conflict and role overload have been shown to impair performance and reduce job satisfaction (Brown et al., 2019).

Sabater et al. (2019) find that information is received by the human subject in a multitude of ways on a daily basis. Some of these are of a social nature, for example, advertisements that are encountered both visually and aurally. Others are of a professional nature, such as emails, memoranda, voice messages, and conversations with colleagues. The remaining category is that of personal communications, including messages and conversations from friends and family. When considered as a whole, it becomes evident that the human subject is exposed to a greater volume of information than can be processed. This state of imbalance has been termed information overload, defined as when the time required for an individual to process information, interactions and internal calculations exceeds the supply or capacity of the time available for such processing (Smith et al., 2020). The phenomenon of role overload has become increasingly pronounced in contemporary society, largely due to the omnipresence of web search engines and the deluge of daily emails and text messages, which facilitate uninterrupted access to a wealth of information. Research in this area has demonstrated a significant impact of such fragmented working patterns on efficiency, creativity and mental

sharpness (Brown et al., 2019). The role of emotions in creative tasks has been a subject of much debate. It has been suggested that individuals who possess a positive attitude are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of creativity and to be more receptive to novel concepts (Lin et al., 2014).

4) Self-Discipline and Motivation

The “I” as a brand is the focal point of this discussion. It is not necessary to sell a product; rather, we must sell ourselves. We are the product. The image we create of ourselves exerts a significant influence on our lives, including our careers. It is preferable to create this image of ourselves than to have it created by others. We must organise our lives meticulously to mitigate the risk of problems arising (Tao & Jing, 2023). The process of self-management, whereby individuals assimilate and internalise the external environment to align with their personal needs, encompasses four successive stages. The initial stage is known as external regulation, where learners engage in activities for external motivation, such as praise or recognition, which falls outside the realm of intrinsic motivation. The subsequent stage, introjected regulation, involves self-approval and disapproval, with the source of motivation being intrinsic emotion rather than self-determination. For instance, individuals introject to avoid anxiety and self-disapproving emotions (Phakamach et al., 2023). Self-regulatory activities the third stage is identified regulation, during which the individual evaluates the value of the activity to oneself, recognises and affirms the importance of the activity and works hard towards the goal, and begins self-regulatory activities. During this period, motivation is still extrinsic. The final stage of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation. The individual integrates and internalises intrinsic and extrinsic factors, rationally plans for themselves, evaluates, regulates and controls their behaviour, and engages in self-regulatory activities (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

5) Self-Management Process

Setting goals. The primary consideration is the establishment of precise and unwavering objectives. These objectives serve as the compass that guides our lives, facilitating the identification of appropriate steps to achieve our desired outcomes. It is imperative to articulate these objectives with clarity and precision, and to allocate timeframes that are

commensurate with the complexity and scope of the objectives, thereby maximising the probability of success (Lorig & Holman, 2003). One of the best methods is SMART, shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. SMART Goals



Source: Stevick (2021)

Considering obstacles and resources. To realise oneself, it is first necessary for the individual to assess the obstacles that may be encountered. These barriers may be personal, for example in the form of a family background, or related to the job and workplace. When assessing barriers, it is important to remain realistic. Group discussions can be a useful tool in overcoming such barriers. When assessing resources, it is important to consider what is needed to achieve the goal, including time, money and social aspects. In this regard, it is imperative to prioritise the utilisation of supporting resources (Matkó, 2014).

Plan the workflow effectively. A work plan and a timetable should be developed, which should reflect reality. There are many tools that can help, such as the following five questions:

- **What:** What do I want to achieve?
- **Why:** The specific reason, purpose and deliverables for achieving the goal.
- **Who:** Who else is involved?
- **Where:** Name of the location.
- **How:** Identification of needs and constraints (Reijers & Van Der Aalst, 2005).

Implementation step by step. The implementation stage is characterised by a sequential execution of tasks, meticulously delineated by the plan. Adherence to the stipulated sequence and timetable is of paramount

importance, as any deviation may result in the emergence of unanticipated impediments. Flexibility in addressing these impediments is crucial, and the implementation phase is facilitated by a robust motivation (Mező, 2015).

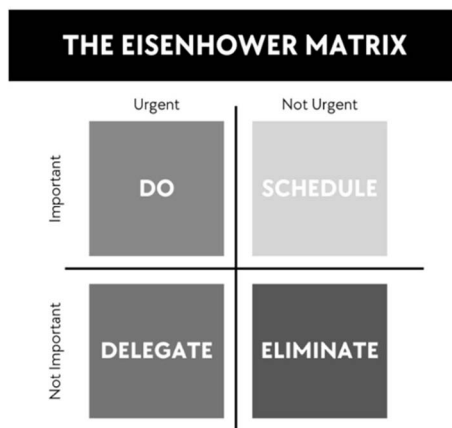
Maintaining motivational balance. In the context of professional success, motivation has been identified as a primary catalyst for performance. It has been demonstrated that motivation influences the extent of energy individuals allocate to their work and the duration of their efforts. In many cases, motivation has been shown to exert the most significant influence on performance outcomes. One theoretical framework that seeks to elucidate motivation is the personality motivation approach, which posits that individual behaviour reflects underlying psychological needs (Matkó, 2014).

3.5.3 Techniques and Tools for Self-Management

1) Effective Planning and Time Organization Methods

The Eisenhower Matrix Method. Figure 6 serves as an effective visual aid to assist individuals in managing their tasks during periods of heightened activity. The efficacy of this concept is predicated on the categorisation of tasks according to both urgency and importance.

Figure 6. The Eisenhower Matrix Method



Source: Evanish (n. d.)

For more time management techniques and tools visit website: <https://www.usa.edu/blog/time-management-techniques/>.

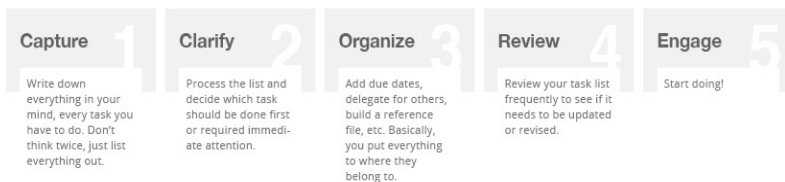
2) *Techniques for Managing Stress and Improving Emotional Resilience* **Seven Steps Method to manage stress and build resilience.**

- Recognize and counter signs of stress.
- Take time for yourself.
- Try new routines.
- Stay connected and make new friends.
- See problems through a different lens.
- Seek help with problems.
- Talk to a health professional if stress is affecting your well-being, you feel you cannot manage the stress you're experiencing (National Institutes of Health, 2020).

3) *Tools for Enhancing Personal Productivity*

GTD Method. Figure 7 shows the GTD Method (Getting Things Done), a guide to productive workflows.

Figure 7. GTD Method



Source: Quire (2019)

Pomodoro Technique Method. Figure 8 shows the Pomodoro Technique, which is a popular time management method that helps to eliminate distractions, with short sprints encouraging focused work, while planned breaks ensure we work sustainably, managing our energy rather than our time. It gives you a clear picture of how long it takes to complete different tasks, and the information helps you plan your days more efficiently.

Figure 8. The Pomodoro Technique

Source: University of Pittsburgh (n. d.)

Carrier Plan Timeline Method. Figure 9 shows Carrier Plan Timeline which is a visual metaphor that gives access to how a person places their time in space, where the past, present and future are in their career, and what emotions and outcomes are associated with them.

Figure 9. Carrier Plan Timeline

Source: VistaCreate (n. d.)

3.5.4 Self-Management in the Workplace

Advancements in the fields of Artificial Intelligence and robotics have rendered the automation of a multitude of high-level cognitive skills a realistic prospect. However, it is important to acknowledge that the impact of these technological developments may vary significantly across different occupations and jobs. High-skilled occupations appear to be less susceptible to automation, as they encompass tasks and competencies that continue to represent significant challenges for automation (Boros, 2023).

1) Self-Management in Relation to Work Tasks and Goals

The concept of self-management can be defined as the process of capitalising on opportunities (Bengtsson, 2014). Work socialisation is predicated on the notion of self-awareness, which, when coupled with a congruence between an individual's characteristics and the demands of their role, engenders a more efficacious socialisation process. Most employees are cognisant of their responsibilities, yet many lack awareness of how their personal behavioural style may impede job effectiveness or impact key work relationships. To align with the job requirements in terms of behaviour and ability, it is essential for employees to cultivate and nurture effective relationships with specific key individuals (Hastuti & Timming, 2021). Sturges (2008) found it is only when employees possess a clear understanding of the requirements for success at an individual level that they are able to formulate a bespoke action plan to facilitate both their own and the organisation's success. Equipped with this newfound awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, employees can leverage their strengths to achieve success and devise strategies to overcome any challenges that emerge. This awareness enables employees to enhance their current roles and relationships, as well as to identify and pursue opportunities for promotion by leveraging their strengths.

In the context of career development, Liu et al. (2024) constructed a mediating model to examine the relationship between self-awareness and career adaptability among new nurses. Their findings revealed that creative self-efficacy and work readiness mediate the influence of self-awareness on career adaptability, suggesting that self-management skills are essential for career resilience.

Empowered individuals tend to show greater self-satisfaction, collaboration and proactivity in problem-solving and performance management. This increased sense of self-efficacy facilitates greater investment in improving organisational effectiveness and profitability, as employees recognise that they can influence change, thereby shaping their own career progress, and this is also true in crisis situations (Krsmanovic et al., 2024).

2) Work-Life Balance

Conflict between work and family is characterised by the way in which the demands of work and family can negatively affect each other. Specifically, the work and family needs of an individual may be incompatible with each other in such a way that work interferes with family life and family needs interfere with work life (Hirschi et al., 2022). The prevalence of this stressor has been steadily increasing as work has become more demanding and technology has enabled workers to work from home and stay in touch with their work around the clock. Research indicates that individuals experiencing stress in one domain tend to be exposed to elevated levels of stress in other domains, potentially exacerbating the overall stress burden (Slowiak & DeLongchamp, 2022). Conflict between work and family has been associated with diminished job and life satisfaction. Notably, work-family conflict appears to be more problematic for women than for men. Organisations that facilitate their employees' achievement of a satisfactory work-life balance are perceived as more attractive than those that do not. Organisations can facilitate work-life balance for employees through various practices, including flexible working hours and individual support from supervisors who demonstrate consideration for employees' family obligations (Guest, 2002).

3) Impact of Self-Management on Teamwork and Leadership

Self-management can be defined as the conscious management of one's own goals, the systematic and rational planning of professional activities, the utilisation of proven methods and tools for problem-solving, and the effective and efficient allocation and utilisation of energy, resources and time (Steyn, 2018). As Raabe et al. (2007) argue, career self-management behaviour is strongly related to a subjective indicator of career success,

measured ex post: career satisfaction. This is since self-management behaviours have the strongest impact on career satisfaction.

The integration of self-management into leadership frameworks has been highlighted as a critical factor for enhancing organizational performance. Wonda (2024) explored the contribution of emotional intelligence – encompassing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management – to employee performance in public sectors. The study emphasized that promoting self-awareness and managing emotions effectively can strengthen self-management practices, thereby improving teamwork and adaptability in professional environments (Abid et al., 2021).

3.5.5 Examples of Successful Self-Management

Stremersch et al. (2021) conducted a survey of recent graduates and found that the quality of the job search process is a significant predictor of job acquisition and perceived fit during the transition from school to work. The study revealed that recent graduates who engaged in more qualitative goal setting and goal striving during the job search process were more likely to secure employment and reported higher levels of fit with the job they obtained. The results underscore the necessity to incorporate the quality of job search into the study of the transition from school to work, as self-regulatory job search activities are found to be highly necessary during this period (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2021). Additionally, Pascual et al. (2021) implemented microlearning activities in engineering education to improve students' self-awareness and career readiness, demonstrating the effectiveness of time-efficient methods in fostering essential life skills. Sharma & Agariya (2024) proposed a framework, emphasizing introspection and self-management as tools for ethical leadership in volatile and uncertain environments. Their hermeneutic analysis suggested that self-awareness and self-management could lead to stress-free performance and perennial happiness, providing a philosophical foundation for leadership practices.

3.5.6 International Research

The dataset consisted of 2,402 documents related to self-management, with a high average citation rate per document of over 6.33.

Most articles were written in the USA (491, 0.4%), the UK (189, 7.9%), China (165, 6.9%), Australia (149, 6.2%), Canada (129, 5.5%), the Netherlands (90, 3.7%), Spain (76, 3.2%) and Germany (75, 3.1%).

Looking at the sources by publishing journal, most relevant articles were published in a relatively small group of journals. The journal BMJ Open published one-and-a-half times as many articles as the second most active journal. The ranking of the leading journals is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Ranking of scientific journals by the number of articles published on self-management

Journals	Rank	Nr. of Articles
BMJ Open	1	56
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	2	35
Journal of Medical Internet Research	3	35
Frontiers in Psychology	4	34
BMC Health Services Research	5	31
Plos One	6	27
Sustainability	7	22
Journal of Vocational Behavior	8	20
Career Development International	9	18
Frontiers in Public Health	10	18
JMIR Formative Research	11	18
BMC Public Health	12	15
JMIR Mhealth and Unhealth	13	15
Journal of Career Development	14	15
Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews	15	14
JMIR Research Protocols	16	13
Journal of Advanced Nursing	17	13

Journals	Rank	Nr. of Articles
Journal of Career Assessment	18	11
Trials	19	11
BMC Primary Care	20	10
Health Expectations	21	10
Patient Education and Counseling	22	10
Frontiers in Psychiatry	23	9
Health & Social Care in the Community	24	9
Healthcare	25	9

Source: Own elaboration

Publications were grouped using three different approaches. The first categorisation was based on their intellectual foundations. The CitNetExplorer software algorithms identified eight different clusters. The distribution of articles across these eight clusters is shown in Figure 10.

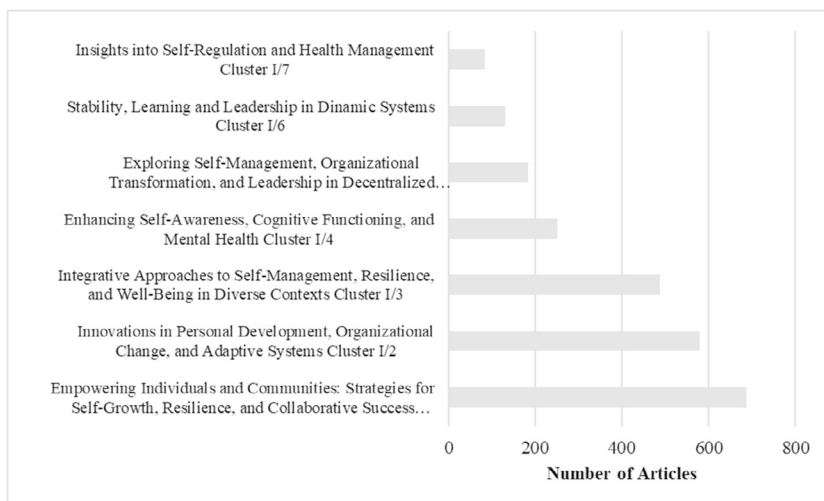
Cluster I/1 highlights strategies for empowering individuals and communities through self-growth, resilience, and collaboration. The articles explore themes such as personal development, community engagement, and fostering collective success in diverse settings. They emphasize innovative practices, inclusive frameworks, and adaptive approaches to enhance well-being, drive meaningful change, and support sustainable progress across personal and organizational domains.

Cluster I/2 focuses on personal development, organizational change, and adaptive systems, exploring innovative approaches to enhance individual and collective performance. Key themes include fostering adaptability, promoting resilience, and implementing transformative strategies in education, healthcare, and workplaces. The studies highlight the integration of technology, reflective practices, and collaborative frameworks to drive growth, support decision-making, and navigate complex challenges in dynamic environments.

Cluster I/3 examines self-management, resilience, and well-being through interdisciplinary approaches across healthcare, education, and organizational settings. It highlights strategies for improving mental and physical health, fostering adaptability, and supporting personal and

professional growth. Key themes include innovative interventions, reflective practices, and the role of self-awareness in addressing challenges and enhancing overall quality of life. These studies emphasize the importance of holistic and context-specific solutions for empowering individuals and communities.

Figure 10. Number of articles in the different clusters according to the intellectual basis of the research



Source: Own elaboration

Cluster I/4 explores self-awareness, cognitive functioning, and mental health through diverse approaches in education, healthcare, and leadership. Key themes include interventions for managing executive function deficits, ADHD, and chronic illnesses, as well as promoting mental health literacy and emotional intelligence. The studies highlight innovative tools like mobile apps and psychoeducational programs to improve quality of life, reduce burnout, and enhance self-management. Additionally, leadership and educational frameworks emphasize reflective practices, cultural competence, and equity-centered development, fostering growth in both individuals and organizations. Together, these works underscore the

importance of integrating psychological, social, and technological solutions for personal and collective well-being.

Cluster I/5 explores the interplay between self-management, decentralized organizational models, and leadership dynamics. They delve into transformative practices like teal organizations, holacracy, and trust-based decentralization, highlighting their impact on autonomy, collaboration, and well-being. Psychological and social dimensions, such as personality traits, self-awareness, and reactance, are examined alongside practical applications in healthcare, education, and cooperative movements. Together, they provide insights into how self-managed systems foster innovation, employee empowerment, and sustainable organizational change.

Cluster I/6 explores the concepts of autonomy, self-adaptation, and stability in dynamic systems, spanning both technical and human-Centered applications. They address challenges such as managing runtime uncertainty, assessing stability in adaptive behaviours, and enabling sustainability intelligence in evolving environments. The studies also delve into learning processes (e.g., reflective learning, experiential teaching, and followership development), highlighting methods to enhance leadership, communication, and adaptability in professional and technological domains. Overall, the cluster emphasizes the intersection of cognitive models, self-aware systems, and pedagogical strategies for fostering resilience and innovation in complex, changing contexts.

Cluster I/7 focuses on the challenges, strategies, and assessments involved in transitioning adolescents and young adults from paediatric to adult care. Key themes include readiness evaluation, addressing barriers (e.g., communication gaps and chronic conditions), and leveraging innovative tools like automated assessments. They highlight the importance of empowering youth with self-regulation and health autonomy skills while emphasizing the need for tailored, patient-Centered transition programs to improve continuity of care and health outcomes.

The research community has tried to use a wide range of methodological tools to understand the situation. This growing interest has led to the widespread use of qualitative methods, which are particularly valuable for exploratory research.

3.5.7 Conclusion

Self-management is essential for best performance, optimising productivity, and achieving short and long-term goals. It supports career development and opens doors to opportunities that might not otherwise be open to you. So, how can you improve your self-management skills? Look for professional development opportunities that focus on the following seven skills: goal-setting, organisation, time management, personal accountability, flexibility, critical thinking and interpersonal skills.

In the contemporary world, characterised by its accelerated pace and numerous challenges, the concept of self-management has assumed a pivotal role. The prevailing economic climate, marked by its complexity and volatility, has exerted significant pressure on corporate entities, consequently impacting the workforce. The labor market has evolved into a highly competitive arena, characterised by a scarcity of available opportunities and the consequent difficulty in maintaining existing positions. This has led to a growing imperative for professionals, across all levels of management, to develop competencies for effective self-management. To achieve this, it is essential that they possess the requisite self-awareness and the skills to develop and manage themselves, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the labor market.

A good self-manager is a good organiser of his or her own resources (time and energy) and of the expectations and tasks that come his or her way. On a day-to-day basis, you can count on such a team player to complete tasks on time and in line with the company's priorities, and to continually improve the company's processes and operations. He or she will lead projects in an accountable way, communicate openly, frequently ask clarifying questions or for help in prioritising, frequently and proactively seek and give feedback on his or her work, dare to make decisions or even say no if he or she feels he or she cannot do the job (Koistinen & Vuori, 2024).

3.6 Self-Presentation

3.6.1 Introduction

In both personal and professional spheres, self-presentation is crucial for influencing how individuals are perceived and for achieving social or career-related goals. By carefully managing self-presentation, individuals can foster positive relationships, enhance their social standing, and advance in their careers. Understanding the dynamics of self-presentation empowers individuals to align their external image with their personal values and professional objectives, thereby promoting success and satisfaction in various aspects of life.

Self-presentation refers to the conscious or unconscious process by which individuals attempt to manage the impressions others form of them. This concept involves strategically controlling information, behaviors, and appearance to influence how others perceive one's identity. According to Schlenker (2003), self-presentation is an important social mechanism through which individuals communicate specific attributes, attitudes, or values to others, shaping their social interactions and personal relationships. In essence, it is the act of presenting oneself in a way that aligns with social expectations, objectives, or personal goals. Self-presentation plays a vital role in personal relationships, as it affects how individuals are perceived by family, friends, and acquaintances. The ability to manage how one is viewed is key to establishing trust, building rapport, and creating meaningful connections.

In the professional realm, self-presentation holds significant weight in shaping career outcomes and professional reputation. The way individuals present themselves to colleagues, superiors, or potential clients can directly impact opportunities for career advancement, collaboration, and job satisfaction. A key aspect of professional self-presentation is the demonstration of competence, reliability, and professionalism. For instance, research by Goffman (1959) suggests that individuals engage in "front-stage" behavior during professional interactions, carefully curating their actions to align with workplace expectations.

Sociopsychological studies, for example, reveal that self-presentation is usually neither aimed at deceiving people in a Machiavellian way nor

purely a form of approval-seeking. Rather, impression management is the selective presentation or strategic disclosure of information necessary to achieve smooth interpersonal relations or important social goals, even if this involves negative self-presentation (Picone, 2015).

Additionally, the rise of digital platforms has expanded the scope of self-presentation, with social media becoming a vital tool for professional branding. Online self-presentation allows individuals to communicate their expertise, values, and personality to a global audience, shaping their professional identity (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). Professionals use these platforms not only to maintain visibility but also to engage with peers and clients, thus enhancing career prospects. The brand experience on social media emerges in the individual's mind. Also, this process suggests that relevance of the content is requisite that managers should take in consideration while designing a strategy of communication aiming to create a specific bundle of attributes, emotions or sensations related to their brands at the mind of the customers of their brands (Losada-Otálora & Sánchez, 2018).

3.6.2 Components of Effective Self-Presentation

Effective self-presentation refers to the ways in which individuals manage and control their image and communication to create favorable impressions in the minds of others. It is not just about how a person looks or speaks; it is the process of strategically presenting oneself to influence how others perceive them. The key components of self-presentation are verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and appearance and personal style. Each of these components can either support or undermine a person's desired image, depending on how they are executed.

1) Verbal Communication: What You Say and How You Say It

Verbal communication encompasses the words you choose and how you convey them. It is a fundamental component of self-presentation as it directly communicates thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) emphasizes that verbal communication does not just transmit information but also performs actions (e.g., requesting,

apologizing, advising). Recent studies continue to explore the complexities of language use in self-presentation, with a focus on effective communication strategies in various contexts, from online to face-to-face interactions.

The content of verbal communication is composed of words and information that are spoken. The content should be relevant, clear, and organized to ensure it aligns with the self-presentation goals. The tone of voice indicates how something is said. This can be as important as what is said. A warm, confident, or enthusiastic tone can make a positive impression, while a flat or monotone voice might suggest disinterest or uncertainty. Clear articulation and precise use of language reflect professionalism and credibility. The ability to express oneself concisely also shows thoughtfulness and control. Based on the research of Burgoon et al. (2021) it is possible to demonstrate how verbal communication strategies impact interpersonal relationships and impressions in various settings.

2) Nonverbal Communication: Body Language, Facial Expressions, Eye Contact

Nonverbal communication is an essential aspect of self-presentation, often conveying more than verbal communication. It includes body language, facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact, and other forms of nonverbal expression. Mehrabian's 7-38-55 Rule (1971) suggests that in face-to-face communication, 7% of the message is conveyed through words, 38% through tone of voice, and 55% through body language.

Body Language and Posture express the way an individual stands, moves, and uses gestures. These behaviors can express confidence, openness, or discomfort. Open, relaxed body language signals friendliness and ease, while crossed arms or slouching may suggest defensiveness or insecurity. Smiling, for example, can indicate approachability and warmth, whereas frowning may communicate discomfort or disapproval. Proper eye contact is crucial for effective self-presentation. Too much eye contact may seem aggressive, while too little can be interpreted as shyness or lack of confidence. Balanced eye contact promotes trust and connection. The study of personal space (proximity) also plays a role in nonverbal communication. Invading personal space can create discomfort, while respecting spatial boundaries enhances rapport. The impact of nonverbal communication on leadership effectiveness, showing how body language

affects leaders' perceived authority and trustworthiness, was demonstrated by the research of Harrigan et al. (2008).

3) *Appearance and Personal Style*

Personal appearance is a pivotal element of self-presentation, as it is often one of the first attributes noticed by others in social and professional settings. While the salience of facial features is well documented, other factors, such as clothing, also play a crucial role in impression formation. Clothing can communicate an extensive and complex array of information about a person, without the observer having to meet or talk to the wearer. A person's attire has been shown to convey qualities such as character, sociability, competence, and intelligence, with first impressions being formed in a fraction of a second. This study empirically investigates how the manipulation of small details in clothing gives rise to different first impressions, even those formed very quickly. The experiment showed that a man wearing a bespoke rather than an off-the-peg suit creates a more favorable impression, although this may be mediated by the salary level of the perceiver. This study is the first to empirically investigate these judgments using time-limited images with minor clothing manipulations on a model devoid of any facial features or expressions, enabling us to conclude with confidence that the impressions arose only from the apparel and were not confounded by the physical attractiveness of the model. We conclude that even apparently minor modifications to clothing style can have a major impact on the information conveyed to perceivers. People are judged on their overall head-to-toe appearance within seconds, and the fundamental role that choice of apparel plays in creating a positive first impression cannot be underestimated (Howlett et al. 2013).

Empirical evidence confirms that greater use of self-presentation tactics fosters positive interviewer evaluations. Indeed, those who fail to self-present are viewed in negative terms. It is not surprising, then, that self-presentation tactics have been a central focus in the study of job interviews (Paulhus et al., 2013). In less formal or creative settings, more casual or tailored attire may be deemed acceptable, provided it remains consistent with the environment's standards. Personal hygiene and grooming practices are essential indicators of an individual's self-care and consideration for others.

Effective self-presentation is a multifaceted process that draws from both verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as appearance and personal style. Each of these components works together to influence how individuals are perceived by others, with verbal communication conveying content, nonverbal cues enhancing emotional connection, and appearance serving as an immediate signal of identity and professionalism. By managing these elements thoughtfully, individuals can project a consistent, positive image and create stronger personal and professional relationships.

3.6.3 Self-presentation in Different Contexts

Self-presentation is a multifaceted concept that plays a crucial role in how individuals are perceived across various contexts. Whether in the workplace, during public speaking engagements, or through online platforms, individuals actively manage their image to influence how they are evaluated by others. In professional environments, self-presentation can significantly impact outcomes including job interviews, presentations, and career advancement. Similarly, public speaking and rhetorical strategies are central to how speakers convey credibility and persuade audiences. In the digital age, managing an online presence, particularly on social networks like LinkedIn, has become an essential aspect of professional identity and personal branding. Understanding self-presentation across these diverse contexts offers valuable insights into the strategies individuals employ to shape perceptions and enhance their social and professional interactions.

Self-presentation in the workplace is a key element in shaping perceptions of competence, professionalism, and cultural alignment. Research has demonstrated that individuals carefully manage their appearance, communication style, and behavior to influence how they are perceived by others, especially during high-stakes interactions such as job interviews and presentations. In interviews, candidates often engage in impression management, adapting their attire, speech patterns, and body language to convey confidence, competence, and alignment with organizational values (Schlenker, 2003). Furthermore, studies indicate that non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, posture, and facial expressions, significantly

impact interview outcomes, with well-managed self-presentation increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome (Carney et al., 2010). During presentations, effective self-presentation is similarly critical. As Goffman (1959) notes, individuals often take on a “performance” role, striving to present a curated version of themselves to the audience. Presenters who adapt their communication style to audience expectations and organizational culture are perceived as more credible and trustworthy, ultimately leading to more successful outcomes.

Public speaking and rhetoric have long been studied in communication theory, with a focus on how speakers use language and delivery techniques to persuade, inform, and entertain audiences. Aristotle’s classical framework of ethos, pathos, and logos remains foundational to understanding rhetorical effectiveness (Aristotle, 2007). Speakers in the Assembly were not members of political parties promoting an ideology but appealed to the interests of the entire community and to shared social values. Ethos, or the credibility of the speaker, is particularly important in workplace presentations, as audiences tend to evaluate the speaker’s trustworthiness and competence (Harris, 2014).

Recent studies on rhetoric continue to explore how speakers adapt these classical principles to contemporary digital platforms, where short-form communication and visual storytelling are often employed. The relationship between computers and writing saw the insertion of the term ‘communication’ in ‘information and communication technologies’ (ICT, or C&IT). ‘Information’ here meant both digital coding of data and information in the sense of news, material and text. ‘Communication’ indicates that computers were seen as vehicles for connecting people, with writing as the principal mode for such communication (Andrews & Smith, 2011).

Modern public speaking draws its origins from the British School of Elocutionists. The theory assumes the existence of two types of language, namely the ‘language of ideas’ and the ‘language of emotions’. While the former enables speakers to manifest the thoughts that pass through their minds, the latter enables them to communicate to the audience the effects those thoughts have on their minds. By using those two types of language, the public speaker’s view is to instruct, to please and to move. It is wrong to think that public speaking occurs only if a person addresses a large

audience. Speaking in public is also present when we try to get a message across to people in a board meeting, or in a team meeting, or when we communicate with a group of employees (Zanola, 2016).

In today's digital age, managing one's online presence is an increasingly vital aspect of self-presentation. Personal branding on social networks, particularly on platforms like LinkedIn, has become a central element of professional identity. Research suggests that individuals who actively curate their profiles and engage with relevant content are perceived as more competent, influential and professional (Bergström, 2017). LinkedIn, as a professional networking platform, serves as a key space for self-presentation, where users can highlight their skills, experiences, and achievements in ways that align with career aspirations and industry expectations. While it is critical to maintain a polished and professional image, over-curation can lead to perceptions of inauthenticity or a lack of transparency, which may diminish trust (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). The balance between professionalism and authenticity is particularly crucial when managing one's brand across multiple social platforms, where audiences may expect different levels of formality and interaction (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Effective online self-presentation involves not only curating content but also engaging with others in a way that fosters trust and credibility, which ultimately contributes to an individual's personal and professional success.

3.6.4 Tools and Techniques for Improving Self-presentation

In today's competitive job market, the ability to effectively present oneself is crucial for career advancement and success. Self-presentation tools and techniques – ranging from verbal communication and body language to digital presentation skills – empower individuals to convey their ideas with clarity and confidence. Mastering these skills not only enhances an individual's professional image but also fosters stronger connections with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders. As organizations increasingly value effective communication in teamwork and leadership, proficiency in self-presentation becomes a critical asset. Ultimately, the ability to articulate one's thoughts persuasively and engage audiences can open doors

to new opportunities, build professional networks, and establish a strong personal brand in a rapidly evolving workplace.

Building confidence and managing nervousness. Public speaking and presentations often evoke feelings of anxiety in many individuals, impairing their performance and confidence. Speaking anxiety is frequently associated with academic achievement. Techniques such as controlled breathing, visualization, and positive self-talk have been shown to alleviate anxiety and boost confidence levels.

Controlled breathing helps regulate physiological responses to stress. There are two techniques that can be used for strategic relaxation: deep breathing and muscle relaxation. An easy deep breathing technique to do is box breathing which can be applied before experiencing anxiety, then stretching the muscles with a progressive muscle relaxation technique that focuses on releasing muscles as a relaxation phase. Furthermore, deep breathing techniques can help the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems work so that blood pressure, heart rate and respiration decrease to normal limits and this has the effect of reducing anxiety (Martingsih et al., 2024).

An alternative effective method is “exposure therapy”, which entails gradually reducing anxiety through repeated exposure to public speaking situations. Confidence can also be bolstered through adequate preparation and rehearsal, creating a sense of familiarity and ownership over the material presented.

Techniques for effective communication and persuasion. Effective communication is essential in engaging audiences and persuading them to adopt certain ideas or viewpoints. Findings of the research carried out by Jakob et al. (2011) indicate that nonverbal elements of persuasive communication can, under certain circumstances, have a beneficial effect on the persuasiveness of individual arguments as well as on the persuasive effects of presentations as a whole. They also show, however, that this is not always the case and, further, that the content of a speech plays a much more significant role than is sometimes assumed in dictating the structure of persuasive effects. Non-verbal cues, including body language and eye contact, are vital components of effective communication. Research by Jakob et al. (2011) indicates that there is some evidence that facial activity and the adequate use of gestures increase perceptions of the credibility

and the persuasiveness of a speech. The prevailing view in research is that certain gestures enhance communication by conveying additional information that amplifies and modulates information conveyed in the speech channel.

Using visual and digital tools to support presentation. In the digital age, visual storytelling, especially through infographics and data visualization, dramatically increases audience-processing time. Infographics simplify complex information into edible visuals and allow readers to grasp the main points of the story more quickly. This horizontal approach engages readers and holds their attention longer, especially when combined with highly structured data visualizations that make it easier to describe patterns, trends, or multi-level information analyzes of large media organizations showed that informative infographics and interactive data visualizations achieve readership and retention rates (Huang et al., 2023).

Theory and concepts in visual rhetoric become important elements of connecting symbols with messages to be conveyed to the audience. Symbols from images, as well as text used in campaign ads carry a specific message to the target audience. Exploration and interpretation findings in the study carried out by Mat Alim & Abd Rahim (2021) show that the use of the good concept of visual rhetoric could produce campaign ads with a more meaningful and clearer message to the audience. In today's world of communication, visual communication is seen to be more effective if it has elements that symbolize certain meanings.

Garner & Alley (2013) conducted a study to explore how the design of presentation slides influences learning outcomes. Specifically, they compared the effects of viewing two types of slide presentations: one that adhered to multimedia learning principles (the assertion-evidence condition) and another that violated these principles (the common-practice condition). In the assertion-evidence condition, several key multimedia learning principles were applied simultaneously, including modality, multimedia, coherence, signaling, and redundancy. These principles were incorporated through the use of sentence assertion headings, explanatory diagrams, images, and minimal slide body text placed near the visuals. In contrast, the common-practice condition featured slides created using PowerPoint's default settings, which are commonly seen in engineering

and scientific presentations. The study examined both immediate and delayed learning outcomes based on whether participants viewed assertion-evidence slides or commonly structured slides. Despite being identical in narration and informational content, the two conditions differed in how well they adhered to multimedia learning principles. The results demonstrated that participants who viewed the assertion-evidence slides exhibited superior comprehension and recall. The authors suggested that this finding reflects how assertion-evidence slides facilitate the development of accurate mental models, aiding in deeper understanding and retention. A significant contribution of this study is the identification of a clear slide structure or template that can enhance multimedia learning during slide-assisted direct instruction. Prior to this research, such a structure had been largely absent. The assertion-evidence slide format is proposed as an effective tool for improving student learning, offering promise for advancing the design of instructional materials.

The use of interactive features in order to engage the audience comprises various behaviors, including likes, shares, comments, mentions, and click-through rates, all of which reflect varied degrees of interest, participation, and affinity toward a specific content or brand. The rising significance of audience participation in social media cannot be emphasized (Manoharan, 2024).

In conclusion, the combination of building confidence, mastering effective communication techniques, and utilizing visual and digital tools can significantly enhance the quality of public speaking and presentations. By integrating these strategies, individuals can improve their delivery, engage their audience, and communicate their messages more persuasively.

3.6.5 Examples of Successful Self-presentation

Developing a personal brand is an ongoing process that involves interactions with others in face-to-face communication and online. The study carried out by Johnson (2017) explores the concept of self-presentation as a key driver of personal branding success. Through the analysis of successful presenters across diverse domains such as business, media, and entertainment, the author examines common strategies employed by influential figures.

Personal branding in social media is the process of taking control of the impressions one is making in the virtual world. Students self-present on a daily basis as they choose what clothes to wear, which car to drive and how they interact with others. Students need to understand that their behavior online can impact potential employers' perceptions of them. When teaching about personal branding, some students are resistant to the idea that images or information posted on social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter could be used by organizations in the hiring process. Career Builder indicated that 60% of employers have used social networking information to hire candidates. Information on a candidate's job qualifications, skills and perception of ability to fit with an organization positively influence hiring, while inappropriate photos, use of alcohol or drugs, and discriminatory comments negatively influence hiring. Making students aware of these concerns assists them in regulating their postings and disclosures on social media (Johnson, 2017).

Additionally, several studies provide insights into developing and maintaining a personal brand over time, including strategic positioning and reputation management.

There are several key focus areas the study addresses:

- Analysis of successful presenters and their strategies.
- Case Studies of effective self-presentation in various fields.
- Practical recommendations: tips for improving self-presentation in daily life.
- Developing and maintaining a personal brand in the long term.

Analysis of successful presenters and their strategies. The area identifies common traits and techniques used by successful presenters, such as authenticity, storytelling, and audience engagement. The role of emotional intelligence in creating meaningful connections is also emphasized (Goffman, 1959). Additionally, the influence of non-verbal communication, as discussed by Hall (2020), highlights how gestures and facial expressions enhance self-presentation, further underscoring the significance of authenticity.

Case Studies of effective self-presentation in various fields. In the digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for self-presentation, transforming how individuals and professionals manage their public personas. A significant area of study within this realm is personal

branding, which refers to the strategic crafting of an individual's reputation and visibility, often utilizing platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. One notable study conducted by Kanasan & Rahman (2024) explores the role of personal branding on social media and its profound implications on career development and personal growth. The study emphasizes the increasing importance of personal branding as a means for self-improvement, particularly in advancing one's career. Originating from self-help literature with a marketing focus, personal branding is now recognized as a practical tool that individuals can leverage to maximize their contributions in both personal and professional spheres. With the rapid advancement of internet technology, social media platforms have become essential venues for individuals to not only stay informed but also actively manage their personal identities online. Kanasan and Rahman's research highlights the extent to which social media influences human behavior, both online and offline. As of 2019 and 2020, global internet users spent an average of 145 minutes daily on social media, a slight increase from the previous year. This widespread use demonstrates the growing integration of social media into daily life and underscores the value of effective self-presentation in the digital world. Social networks, with a global penetration rate of 54%, have become essential platforms for individuals aiming to elevate their personal brands and achieve greater visibility. Personal branding on social media allows individuals to strategically craft an impression, enhancing their reputations and transforming their ideas into tangible realities. This process, which involves a combination of storytelling and online content sharing, helps individuals stand out from obscurity to prominence. The study reveals that through the careful application of branding strategies, individuals can effectively capture the attention of audiences, building a strong personal identity that translates into both professional and personal growth.

Recent research by Hollenbaugh (2021) highlights the role of social media affordances in shaping self-presentation strategies. As users engage with social media platforms to present either their actual or ideal selves, they must navigate the distinct features inherent in each platform, which may influence the messages they construct to achieve their identity goals. A critical aspect of this process is the level of visibility afforded by the medium, as the accessibility and retrievability of information on social

media are often high. Specific platform features, such as the use of trending hashtags on Twitter or the sharing of posts to public stories on Snapchat, contribute to the increased visibility of content. Under such conditions of heightened visibility, users tend to adopt more selective self-presentation strategies in an effort to project an idealized image. Further investigation into social media platforms has shown that Facebook users perceive the platform to offer the highest level of visibility control. Facebook's built-in privacy tools allow users to manage who can view their posts, offering a greater sense of control over the audience. In contrast, a survey conducted among Facebook users revealed that participants expressed greater concern for privacy on Facebook compared to Twitter. This concern was particularly due to the expansive, often less-defined audience on Facebook, where posts may be visible to individuals beyond the original intended audience, including the friends of friends. This study underscores the importance of platform-specific affordances in shaping users' privacy concerns and self-presentation behaviors.

Thus, the concept of personal branding as discussed in Kanasan and Rahman's work exemplifies an effective method of self-presentation in the digital age, demonstrating how individuals across various fields – whether entrepreneurs, professionals, or creatives – can use social media as a powerful tool to influence their careers and public images.

Another research led by Anderson et al. (2001), emphasized the importance of adapting self-presentation strategies to different platforms and audiences. The effect of social media on one's own body image appears as an issue related to self-confidence and self-evaluation. This is shown by the results of longitudinal research by Shakya and Christakis, which suggests that the use of Facebook does not promote mental well-being and that, on the contrary, face-to-face social interactions have a positive effect (Trajković, 2022).

Practical recommendations: tips for improving self-presentation in daily life. The study outlines actionable tips for individuals to refine their self-presentation in everyday interactions, including body language, verbal communication, and the management of first impressions (Mehrabian, 1971). Recommendations such as maintaining open body posture and actively listening align with existing studies on interpersonal communication (Knapp et al., 2013).

Developing and maintaining a personal brand in the long term.

Insights are shared on how to cultivate a sustainable personal brand that resonates with long-term career goals. This includes strategies for evolving one's image, maintaining consistency across different platforms, and leveraging professional networks for growth (Labrecque et al., 2011). Khamis et al. (2016), who argue that consistency and alignment across personal and professional narratives are key to creating a strong personal brand, highlight the importance of long-term personal branding.

The study by Johnson (2017) underscores the crucial role of self-presentation in shaping personal branding and achieving professional success. By analyzing a diverse array of successful presenters across various domains such as business, media, and entertainment, the study highlights how strategic self-presentation techniques – ranging from authenticity and storytelling to emotional intelligence and non-verbal communication – are consistently employed by influential figures to engage audiences and foster lasting relationships. Through case studies, the research illustrates the power of tailored self-presentation strategies in different fields, demonstrating how individuals effectively use these techniques to boost visibility and secure long-term career advancement. The practical recommendations provided in the study offer valuable insights for improving self-presentation in daily interactions, emphasizing the importance of body language, verbal communication, and the management of first impressions. These actionable tips are vital for individuals seeking to refine their self-presentation and, in turn, improve their personal and professional interactions. Furthermore, the research highlights how developing and maintaining a personal brand requires consistency, adaptability, and careful management over time, especially in the ever-evolving landscape of social media and professional networks. Overall, the examples of successful self-presentation shared in this study provide powerful evidence that the way individuals present themselves, both online and offline, has a profound impact on their careers. By following the strategies discussed, individuals can cultivate a strong personal brand that aligns with their long-term goals and resonates with their target audiences. As the study reveals, mastering the art of self-presentation is not only a tool for immediate success but also a crucial component of sustainable career growth and influence in today's competitive landscape.

3.6.6 International Research

Recent studies in the field of self-presentation have emphasized the growing complexity of how individuals curate their identities, particularly in digital environments. The impact of social media platforms is global, amplifying the ways in which users engage in selective self-presentation to enhance social status and manage public perceptions.

However, the growing prevalence of curated self-presentation has led to emerging psychological concerns that transcend geographical boundaries. In addition to digital concerns, persuasive communication remains a critical element in self-presentation across both personal and professional contexts globally. Jakob et al. (2011) examined persuasive communication in self-presentation contexts, emphasizing that the effectiveness of such strategies depends heavily on the cultural context in which they occur. Their research suggests that there is no universal formula for successful self-presentation; rather, the impact of persuasive messages varies across cultures. While factors such as the content of the message are important, Jakob et al. (2011) argue that the alignment of auditory and visual elements with the cultural expectations of the audience enhances the persuasive power of the communication. This finding has cross-cultural implications, suggesting that effective self-presentation in international settings requires understanding and adapting to diverse cultural norms regarding communication styles and persuasive techniques.

As globalization brings together increasingly diverse teams, the role of communication in self-presentation becomes even more essential. Effective communication fosters collaboration, bridges cultural divides, and establishes strong relationships across borders. Tools such as International English, Active Listening, the Ladder of Inference, and intercultural feedback practices have become critical in ensuring that self-presentation is clear and culturally appropriate in multicultural settings. These tools facilitate understanding in international environments, ensuring that the speaker's message resonates with diverse audiences. As Ilie (2019) notes, intercultural communication competence is a key skill, requiring individuals to adapt to different communication styles while remaining sensitive to cultural nuances. Given the international nature of many modern work

environments, this skill is essential for building effective self-presentation strategies in multicultural contexts.

Looking to the future, international research should expand to include a wider range of cultures and socio-economic backgrounds to better understand the spectrum of self-presentation strategies globally. Longitudinal studies that track self-presentation behaviors across different cultural groups and over time would provide valuable insights into how digital self-presentation practices evolve in response to technological advancements and shifting societal norms. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches that combine psychology, sociology, media studies, and cross-cultural research are necessary to provide a comprehensive understanding of self-presentation across different regions and cultural contexts. Exploring how emerging technologies, such as augmented reality and Artificial Intelligence, influence self-presentation in diverse cultural settings will be essential as these technologies continue to shape global communication.

Finally, addressing the global mental health risks associated with self-presentation is of critical importance. Given the international nature of social media, educational initiatives aimed at promoting digital literacy and fostering healthy self-presentation practices must have a global reach. Equipping individuals worldwide with the tools to critically assess their online behaviors and recognize the psychological impacts of curated self-presentation can help mitigate the mental health risks associated with digital identity management. A culturally inclusive approach to digital literacy will ensure that individuals across different regions can develop healthy, balanced approaches to self-presentation in the digital age.

3.6.7 Conclusion

Self-presentation is a multifaceted process through which individuals convey aspects of their identity to others, heavily influenced by context, culture, and the medium of interaction. Key aspects of self-presentation include the selection of personal attributes to display, the strategic management of online identities, and the critical role played by digital platforms in shaping how individuals express themselves. Recent research emphasizes the significant psychological implications of self-presentation, with

findings indicating that curated online personas can both enhance social connections and contribute to negative mental health outcomes, particularly when individuals engage in upward social comparison. The continuous improvement of self-presentation is paramount in today's fast-paced and ever-evolving digital landscape. Individuals must cultivate awareness of how their self-presentation strategies affect their relationships, self-esteem, and overall well-being. Moreover, as social media and technology advance, the potential for misunderstandings and misrepresentations grows, underscoring the need for individuals to adapt their approaches to stay authentic and effective in their self-representation.

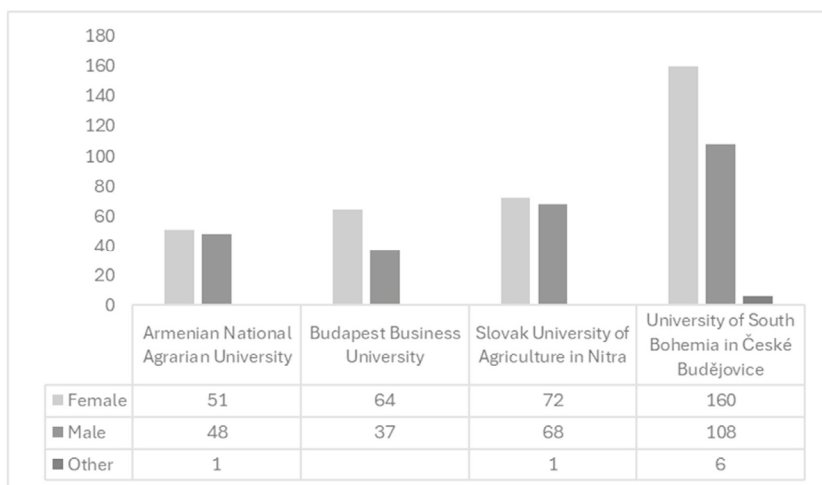
Furthermore, promoting digital literacy and fostering healthy self-presentation practices can help mitigate the risks associated with social media use. Encouraging individuals to engage thoughtfully with their online identities not only empowers them to represent themselves authentically but also nurtures a more inclusive and supportive online community. In summary, understanding and enhancing self-presentation is vital for personal growth, social interaction, and mental health in an increasingly digital world.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Basic Sample Characteristics

Representatives from four universities participated in the survey, a total of 616. The largest number of participants are from University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (USB, 274 participants, or 44%), and the smallest from Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU, 100 participants, or 16%). Fifty-five percent of the total participants were female, 42% – men and 1.3% selected as “other” (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Structure of the sample



Source: Own processing

Representatives of 17 faculties from four universities participated in the survey. The largest number of participants (272, or 44%) were representatives of the Faculty of Economics of the University of South Bohemia

in České Budějovice. All 5 faculties of Armenian National Agrarian University, 3 from Budapest Business University (BBU), 6 from the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SUA), and 3 from the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice were participated in this research. The Table 2 shows the distribution of all participants per faculties.

Table 2. Distribution of all participants per faculty

Faculty	ANAU	BBU	SUA	USB
Faculty of Agrarian Engineering	19			
Faculty of Agribusiness and Economics	36			
Faculty of Agrobiology and Food Resources			7	
Faculty of Agronomy	25			
Faculty of Arts				1
Faculty of Biotechnology and Food Sciences			4	
Faculty of Commerce, Hospitality and Tourism		28		
Faculty of Economics				272
Faculty of Economics and Management			100	
Faculty of Engineering			9	
Faculty of European Studies and Regional Development			15	
Faculty of Finance and Accountancy		34		
Faculty of Food Technologies	16			
Faculty of Health and Social Sciences				1
Faculty of Horticulture and Landscape Engineering			6	
Faculty of International Management and Business		39		
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Husbandry	4			
Total	100	101	141	274

Source: Own elaboration

Most survey participants are Bachelor's students. Twenty-two percent of survey participants are master's students. College students from Armenian National Agrarian University also participated in the survey, accounting for about 7% of the total survey participants. The participation

of College students is crucial for this project and survey since the primary beneficiaries of this current project are the students at any level studying at Armenian National Agrarian University. In addition, the number of college students has increased dramatically in recent years, so their participation plays a crucial role in understanding the current situation regarding this research.

66% of all respondents work while studying and only 34% of participants report that they study exclusively and do not work. Moreover, by educational level, 58% of Bachelor's students are employed, compared to 85% of Master's students. According to the university, the highest rate (77%) of student employment is in University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, and the lowest rate (48%) is in Armenian National Agrarian University. In Budapest Business University and Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, it is 59% and 61% respectively. 100% of Master's students at Budapest Business University are employed. By educational level, the lowest employment rate is found among college students at Armenian National Agrarian University, with only about 36% working while studying.

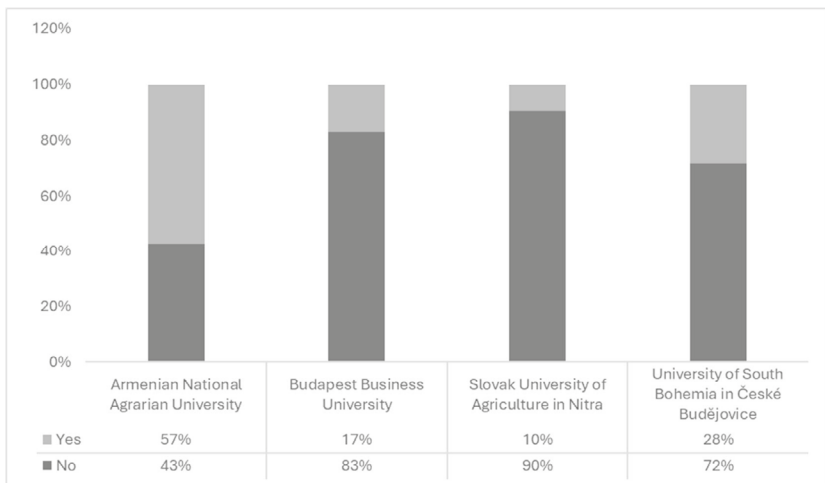
A comparison of employment rates by mode of study shows that part-time learners are the most likely to work, with 86% employed. Only 62% of full-time learners are employed. At Armenian National Agrarian University, 44% of full-time students and 60% of part-time students are employed. At Budapest Business University, all part-time students are employed, while only 56% of full-time students are employed. At the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, 87% of part-time students are employed, compared to just 54% of full-time students. The highest employment rates are at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, where 98% of part-time students are employed while studying, while the percentage of the employed full-time students is 73. Overall, the results align with expectations.

4.2 Career Counseling

According to the data received, about 73% of all participants are aware that there is a career assistance and support center at their universities. The

highest level of awareness is at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice – 92%, and the lowest is at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra – 45%. At Budapest Business University and Armenian National Agrarian University, 69% and 68%, respectively, are aware that there is a career assistance center at their universities. Figure 12 presents the relative awareness of students about the existence of a Career Center at home university.

Figure 12. Awareness of the existence of a Career Center



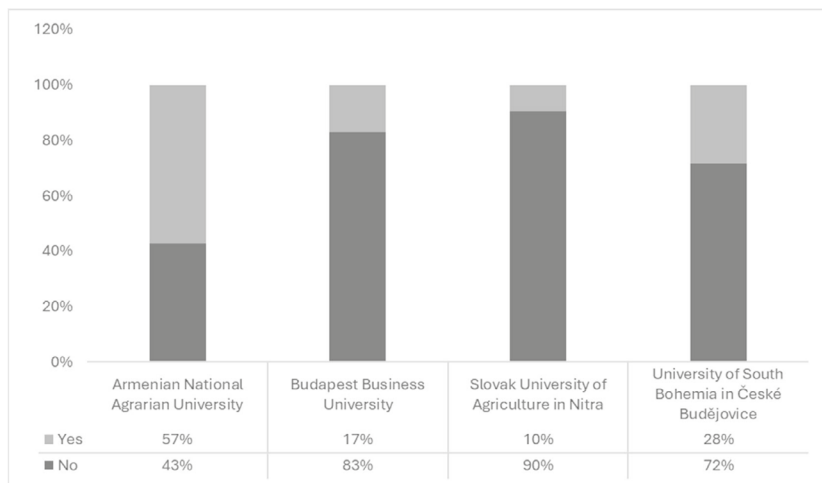
Source: Own processing

The analysis of the data obtained shows that only 28% of all survey participants visit or use the services of their university's Career Center, while 72% do not use this opportunity. This is in stark contrast to the results of the previous survey, according to which 73% of students are aware that their university has a Career Center. It turns out that despite the knowledge of the majority, very few of them visit or use the services of the Career Center. This gap requires in-depth analysis.

Moreover, the highest number of people visit or use the Career Center at Armenian National Agrarian University – about 57%, and the lowest

number at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra – 10%. This indicator at Budapest Business University and the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice is 17% and 28%, respectively. Figure 13 illustrates this topic in detail.

Figure 13. Visiting or usage of services



Source: Own processing

The main information sources from which the students learn about Career Centers available at their universities are university websites, social media, email communication, faculty members, recommendations from peers, and information posters. The participants could select as many options as they wanted.

The survey results indicate that at ANAU, people are informed about the Career Center mainly through the advice of faculty members (30%) or peers (32%). None of the participants used information posters. At BBU, most people learned about this service from the university website (26%), and 17% of the participants learned about it from social media, emails, and advice from peers. At SUA in Nitra, the most common source of information is via emails, around 25 percent. However, 19% of the participants

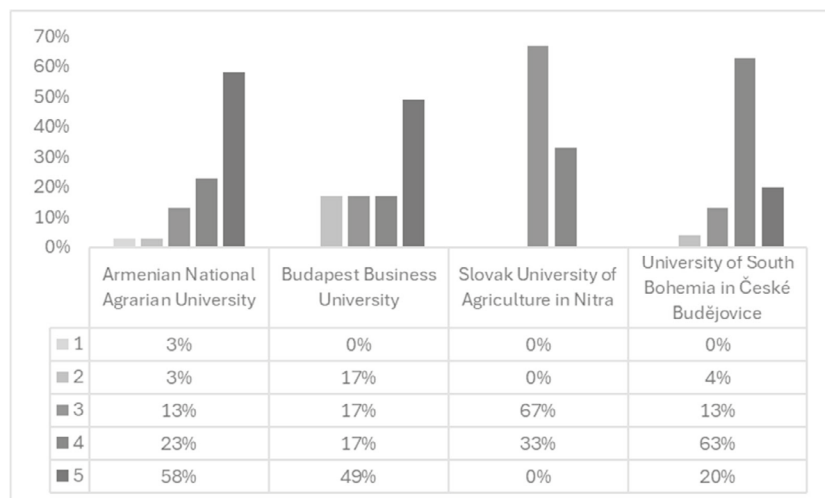
learned about this service from the university website, social media, and faculty members. In USB, the most common source of information is social media (30%) and the university website (24%). The number of people getting information through emails is quite high as well – 20%. Table 3 provides more detailed information.

Table 3. The sources to know about the Career Center

Source	ANAU	BBU	SUA	USB
University website	20	26	19	24
Social media	11	17	19	30
E-mail communication	7	17	25	20
Faculty members	30	13	19	15
Recommendation from peers	32	17	13	4
Information posters	0	9	6	6

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 14 presents the rating of the information available about the Career Center. Answers were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “very poor” and 5 indicates “excellent”. On average, only 34% of all participants rated the information available at the Career Center as excellent. About half of them, 45%, rated it as “good”. Six percent of participants rated the information available at the Career Center as “very poor” or “poor”. The highest satisfaction (as excellent) with the information available at the Career Center was in Armenian National Agrarian University, with 58% and an average of 4.33, and at Budapest Business University, with 49% and an average of 4.00. Students of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice rated the information available about the Career Center with an average of 3.99. About 67% of participants at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra rated the information available as average and the average of answers was 3.33.

Figure 14. Information availability

Source: Own processing

The next part is a discussion about how aware students are of the services provided by their university's Career Center. The services are the following: job search counseling, career workshops and seminars, individual consultations with a career advisor, internships and placements, online job search tools. Answers were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "I am not familiar", and 5 – "I am familiar" (Table 4).

Table 4. Awareness of services provided by carrer center

Service	ANAU		BBU		SUA		USB	
Online job search tools	1	10%	1	25%	1	33%	1	28%
	2	5%	2	25%	2	33%	2	21%
	3	5%	3	0%	3	17%	3	23%
	4	33%	4	17%	4	2%	4	18%
	5	46%	5	33%	5	17%	5	10%

Service	ANAU		BBU		SUA		USB	
Internships and placements	1	10%	1	8%	1	0%	1	27%
	2	5%	2	25%	2	33%	2	23%
	3	13%	3	17%	3	17%	3	30%
	4	41%	4	42%	4	17%	4	15%
	5	31%	5	8%	5	33%	5	6%
Individual consultations with a career advisor	1	10%	1	0%	1	17%	1	24%
	2	5%	2	0%	2	33%	2	14%
	3	10%	3	17%	3	0%	3	18%
	4	36%	4	50%	4	50%	4	18%
	5	38%	5	33%	5	0%	5	25%
Career workshops and seminars	1	8%	1	33%	1	17%	1	3%
	2	3%	2	0%	2	17%	2	3%
	3	15%	3	0%	3	0%	3	13%
	4	49%	4	50%	4	50%	4	21%
	5	26%	5	17%	5	17%	5	61%
Job search counseling	1	8%	1	42%	1	17%	1	27%
	2	8%	2	8%	2	33%	2	18%
	3	5%	3	17%	3	33%	3	17%
	4	36%	4	25%	4	17%	4	17%
	5	44%	5	8%	5	0%	5	21%

Source: Own elaboration

The data obtained indicate that the majority of ANAU students are familiar with the aforementioned services provided by the local Career Center. More than 70% of the survey participants rated them as 4 or 5. For comparison, it should be noted that students are most familiar with the service of online job search tools. Students are least familiar (8%) with the “job search counseling” and “career workshops and seminars” (rated as 1). The total average for all services is 3.89 for ANAU. More than half of the participants of BBU students are aware of the following services: career workshops and seminars, individual consultations with a career advisor,

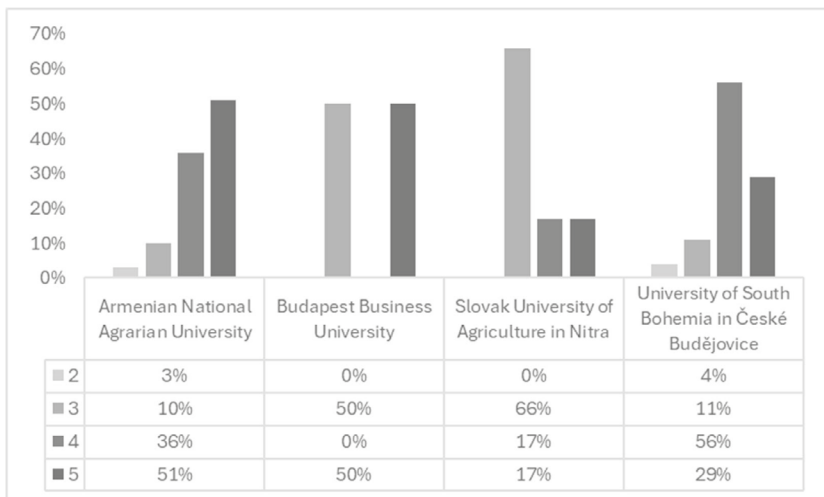
internships and placements, online job search tools. Only the service named “job search counseling” is rated 4 by 25% and 5 by 8% of participants. More than 1/3 of all the participants are unaware of career workshops, seminars, and job search counseling services. Average for all services at BBU is 3.22. The data obtained indicate that more than half of participants of SUA students are familiar with the following services: career workshops and seminars, individual consultations with a career advisor, internships and placements, which are rated as 4 and 5. The services named “online job search tools” and “job search counseling” were rated 17–19% as 4 and 5. Approximately 33% of all participants are not familiar with “online job search tools services”. The average for SUA is 2.90. The service named “job search counseling” is rated 4 by 17% and 5 by 0% of participants. In contrast, more than half of the participants of USB students are aware only of the “career workshops” and “seminars service”. About 24–28% of all participants rated as 1 the following services: online job search tools, individual consultations with a career advisor, internships and placements, job search counseling. For USB, the average for all services is 3.08.

The following part discusses the ratings of the following services provided by Career Centers: job search counseling, career workshops and seminars, individual consultations with a career advisor, internships and placements, online job search tools, assistance in understanding your interests, skills or personal strengths, assistance in understanding values in relation to career choices, assistance with finding and researching career, educational, and employment information, assistance in setting and planning career goals, assistance in exploring career options. Answers were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means “excellent” and 1 means “very poor”.

More than half of ANAU’s students are very satisfied with the aforementioned services provided by home institution’s Career Center, which are rated as good (4) and excellent (5). Ten percent of all participants rated the “online job search tools service” as very poor. The total average for all services at ANAU is 4.14. It is obvious that BBU students are mostly satisfied with the services provided by their university’s Career Center. Half of them rated all services as either 4 (good) or 5 (excellent). None of them rated the services as very poor (1). However, 33% rated the “job search counseling service” as poor (2) and 17% rated the following services with the same score: assistance in exploring career options, online

job search tools, internship and placement. The total average for BBU is 3.96. There is a different situation regarding SUA's data. Most of participants rated the services from 2 (poor) to 4 (good). Fewer participants rated the services as excellent (5) or very poor (1). About half or more of them rated the following services as good: Individual consultation with a career advisor, career workshops and seminars and job search counseling. The total average for SUA is only 2.85. As for USB, the ratings are mostly distributed from 3 (average) to 5 (excellent) for all services. However, the highest number of excellent (5) ratings is given to the service "career workshops and seminars" (51%). The most "underrated" services are "online job search tools" and "internships and placements": 21–24% of all participants rated them as "very poor" or "poor". Overall, the average for all services at USB is 3.62.

Figure 15. The rate of overall experience with Career Center



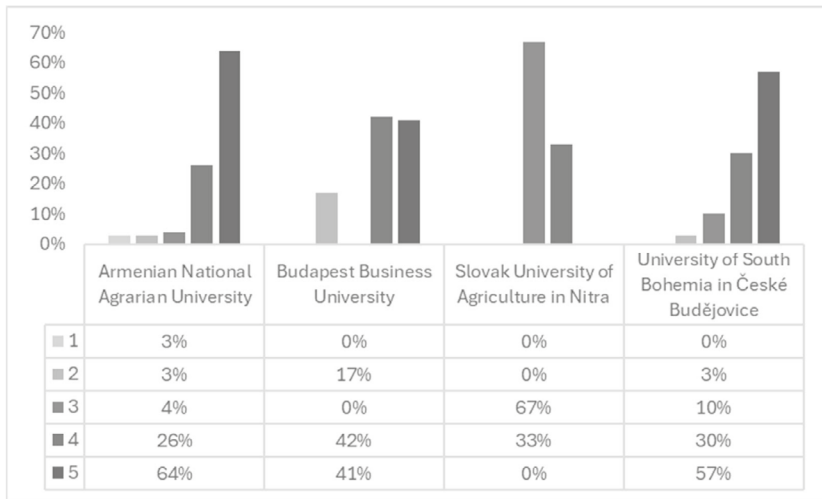
Source: Own processing

Figure 15 presents the overall rate of student's experience with the Career Center. Answers were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates "very poor", and 5 – "excellent". Overall, 37% of respondents rated their

experience at the Career Center as excellent. The most satisfied were at Armenian National Agrarian University and Budapest Business University, with 51% and 50%, respectively. None of them rated their experience as very poor. Only 3% rated it as poor, and 17% rated it as average. The average ratings of overall experience are as follows: ANAU 4.36, BBU 4.00, SUA 3.50, and USB 4.08.

The efficiency of the Career Center's response to inquiries or requests was also evaluated. Answers were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates "very poor", and 5 – "excellent". Thirty percent of the respondents rated the effectiveness of the Career Center on the issues they are concerned about as good, and 42% rated it as excellent. Only 6% are very dissatisfied with the effectiveness of the answers received from their Career Centers. This indicates that Career Centers in all four participating universities do their best to meet the needs of their internal stakeholders. The most satisfied with the effectiveness of the answers provided by the Career Center of their university are at Armenian National Agrarian University – 62%. The average for ANAU is 4.36. It should be noted that all respondents from the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (average 3.00) gave this question only a "satisfactory" (3) rating. This result should be specifically investigated and analyzed by the university officials in the future. The average rating for BBU is 4.17, and 4.01 for USB.

Figure 16 presents the rate of Career Center's staff approach. Answers were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates "very poor", and 5 – "excellent". According to the survey results, 85% of all survey participants rated the approach of their Career Center employees as either good (30%) or excellent (55%). Only 1% rated it as very poor, and 4% – as poor. About 64% of Armenian National Agrarian University (average 4.46) participants rated the approach of their Career Center employees as excellent. The same figure is 57 percent at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (average 4.42), and 41% at Budapest Business University (average 4.08). It is noteworthy that no one at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (average 3.33) rated the approach of their Career Center employees as excellent.

Figure 16. Career Center staff

Source: Own processing

This section discusses the areas and activities in which university Career Centers have helped students. The areas are the following: awareness of my potential, searching for job opportunities, understanding my advantages/disadvantages, writing a resume, cover letter, preparing LinkedIn profile, preparing for job interviews, communicating with potential employers, planning skill development, planning personal growth, planning development of soft skills, understanding rights and responsibilities related to employment. Answers were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means “helped me a lot” and 1 – “did not help”.

It is obvious that the majority of ANAU students are satisfied with the services and support provided by their Career Center. In particular, more than half of the participants rated all areas in which the Career Center was able to help them as 4 (helped) or 5 (helped a lot). The area that received the highest score of 5 is “awareness of my potential”. Additionally, 49–51% of participants rated the following fields as 5: understanding rights and responsibilities related to employment, planning development of soft skills, planning skill development, understanding my advantages/

disadvantages. The total average for all evaluated categories at ANAU is 4.03. As for BBU (total average 3.54), it should be noted that the Career Center was rated as having helped a lot (5) students particularly in the areas: understanding my advantages/disadvantages (67%) and awareness of my potential (50%). However, 17% of participants rated 1 (did not help) the following areas: understanding rights and responsibilities related to employment, planning skills development, preparing for job interviews, preparing LinkedIn profile. The rating distribution is very varied in the case of SUA (total average 2.80). Both “did not help” and “helped a lot” rankings were selected by 0%, 17% and 33% of participants, except the following fields: preparing for job interviews, preparing LinkedIn profile (50% of participants selected 1). 50% of participants selected “helped” (4) for the field of communicating with potential employers. In case of USB (total average 3.27), only 41% of participants rated the writing resume, cover letter field as 5. For all other areas, a rating of 5, was selected by 27% or fewer participants.

As previously noted, one of the survey questions was about whether students use the services of the Career Center. Some respondents indicated that they do not and this section explores the primary reason why students do not visit these centers.

According to the data collected, the majority (31%) of Armenian National Agrarian University students do not use the services of the Career Center, as they are not aware of the services provided. Additionally, 13% of the participants do not consider it a priority yet, and for this reason they do not visit the Career Center. As for Budapest Business University, the vast majority of students (49%) who do not use the services of the Career Center justify their decision by the fact that they are not aware of the services provided. Furthermore, 17% of the respondents reported that they already have a clear understanding of their career goals and how to achieve them, and 12% noted that engaging with the career center is not currently a priority. Among students of Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra 33% indicated unawareness of the Center’s services as the main reason for not using them. Another 21% stated that it is not a priority for them yet and the 10% indicates, that “I know what I want to do and how to do it”. At the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice 29% of non-users justify their choice by saying that “not a priority for me yet”.

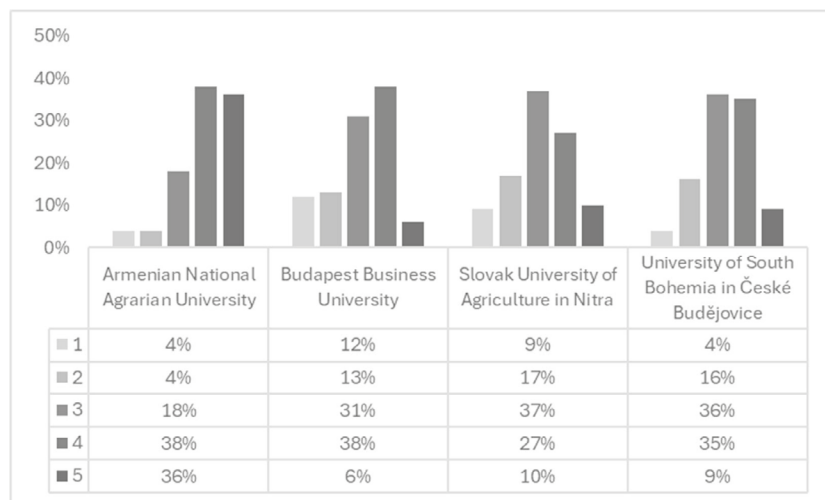
Another 12% justify their choice by saying that “not aware of the offered services”, and 9% by saying “I know what I want to do and how to do it”.

Overall, the reasons for not engaging with career center services are remarkably consistent across all four participating institutions. These findings highlight common barriers to student participation, which should be further investigated to develop targeted strategies aimed at increasing awareness and utilization of career support services.

4.3 Soft Skills

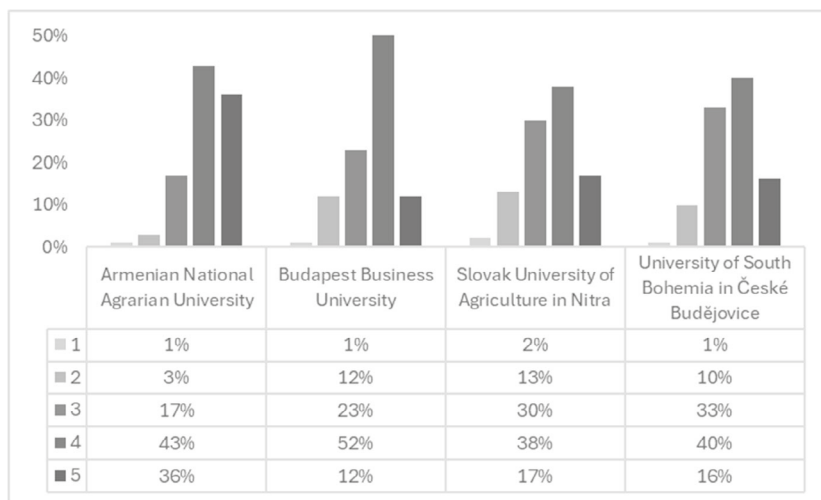
First, students from four universities assessed the level of their soft skills on a five-point scale, where 1 indicates the lowest and 5 the highest level. The self-assessment focused on key areas such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and time management.

Figure 17 shows the self-assessment results for “communication skills”. Armenian National Agrarian University ranked first (average score of 3.98), where up to 74% of students rated themselves at levels 4 and 5, which indicates very high self-confidence in the field of communication. The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice ranked second (average score of 3.27), where 35% of students selected level 4 and 9% selected level 5, together making up 44% of high ratings, with level 3 also as the most commonly chosen score. Budapest Business University ranked third (average score of 3.14). It had the lowest proportion of students selecting level 5 (only 6%), and the majority (69%) rated themselves at levels 3 and 4, which indicates lower self-confidence in communication skills. The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra ranked last (average score of 3.11), which indicates that students here evaluated their communication skills most critically. 37% of students selected level 3, while the share of higher ratings (37%) was lower than at the university of České Budějovice and Budapest.

Figure 17. Level of communication

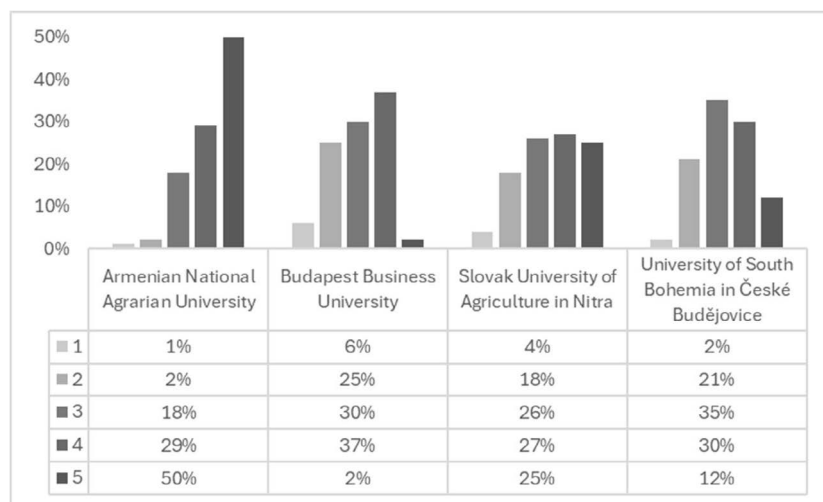
Source: Own processing

Afterward, “critical thinking” was analyzed. The procedure remained the same as in the previous case. The results are summarized in Figure 18. Based on the average rating of critical thinking by students of individual universities, Armenian National Agrarian University ranked first with an average of 4.11, indicating a very high level of self-confidence of students in this area. Almost 80% of them rated themselves at levels 4 or 5. Budapest Business University ranked second with an average of 3.62, where level 4 prevails (52%), but only 12% selected level 5. Close behind in the third place was the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice with an average of 3.61, where most responses were at levels 3 and 4 (73%). The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra ranked last, here students provided an average score of 3.57, although even here, levels 3 and 4 were dominant (68%).

Figure 18. Level of critical thinking

Source: Own processing

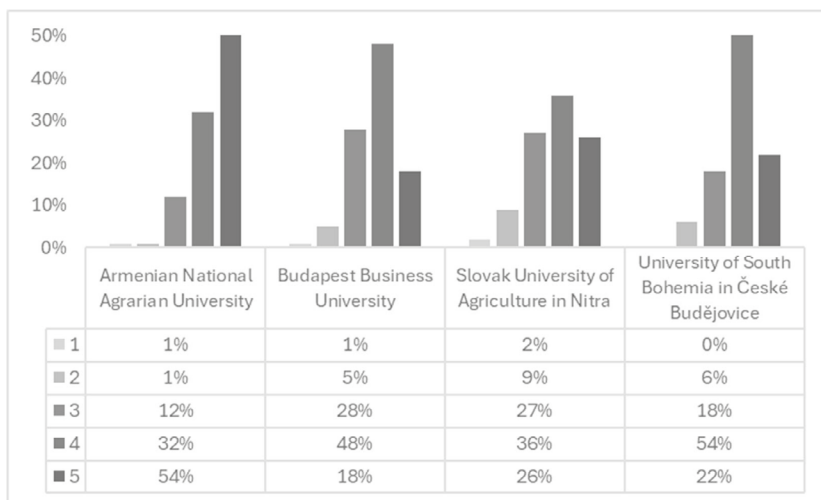
“Leadership” was the next skill analyzed. The results are summarized in Figure 19. Armenian National Agrarian University ranked first in the leadership level assessment with a significant average of 4.23. Half of the students gave it the highest possible rating (50%). The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra ranked second, with an average of 3.50, where the answers are fairly evenly distributed, but with a lower proportion at level 5 (25%). The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice ranked third, with an average of 3.29, with the most students selecting level 3 (35%). Budapest Business University ranked last, with an average score of 3.05. Despite having a relatively high proportion of ratings at levels 3 and 4, only 2% of students here selected the highest level.

Figure 19. Level of leadership

Source: Own processing

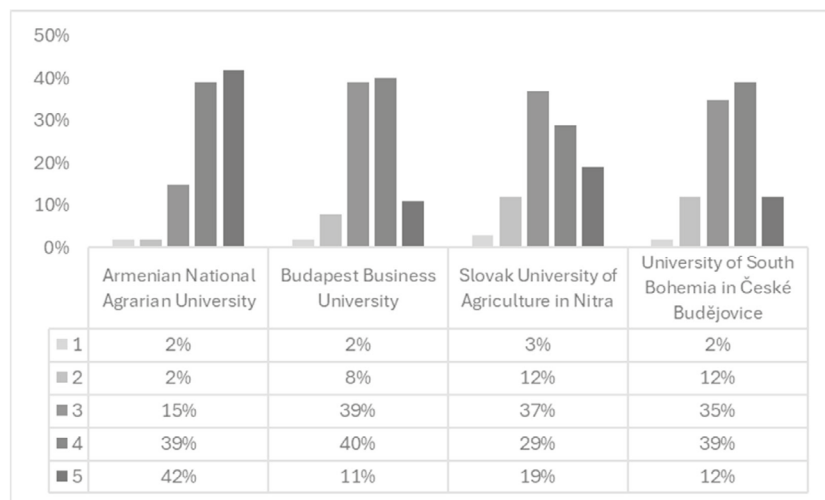
Subsequently, level of “teamwork” was observed. Procedure remained the same as in the previous case. Results are summarized in Figure 20.

Armenian National Agrarian University ranked first again with an average of 4.36 when assessing the level of “teamwork”. It stands out with an extremely high share of ratings at level 5 (54%), and a total of 86% of students rated themselves at levels 4 and 5. The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice ranked second with an average of 3.90, where level 4 dominates (54%), and nearly a quarter of students selected 5. Budapest Business University ranked third with an average of 3.78 – most students (76%) selected levels 3 and 4, but the share of the highest rating is only 18%. The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra finished ranked last, with an average of 3.77, where students mostly selected level 4 (36%).

Figure 20. Level of teamwork

Source: Own processing

When it comes to “conflict management” skills, the results are summarized in Figure 21. The students of Armenian National Agrarian University ranked first in the assessment of their level of conflict management, with a high average of 4.17. 42% of students selected level 5, and another 39% selected level 4, which indicates the students’ strong confidence in their ability to resolve conflicts. Budapest Business University ranked second, with an average of 3.49, although most students here selected levels 3 and 4 (79%). The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice ranked third, with an average of 3.48, with a very similar distribution of responses as Budapest. The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra ranked last, with an average of 3.47, where some students chose the highest rating (19%), but there was also the highest representation of lower levels (1 and 2 together, 15%).

Figure 21. Level of conflict management

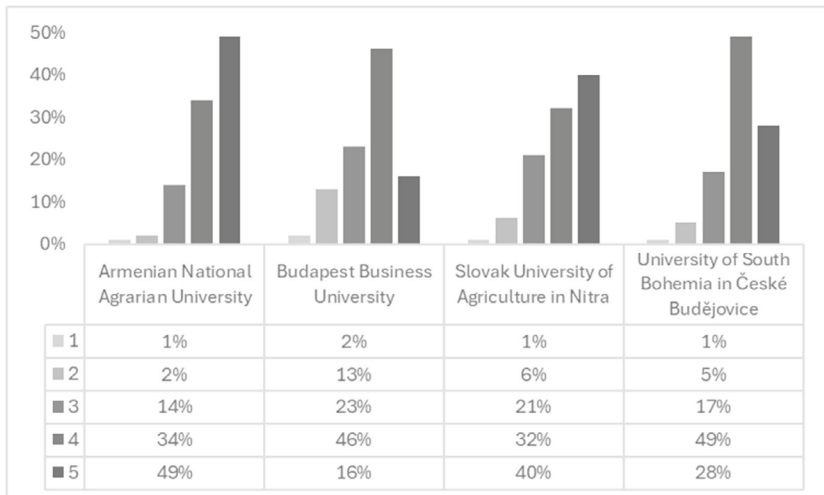
Source: Own processing

In terms of “flexibility and adaptability” (Figure 22), students of Armenian National Agrarian University ranked first with an average of 4.28. Almost half of the students gave the highest possible rating (49%), and another 34% selected level 4 for the given soft skill, which clearly confirms strong self-confidence in this competence. The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra ranked second, with an average of 4.03, which also has a very good distribution of answers – 40% of students selected level 5 and over 30% selected level 4. The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice ranked third, with an average of 3.99, where level 4 (49%) and 5 (28%) dominate, which indicates a high level, albeit with a slightly lower representation of the highest grade compared to Nitra. Budapest Business University ranked last, with an average of 3.59 – although more than 45% of students here selected level 4, only 16% were confident enough to rate themselves at level 5, and a relatively high proportion also fell on lower levels from 1 to 3 (38%).

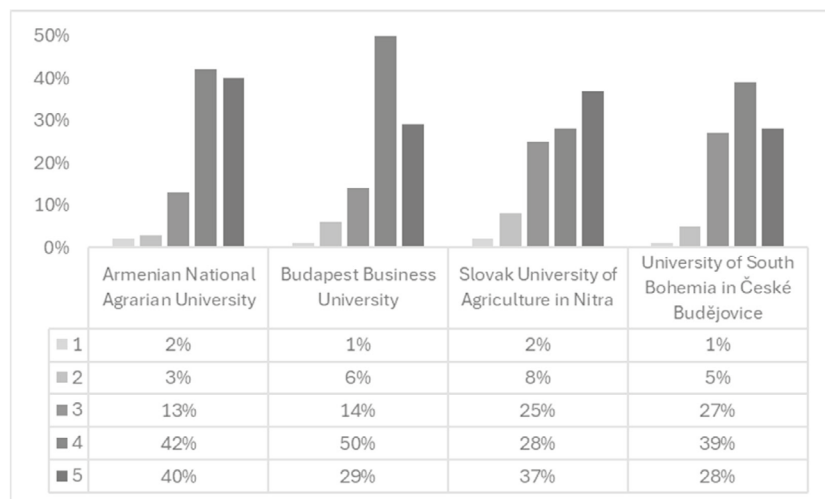
Another evaluated skill was “emotional intelligence” (Figure 23). In the average rating of “emotional intelligence”, Armenian National Agrarian

University ranked first, with an average of 4.14. 40% of students rated themselves at level 5 and 42% at level 4, which confirms high self-confidence in the area of managing emotions and empathy. Budapest Business University ranked second, with an average of 4.01, where most students selected level 4 (50%), but less than 30% reported the highest grade. The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra ranked third, with an average of 3.90, with a relatively even distribution between levels 3 and 5. The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice ranked fourth, with an average of 3.87, where 67% of students reported a level of 4 or 5, but compared to other schools, the share of the highest level was lower (28%).

Figure 22. Level of flexibility and adaptability

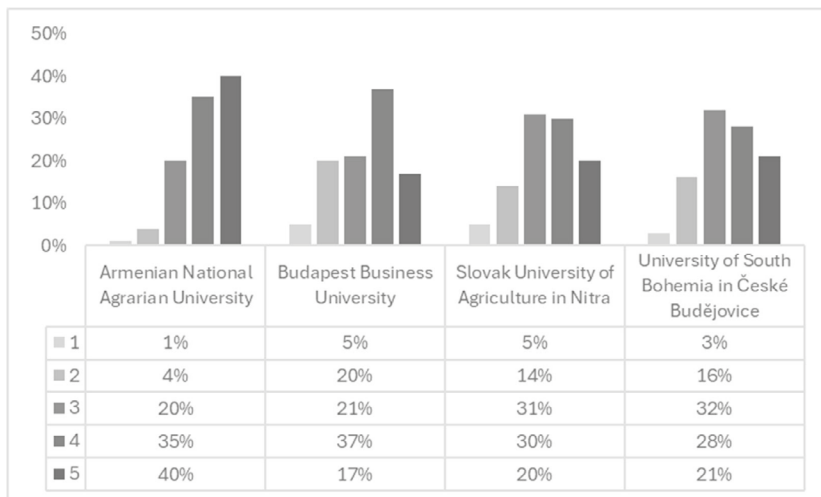


Source: Own processing

Figure 23. Level of emotional intelligence

Source: Own processing

Finally, yet importantly, “time management” skills were evaluated (Figure 24). In the field of time management, Armenian National Agrarian University ranked first by a wide margin with an average rating of 4.08. 40% of students there rated themselves at level 5, and 35% at level 4. The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice ranked second with an average of 3.47, where the majority of students (60%) rated themselves at level 3 and 4. The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra ranked third with an average of 3.44, although it had a higher proportion of students rating themselves at levels 3 and 4 (61%) compared to České Budějovice. Budapest Business University with an average of 3.41, and a noticeably higher proportion of low ratings (levels 1 and 2 combined exceeding 25%), ranked last. Only 17% of students at this university gave themselves level 5.

Figure 24. Level of time management

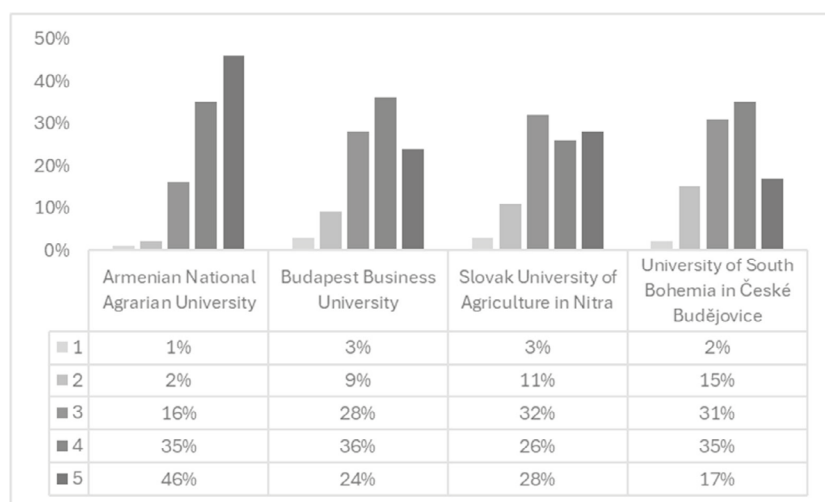
Source: Own processing

Finally, “creativity” was the last of the evaluated soft skills. All results are summarized in Figure 25. In the creativity assessment, Armenian National Agrarian University ranked first by a wide margin with an average of 4.23. 46% of students gave themselves the highest rating (5) and 35% gave a rating of 4, which indicates high self-confidence in their creative abilities. Budapest Business University ranked second with an average of 3.70, where ratings of 3 and 4 predominate, but with a lower share of the highest grade (24%). The SUA ranked third with an average of 3.65, with a similar distribution of ratings as Budapest, but a slightly lower proportion of students rating themselves with a 4 (26%). The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice with an average of 3.50, where most students rated themselves with threes and fours, ranked last but only 17% gave themselves a rating of 5.

Based on the monitored areas of soft skills, the best-rated group of students comes from Armenian National Agrarian University. They achieved the highest average results in all nine assessed skills (communication, critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, conflict management, flexibility & adaptability, emotional intelligence, time management, and creativity).

Their self-confidence in their abilities is consistently high, with a significant share of the highest ratings (5) and a minimal incidence of low ratings. These students, therefore, perceive themselves as very strong in soft skills. At the opposite end of the spectrum are students from Budapest Business University, who tend to choose mid-range ratings more often and have the lowest shares of the highest ratings in most areas. Although they achieve relatively decent results in some skills, such as critical thinking or emotional intelligence, their averages are among the weakest overall. Students from the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice and the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra hover around the average, sometimes slightly above, sometimes below, and their evaluations are often very balanced.

Figure 25. Level of creativity



Source: Own processing

Table 5 shows how students from the universities surveyed perceive the importance of soft skills for their future careers. The results across all institutions are high – all averages exceed 4, confirming that students consider soft skills to be very important. The highest score was achieved by Budapest Business University (4.49). Armenian National Agrarian University was close behind (4.33). The lowest score belongs to the Slovak

University of Agriculture in Nitra (4.03), but it is still quite high, although it may indicate a slightly lower emphasis on soft skills within the study environment. The overall average of 4.22 confirms that there is a consensus across countries and institutions on the key importance of soft skills for professional success.

Table 5. Importance of soft skills for future career

University	Average
Armenian National Agrarian University	4.33
Budapest Business University	4.49
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra	4.03
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	4.22

Source: Own elaboration

Students' interest in developing soft skills was another evaluated category. For Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU), the overall results are very positive, for all soft skills monitored, ratings in categories 4 and 5 predominate. Students showed the greatest interest in "flexibility and adaptability" (50% rating 5), "teamwork" (49%), "communication skills" (46%), and "creativity" (46%). "Leadership", "critical thinking", and "time management" also received a high share of the highest ratings (all above 37%). The representation of lower ratings (1 and 2) is very low, which indicates that students have a real and strong interest in all of the listed skills.

The following text summarizes which soft skills students at Budapest Business School (BBU) are most interested in in terms of their further development and learning. The responses are strongly positive – students showed the greatest interest in "flexibility and adaptability", "teamwork", "communication skills", and "creativity". These areas received the largest share of the highest rating (5), for example, "flexibility" reached up to 50%, "teamwork" 49%, and "communication" with "creativity" 46%. Other skills, such as "time management", "emotional intelligence", and "conflict resolution", were also rated mostly positively, with ratings 4 and 5 accounting for over 60% of responses for most skills. The lowest shares of responses appear at levels 1 and 2, which shows that only a very small proportion of students are not interested in developing these skills.

At the Slovak University of Agriculture (SUA), students are interested in developing individual soft skills. The results show that students have a very positive attitude overall – they showed the greatest interest in “communication skills” (42.55% rating at level 5), “critical thinking”, and “time management” (both 36.17%). Strong interest is also shown in the areas of “leadership”, “creativity”, and “teamwork”. At the same time, it is noticeable that some skills, such as “emotional intelligence” and “flexibility with adaptability”, have a more significant representation of medium ratings (3 and 4), as well as a slightly higher proportion of lower ratings (1 and 2) compared to other areas. “Emotional intelligence”, for example, received over 11% rating 1 and almost 13% rating 2, which indicates a lower interest of some students in its development.

For USB, overall, it can be said that most students show a high interest in the given skills – the most frequent ratings fall into categories 4 and 5. The greatest interest is evident in “communication skills” (43%), “critical thinking”, and “time management” (both 36%), which received the highest share of ratings of 5. Interest in other skills, such as “creativity”, “teamwork”, “flexibility”, and “emotional intelligence”, is also significant, with the majority of students rating them with grades 3 to 5. A more pronounced dispersion of responses is evident in “emotional intelligence”, which shows the highest share of lower ratings (1 and 2), possibly indicating a lower priority of this skill for some students.

Afterwards, three statements were analyzed. The first area examines students’ self-confidence in solving problems in life – “I am confident in my ability to solve problems that I might face in life.” The highest average rating in this category was given by Budapest Business University students, who are the most confident in this area (4.25). Conversely, the lowest level of confidence in the ability to solve problems was reported by students from the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra and the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, whose results are below the average (3.9) compared to other universities (both 3.74). Students from Armenian National Agrarian University are relatively strong in this area (4.11), but slightly behind Budapest.

The second area monitored is “I get along well with others.” Here, too, students from Budapest Business University stand out, showing the highest average rating (4.32). Students from Armenian National Agrarian

University have a slightly lower rating in this area (4.12). On the other hand, students from České Budějovice (3.9) and Nitra (3.8) again rate their abilities relatively lower and are therefore below the average (4.0).

The third monitored area is “I am open to new ideas.”, i.e., openness to new ideas. Budapest Business University (4.28) leads in this category again, closely followed by Armenian National Agrarian University (4.13). Students here are more inclined towards innovations, changes, and new approaches. In contrast, students from the University of South Bohemia (4.09) and Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (4.05) have slightly lower results than the average (4.12), although these are still within a relatively positive range. In general, it can be said that openness to new ideas is the most strongly perceived ability of all three monitored areas. All results are summarized in Table 6.

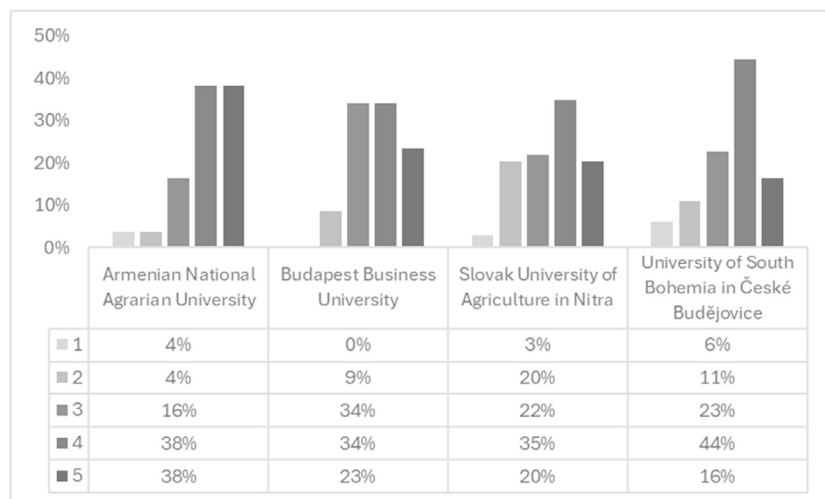
Table 6. Evaluation of statements

Statement	ANAU		BBU		SUA		USB	
I am confident in my ability to solve problems that I might face in life	1	2%	1	0%	1	0%	1	1%
	2	2%	2	1%	2	6%	2	5%
	3	19%	3	17%	3	31%	3	28%
	4	37%	4	38%	4	44%	4	50%
	5	40%	5	44%	5	19%	5	16%
I get along well with others	1	4%	1	0%	1	1%	1	0%
	2	2%	2	2%	2	5%	2	6%
	3	14%	3	9%	3	33%	3	17%
	4	38%	4	43%	4	33%	4	52%
	5	42%	5	46%	5	28%	5	25%
I am open to new ideas	1	4%	1	0%	1	1%	1	0%
	2	1%	2	2%	2	3%	2	1%
	3	19%	3	13%	3	19%	3	21%
	4	30%	4	40%	4	43%	4	43%
	5	46%	5	45%	5	34%	5	35%

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 26 shows the average self-assessment of students to the question: “Have you noticed the development of your soft skills since the beginning of your studies at the faculty?” The results show the highest level of soft skills development is observed among students at Armenian National Agrarian University, with an average rating of over 4.0, which may indicate that most of them have made noticeable progress in their soft skills during their studies. Budapest Business University is in second place with an average of around 3.75, which is slightly lower but still relatively positive assessment. The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice and the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra reach an average of around 3.5 to 3.45, which indicates that students here perceive the development of soft skills as moderate to mild.

Figure 26. Perception of improvement in soft skills

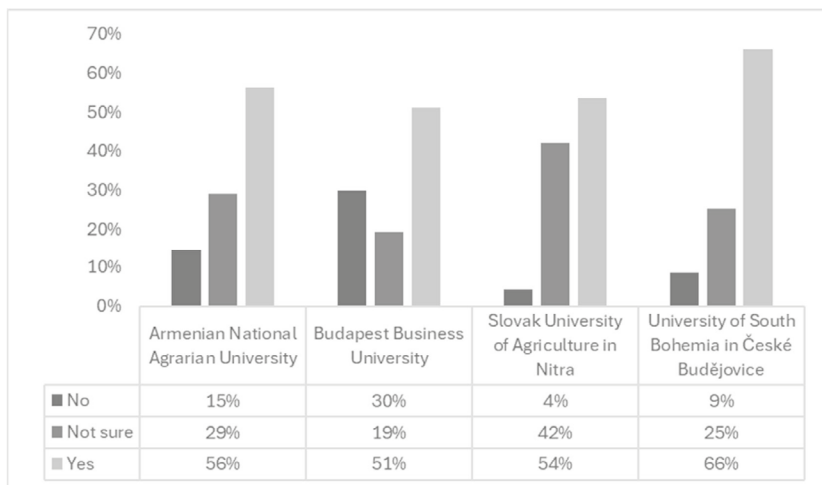


Source: Own processing

Figure 27 shows the responses of students from four universities to the question: “Do you feel that the university sufficiently supports the development of soft skills?”, with the responses divided into three categories: Yes, Not sure, and No. The University of South Bohemia in České

Budějovice shows the most positive perception of soft skills support, where over 66% of students answered “Yes”. Similarly, high levels of satisfaction were recorded by Armenian National Agrarian University and the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, where more than 50% of respondents answered positively. On the other hand, the highest level of dissatisfaction is reported by students from Budapest Business University, where almost 30% of students answered “No” and only half said “Yes”. The relatively high proportion of undecided “Not sure” responses across all universities is also striking, which may indicate a lack of clear or transparent communication about the support available in this area.

Figure 27. University sufficiency in developing soft skills

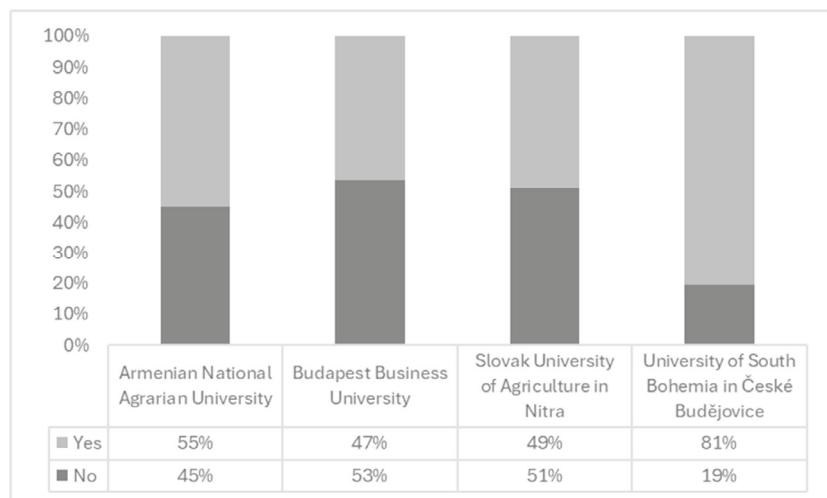


Source: Own processing

Similarly, Figure 28 shows students’ answers to the question: “Do you have experience with learning soft skills at university?” with the options “Yes” and “No”, with the results varying across universities. The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice is the most positive, with up to 80% of students answering “Yes”, which is significantly the highest share of all the schools monitored. This indicates that soft skills teaching is not

only taking place here but is also well recognized by students as a specific and beneficial activity. On the contrary, Budapest Business University and Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra have answers divided almost evenly between “Yes” and “No”, which indicates a mixed experience – some students have come into contact with soft skills teaching, but a large part have not. Armenian National Agrarian University shows a slightly higher proportion of positive answers (55%), though a relatively large share of students (45%) report no experience.

Figure 28. Experience with learning soft skills



Source: Own processing

Table 7 compares the students' evaluations of four universities based on two questions:

- 1) How do they evaluate the current offer of courses focused on soft skills?
- 2) How do they evaluate their quality?

Focusing on the first question – the evaluation of the range of courses – Armenian National Agrarian University performs best with an average rating of over 4.1. The other universities fall in the range of approximately 3.2 – 3.5, with the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra having the

lowest average, which indicates lower student satisfaction with the availability or diversity of these courses.

The trend is similar for the second question – the evaluation of the quality of soft skills courses. The highest satisfaction is again expressed by students from Armenia, closely followed by students from Budapest Business University, where the perceived quality is higher than the offer itself. At the other two universities (Nitra and České Budějovice), the evaluations of the offer and quality are very similar and lower, which may indicate a need for improvement in both the scope and quality of these courses.

Table 7. Evaluation of soft skills courses

Statement	ANAU		BBU		SUA		USB	
How students evaluate the current offer of courses focused on soft skills	1	2%	1	0%	1	3%	1	1%
	2	4%	2	30%	2	13%	2	15%
	3	18%	3	21%	3	49%	3	46%
	4	31%	4	28%	4	25%	4	34%
	5	45%	5	21%	5	10%	5	4%
How do they evaluate their quality	1	2%	1	0%	1	1%	1	3%
	2	4%	2	9%	2	6%	2	7%
	3	18%	3	31%	3	46%	3	40%
	4	38%	4	28%	4	34%	4	43%
	5	38%	5	32%	5	13%	5	7%

Source: Own elaboration

Finally, a short summary of this chapter is offered. First, Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU) is evaluated. Students of this university achieve the highest averages in all monitored soft skills areas, which indicates very high self-confidence in their skills. They rated highest in communication, leadership, teamwork, flexibility, and creativity. The perceived development of soft skills during studies is also the strongest here. ANAU students also perceive a good offer and quality of courses focused on soft skills and show a strong interest in their further development. The university thus appears to be the one that best supports the development

of soft skills among the monitored institutions. Next, students at Budapest Business University (BBU) are summarized. Although BBU students are generally among the most critical evaluators of their soft skills, in some areas – such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, or openness to new ideas – they show strong results. Interestingly, despite the lower average skill ratings, they perceive soft skills as very important for their careers and show great interest in them. However, the university's approach to teaching soft skills is perceived as contradictory – almost half of the students have no experience with teaching them, and more than a quarter do not think that the school sufficiently supports the development of these skills.

The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice students are mostly around average in their assessment of their soft skills – they rate some areas slightly higher (e.g., teamwork, time management), others lower (creativity). Nevertheless, they perceive the importance of soft skills for their future career quite strongly. A significant positive is that up to 80% of students report direct experience with teaching soft skills at the university, which is the highest value of all institutions. The university is also perceived as very active in supporting the development of these skills; more than 65% of students answered that the university supports development.

Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra students rate their soft skills rather conservatively, mostly with average or slightly below average results. They show less self-confidence in, for example, communication or problem-solving. On the other hand, there is a clear interest in developing individual soft skills, especially in the areas of communication and time management. The support perceived from the university is relatively good, but only a part of the students has concrete experience with teaching soft skills. The range and quality of courses focused on soft skills are rated the lowest of all four universities, which indicates potential for improvement.

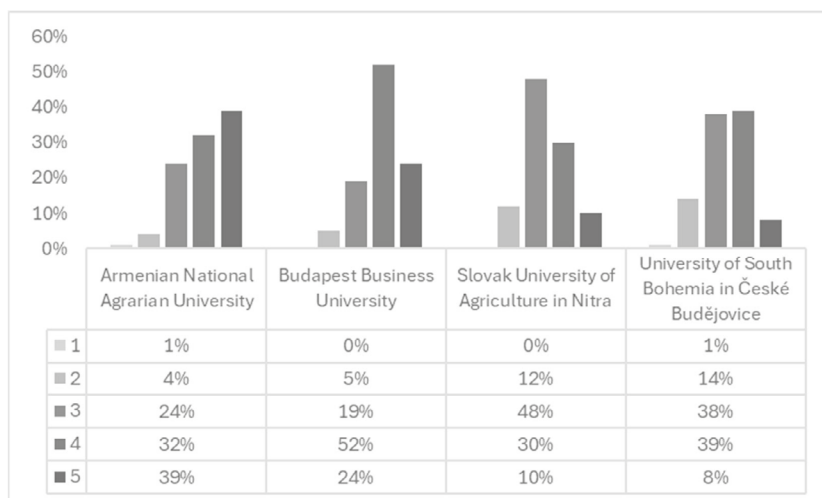
4.4 Well-being

This chapter focuses on the area of well-being in the specific context of university students. As part of the practical part of the research, we decided to explore in more detail how students at the four selected universities perceive their overall well-being and what factors influence it. In particular,

we focused on their everyday experiences, their levels of satisfaction in different areas of life and their personal experiences. The results of the questionnaire survey provide valuable insights into how students manage the demands of academic life and what support mechanisms they use where appropriate.

Figure 29 shows the current overall well-being rating of students on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). As can be seen, the level of well-being varies quite a lot across universities. According to the data of Figure 29 a very good level of well-being (sum for categories 4 and 5) is mainly shown by students of BBU (76%, average 3.95) and ANAU (71%, average 4.04). On the contrary, the lowest sum in these categories is registered for SUA (40%, average 3.35), which, however, also shows the highest neutral value (48%). The lowest level of well-being in terms of the sum of ratings 1 and 2 is then shown by USB students (15%, average 3.39). In conclusion, students from Hungary and Armenia praise their current level of well-being, while students from Slovakia show a rather average level and students from the Czech Republic most frequently report lower levels of well-being.

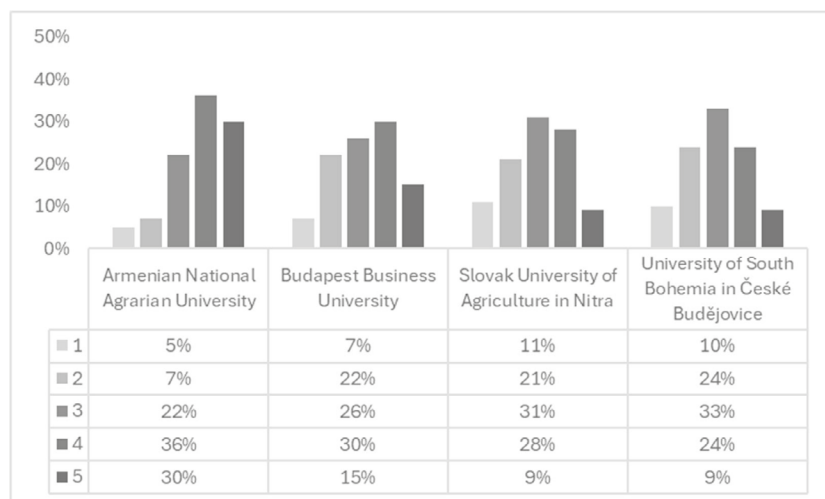
Figure 29. Overall Well-being



Source: Own processing

In the next step students' ability to cope with stress was assessed. Figure 30 shows students' self-ratings of their ability to cope with stress on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). It is possible to identify several differences in this capability across institutions.

Figure 30. Ability to cope with stress



Source: Own processing

Based on the survey conducted, ANAU students demonstrate the best ability to cope with stress, rating this aspect of well-being as 4 or 5 in 66% of cases (average 3.79). Likewise, they recorded the lowest share of ratings at levels 1 or 2, namely only 12%. BBU students follow, with 45% of respondents giving rating of 4 or 5 (average 3.24). However, lower ratings (1 or 2) were more frequent among BBU students, suggesting a wider spread of experiences. By far the lowest level of coping with stress is then recorded for SUA (average 3.02) and USB (average 2.99), which show virtually identical results. Their ratings at levels 4 or 5 do not even reach 40%, while the combined share of very poor or poor level exceeds 30%. Both SUA and USB should consider incorporating special techniques or courses to improve this ability.

Next, students were asked which skills or knowledge they would like to acquire to improve their well-being. They rated the following options: Techniques for managing stress and anxiety, Healthy eating habits, Improving physical fitness and health, Meditation and mindfulness, Improving sleep quality, Time management and work-life balance, Strengthening social connections and interpersonal relationships. All of these skills were rated from 1 (not interesting in learning) to 5 (most interesting in learning).

The first item evaluated was “Techniques for managing stress and anxiety”. USB students are the highest interested in developing these skills, with ratings of 4 and 5 reaching 75%, (average 4.06). They were followed by ANAU (70%, average 3.93), BBU (68%, average 3.82) and SUA (65%, average 3.86). On the other hand, BBU students had the highest proportion of low interest, with 18% giving ratings of 1 or 2. The second ranked skills are then SUA (11%), ANAU (10%) and USB (9%), which means that there are very few USB students who do not consider developing these techniques important. The highest proportion of neutral rating (3) was recorded by SUA students (23%). Overall, however, there is a strong and consistent interest in developing these techniques and skills across institutions.

The second skill assessed was “Healthy eating habits”. The results show that ANAU (average 3.80) and USB (average 3.70) students are clearly most interested in developing this skill, with ratings of 4 and 5 reaching 68% and 66% respectively. Students from Slovakia and Hungary do not show such interest, as their ratings of 4 and 5 reach 49% for SUA (average 3.53) and only 46% for BBU (average 3.39). Thus, in both cases less than half of the students. Additionally, low-interest ratings (1 or 2), were recorded 22% of cases at BBU and in 20% of cases at SUA. These findings suggest that students from BBU and SUA are generally less interested in developing healthy eating habits, while students from ANAU and USB show significantly higher interest.

Subsequently, interest in the category “Improving physical fitness and health” was observed. The results show that the highest interest is again among ANAU students, with 74% giving scores 4 and 5 and an average of 3.99. This is followed by USB with 71%, and SUA with 66% and an average of 3.96. Notably, BBU stands out with a much lower level of interest – only 50% rated this skill with a 4 or 5, and the average score is just 3.37. At the same time, BBU students show the highest percentage

of low-interest responses (ratings 1 and 2), with a total of 30%, which is significantly higher than any other institution. The second-highest proportion of low-interest ratings is at SUA (13%, average 3.84). In summary, students from all countries except Hungary are interested in developing this skill.

The “Meditation and mindfulness” area produces the following results. As in previous cases, the greatest interest is observed among ANAU students, with ratings of 4 and 5 reaching 70% (average 3.88), followed by BBU with 55% (average 3.58). SUA (average 3.08) and USB (average 3.14) show similar values (38% and 41%, respectively). Thus, students from the Czech Republic and Slovakia do not show a strong interest in developing these skills, as confirmed by the fact that the sum of their ratings 1 and 2 is 31% (USB) and 32% (SUA), respectively. For BBU, this figure is also relatively high, reaching 24%. Thus, only ANAU students show significant interest in this area.

“Improving sleep quality” is a priority across all observed institutions. However, ANAU shows the highest interest, with a combined rating of 4 and 5 equal to 73% (average 3.99), followed by USB (average 3.85) with 69%, then BBU (average 3.85) with 65% and finally SUA (average 3.83) with 63%. Disinterest in improving sleep quality is minimal, with the lowest level observed at ANAU, where the sum of ratings 1 and 2 is only 8%.

This was followed by “Time Management and Work-Life Balance”. An equal 80% of ANAU students indicated an interest in improving this area with ratings 4 or 5 (average 4.11), which represents a truly significant proportion. 72% of students at USB (average 4.04) completed the assessment, followed by an equal 59% of BBU (average 3.78) and SUA (average 3.72) students. It is quite clear that students from Armenia and the Czech Republic are significantly interested in moving forward in this area. The least interest is observed at SUA, where the sum of ratings 1 and 2 is 18%, which is the highest of all observed institutions. The difference between institutions on this issue is significant and may indicate specific challenges in mastering this discipline.

“Strengthening social ties and interpersonal relationships” is the final area monitored for its contribution to enhancing well-being. As with all the previous questions, ANAU students show the greatest interest in

improving it, with the sum of scores of 4 and 5 reaching 75% and average 3.99. Other universities show lower level of interest, with USB having 60% and average 3.72, SUA 57% with average 3.68 and BBU 48% (average 3.37). BBU students show least interest in improving this discipline, as they also have the highest proportion of ratings in categories 1 and 2, which accounts for 21%, compared to 14% at SUA.

In conclusion, ANAU students in all cases show a desire to improve in each discipline studied, while the situation is more variable at the other universities. USB students appear interested in improving in 5 of the areas studied, while BBU and SUA students show clear interest in only 3. However, the area of “Time Management” and “Work-Life Balance” is difficult to evaluate for BBU and SUA students, as their responses indicate conflicting levels of interest.

Subsequently, students were asked what activities or programs they would like to see included in the university curriculum to support well-being. Table 8 shows the responses obtained. All of them were rated from 1 (not interesting) to 5 (most interesting).

As Table 8 shows, interest in different educational activities varies across institutions. If we define interest as sum of ratings 4 and 5 and disinterest as the sum of ratings 1 and 2, we can draw several conclusions. ANAU students show the highest level of interest in the area in 4 out of 5 cases (only “Regular workshops on stress management and time management” do not rank highest). At the same time, these students show the lowest level of disinterest. Thus, it can be concluded that students from Armenia are most interested in practically all the given educational activities or programs. Similarly, BBU students show a high level of interest in the activities and programs. In “Regular workshops on stress management” and “Time management”, their level of interest is even the highest, and in most other cases, they are just behind ANAU. A significant lack of interest (only 39%) can be seen in “Sports activities and group exercises”, and in “Programs focused on healthy nutrition and cooking”, but also in these categories, BBU still ranks second in terms of expressed interest. The SUA results indicate that their students show the lowest level of interest among the observed institutions in the educational programs offered. Only in the case of “Sports activities and group exercises”, this university did not rank last, but even in this

case the interest rate is very low (49%). Particularly in “Meditation and mindfulness” classes, very low engagement is observed, as only 33% of students expressed interest, while 44% were not interested. USB results are not very encouraging. This university consistently ranks just above SUA, and shows very similar features. The interest in individual activities is very low, only in 3 cases exceeding 50%, while the disinterest rate is quite high, e.g. 40% for “Meditation and mindfulness” classes and 30% for “Programs focused on healthy nutrition and cooking”.

Table 8. Activities or programs to support well-being

Discipline	ANAU		BBU		SUA		USB	
Regular workshops on stress management and time management	1	3%	1	2%	1	9%	1	7%
	2	4%	2	14%	2	10%	2	7%
	3	26%	3	10%	3	32%	3	23%
	4	33%	4	29%	4	26%	4	30%
	5	34%	5	45%	5	23%	5	33%
Sports activities and group exercises	1	8%	1	13%	1	11%	1	10%
	2	6%	2	29%	2	16%	2	18%
	3	12%	3	19%	3	24%	3	20%
	4	37%	4	17%	4	26%	4	22%
	5	37%	5	22%	5	23%	5	30%
Programs focused on healthy nutrition and cooking	1	4%	1	12%	1	10%	1	11%
	2	6%	2	19%	2	11%	2	19%
	3	17%	3	19%	3	33%	3	22%
	4	37%	4	22%	4	20%	4	25%
	5	36%	5	28%	5	26%	5	23%
Meditation and mindfulness classes	1	6%	1	9%	1	22%	1	20%
	2	6%	2	15%	2	22%	2	20%
	3	20%	3	15%	3	23%	3	20%
	4	34%	4	21%	4	15%	4	19%
	5	34%	5	40%	5	18%	5	21%

Discipline	ANAU		BBU		SUA		USB	
Mental health support (e.g., consultations with a psychologist)	1	7%	1	9%	1	7%	1	10%
	2	3%	2	12%	2	9%	2	13%
	3	16%	3	10%	3	28%	3	21%
	4	33%	4	17%	4	21%	4	25%
	5	41%	5	52%	5	35%	5	31%

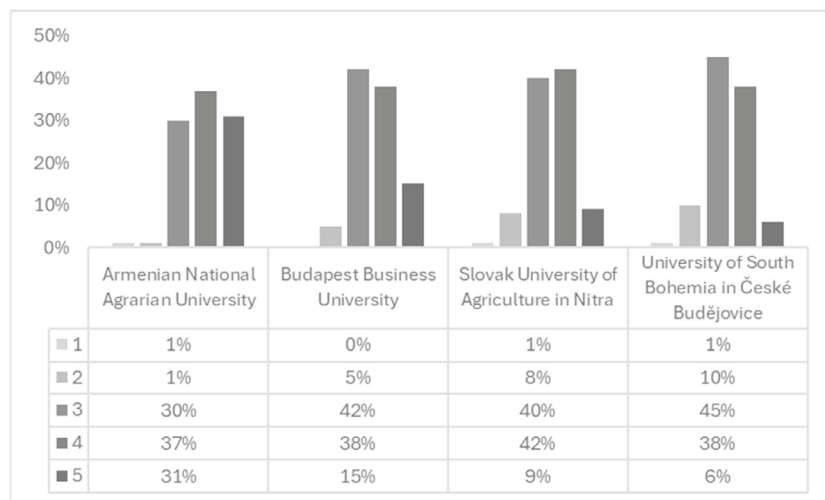
Source: Own elaboration

In general, however, it can be concluded that ANAU students (overall average score for all activities 3.91) show interest in all programs and activities, while other institutions should focus exclusively on “Regular workshops on stress management” and “time management”, and possibly on “Mental health support” (e.g., consultations with a psychologist), as these are two activities that show relatively high levels of interest and low levels of disinterest. There is not much interest in other activities at BBU (average 3.60), USB (average 3.40), and SUA (average 3.34).

This issue was followed by a series of statements that the students had to evaluate. The first was “How would you rate your current level of knowledge about wellbeing?” Figure 31 presents responses on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent).

Based on the data obtained, the following facts can be observed. ANAU students perceive their level of knowledge about well-being to be very high (average 3.96), as 31% selected rating 5 (the highest), and almost no responses were given at ratings 1 or 2 (the lowest). For the remaining universities, a very similar distribution for rating 3 can be observed: 45% prevailing for BBU (average 3.62) and 42% for USB (average 3.36). SUA bucks the trend slightly (average 3.49), as it scores slightly higher for rating 4 rather than 3. However, BBU students report the highest knowledge of well-being among the three institutions, while USB students show the lowest awareness of the concept.

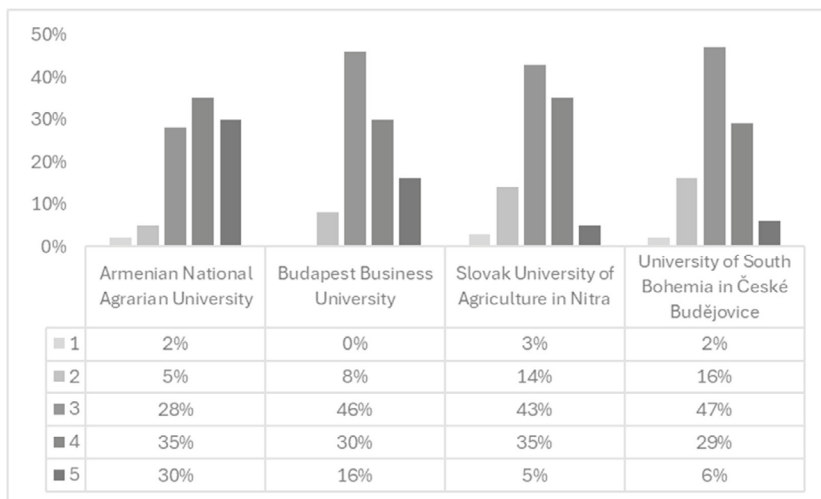
The finding regarding how well students manage to maintain their well-being follows this. Figure 32 shows responses using the same scale as before, from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent).

Figure 31. Knowledge about well-being

Source: Own processing

The situation is similar to the previous one. ANAU students are likely to take the most steps to manage the maintenance of their well-being at a high level, as evidenced by the aggregate of responses 4 and 5 at 65%, though not the highest proportion, the average is 3.86. This is followed by BBU (average 3.53), where we can also observe a high proportion of these responses along with notable proportion at 46%, followed by SUA with an average of 3.26. The worst position is occupied by USB (average 3.20), where only 35% of students report that they manage to maintain their well-being, while 18% report that they do not manage it at all.

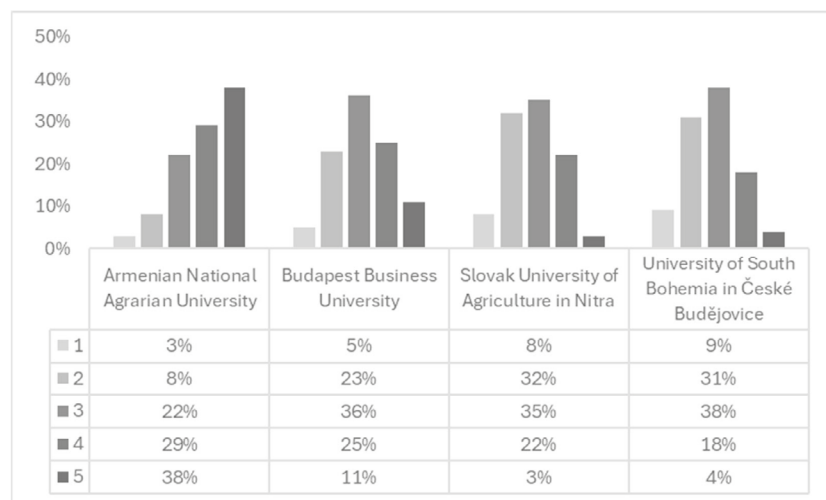
Subsequently, how often students felt that they could not manage their studies or work was investigated. Figure 33 shows the results, again using a rating of 1 (always) to 5 (never).

Figure 32. Managing to maintain well-being

Source: Own processing

ANAU students also excel in this section with an average of 3.91. 38% of them feel that they never feel they are not coping with their responsibilities, while a further 29% very rarely feel this way. Only 11% of ANAU students experience this feeling very often or all the time. BBU also shows relatively good results (average 3.14), although it lags far behind ANAU. SUA (average 2.81) and USB (average 2.78) again show similar characteristics, with USB being the worst by a small margin. Only 22% of USB students do not have this feeling at all or very rarely (25% for SUA), while a combined 40% experience it all the time or very often (identical to SUA). Students in Slovakia and the Czech Republic therefore show the same characteristics in this area, with students very often feeling that they are not managing their responsibilities.

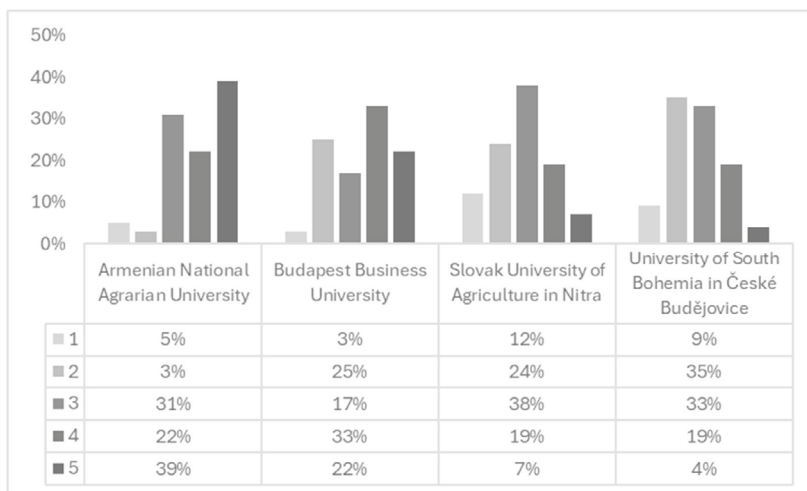
Subsequently, how often students feel motivated to study was investigated. Responses were recorded on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always) and the results are shown in Figure 34. Some of the most disturbing findings can be seen.

Figure 33. Not managing studies or work

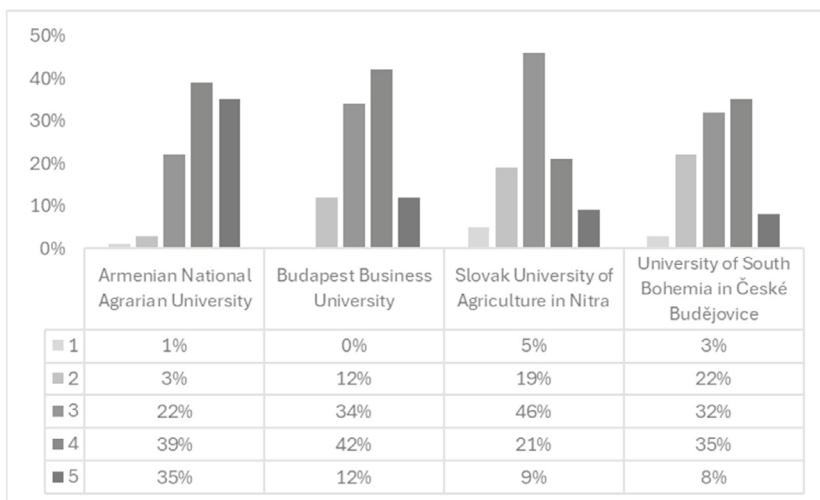
Source: Own processing

Finally, the study investigated how often students are able to maintain the balance between study/work and personal life. Responses were recorded on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always) and the results are presented in Figure 35.

Again, ANAU students performed best on this question (average 4.04), selecting ratings 4 or 5 in 74% of responses. This is followed by BBU (average 3.54), with 54% of students gave the same ratings. However, at BBU, a stronger representation of the neutral rating (3) was observed, at 34%. The worst results were again recorded for USB (average 3.22) and SUA (average 3.09). At USB, 43% of students selected ratings of 4 or 5, while at SUA, only 30% did so. However, SUA had a notably higher proportion of neutral responses, at 46%.

Figure 34. Feeling motivated to study

Source: Own processing

Figure 35. Managing study/work and personal life

Source: Own processing

Finally, students rated their level of agreement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on two statements:

- In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.
- In general, I feel optimistic about the future.

For the first statement, BBU students reported the highest alignment with their ideal life (average 3.73), with 64% selecting ratings 4 or 5, and only 10% selecting 1 or 2. ANAU students showed a similar trend (average 3.77), with 60% giving high ratings and only 12% selecting the lower end of the scale. USB followed with an average of 3.12: 36% responded positively with ratings 4 or 5, and 25% responded negatively with ratings 1 or 2. SUA recorded the weakest results (average 3.92), with only 33% of respondents selecting positive and 36% negative answers.

In terms of an optimistic approach to the future, 3 out of 4 universities showed positive results. ANAU led again, with 74% selecting ratings 4 or 5 (average 4.11), followed by 65% of BBU students (average 3.74), and 59% of USB students (average 3.51). Despite the poor results in the previous categories, USB students demonstrated a positive outlook for their future, although 17% of responses still report low optimism, with a rating of 1 or 2. SUA again ranked lowest (average 3.29), with 50% of responses in categories 4 and 5, and 27% at the lowest categories.

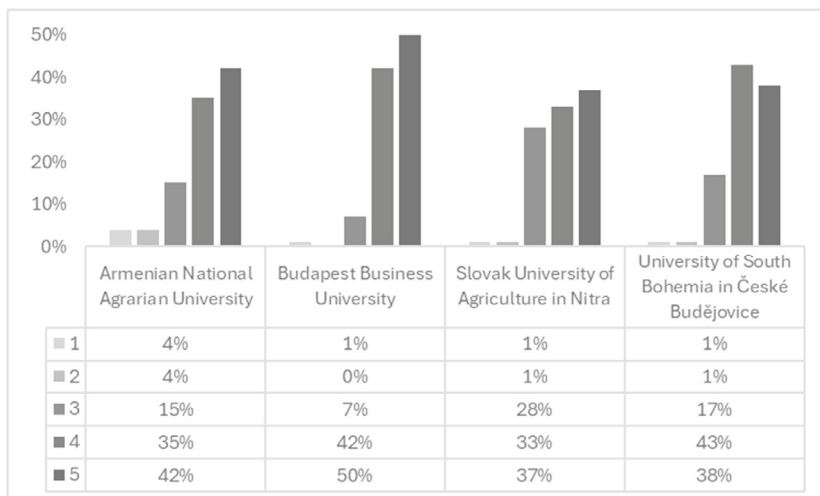
4.5 Self-Management

Figure 36 shows “Time Management” as self-reported by students in terms of their preference at the four universities, on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The distribution of responses provides an insight into how important students consider “Time Management” to be in different university environments.

Figure compares the percentage distribution of responses across five rating categories (1 to 5) for four different universities. BBU students (average 4.41) rated “Time management” as the most important, with 92% in categories 4 and 5 combined, while it was rated least by SUA students with 70%. The relatively high value of SUA neutral (28%, average 4.02) is noteworthy, as “Time Management” is not yet among the most important for Slovak students. ANAU shows high scores in the 1 and 2 categories

(8%, average 4.07) compared to the other three universities. USB scores highest in category 4 (43%, average 4.16).

Figure 36. Time Management preferences



Source: Own processing

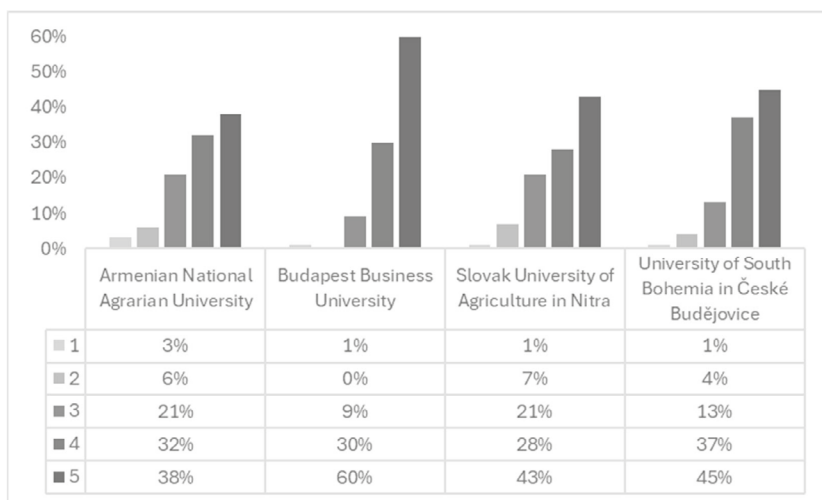
The Figure 37 shows “Stress and Emotional Management” as self-reported by students at the four universities, on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The distribution of responses provides insight into how important students consider “Stress and Emotional Management” to be in different university environments.

Figure 37 compares the percentage distribution of responses across five rating categories (1 to 5) for four different universities. The Hungarian (BBU) students (categories 4 and 5 combined) rated the importance of “Stress and Emotional Management” very highly (90%, average 4.49). The neutral response (category 3) was significant for the Armenian (average 3.96) and Slovakian universities (average 4.06), 21 and 21% respectively. A certain level of skepticism is evident when looking at the values that are considered least important (categories 1 and 2 together): Armenian and Slovak students give less importance to stress and motivational

management. USB scored an average of 4.22, which is the second-best result.

Next observed category was Self-motivation. Figure 38 shows Self-Motivation as self-reported by students at the four universities, on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Figure 37. Stress and Emotional Management preferences



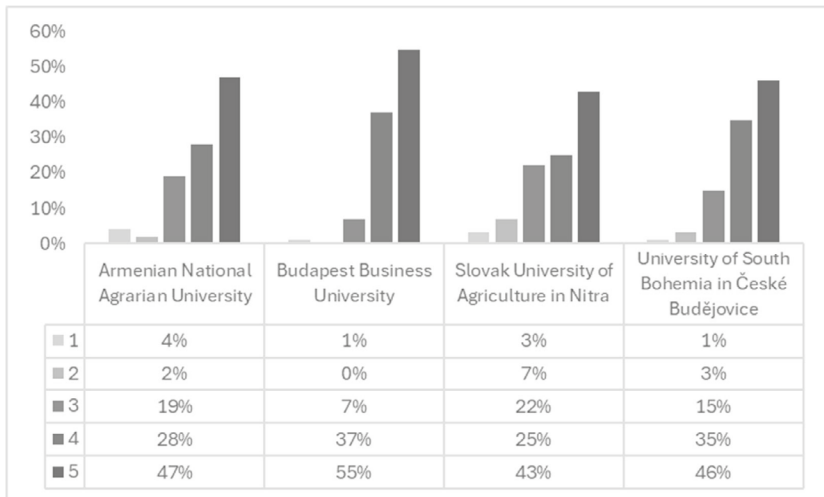
Source: Own processing

Figure 38 compares the percentage distribution of responses across five rating categories (1 to 5) for four different universities. “Self-motivation” was considered important for 92% of BBU students (categories 4 and 5 combined, average 4.46) than for students from the other three universities: 81% for USB (average 4.22), 75% for ANAU (average 4.12) and 68% for SUA (average 3.99). 10% of Slovak students expressed the opinion that this preference is not important for them.

This was followed by observing the category “Goal Setting and Planning”. Figure 39 shows “Goal Setting and Planning” as self-reported by students at the four universities, on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Figure 39 compares the percentage distribution of responses across five rating categories (1 to 5) for four different universities. In terms of neutral

responses (category 3), SUA (average 4.03) and USB (average 4.03) show similar results with 19 and 18% respectively. However, BBU stands out with a combined score of 91% in the top two categories (average 4.45). It is also striking that the level of skepticism among SUA, USB, and ANAU (average 4.10) is close to 10%.

Figure 38. Self-Motivation preferences



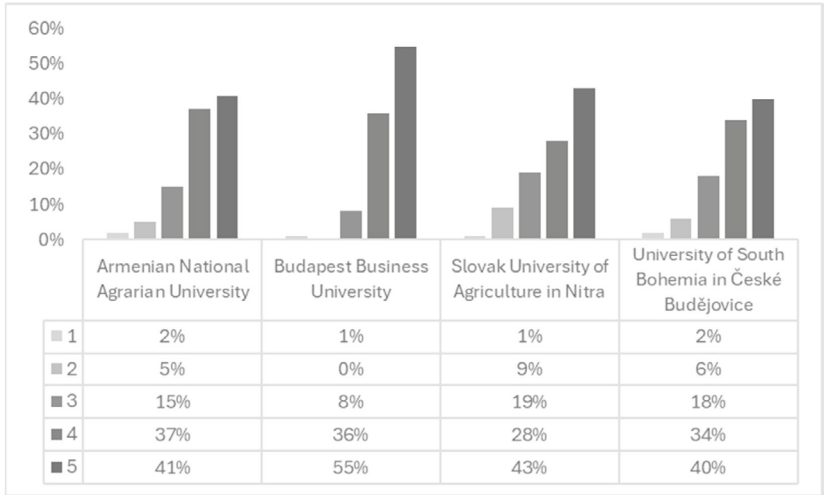
Source: Own processing

Another observed category was “Self-discipline”. Figure 40 shows “Self-discipline” range as self-reported by students at the four universities, on the same scale as previous.

The chart compares the percentage distribution of responses across five rating categories (1 to 5) for four different universities. “Self-discipline” was rated highest by Czech USB students (average 4.32) with 85% in the top two categories (4 and 5), although SUA students were the most likely to have marked category 5 (54%, average 4.26). Averages for ANAU and BBU were 4.11 and 4.18 respectively.

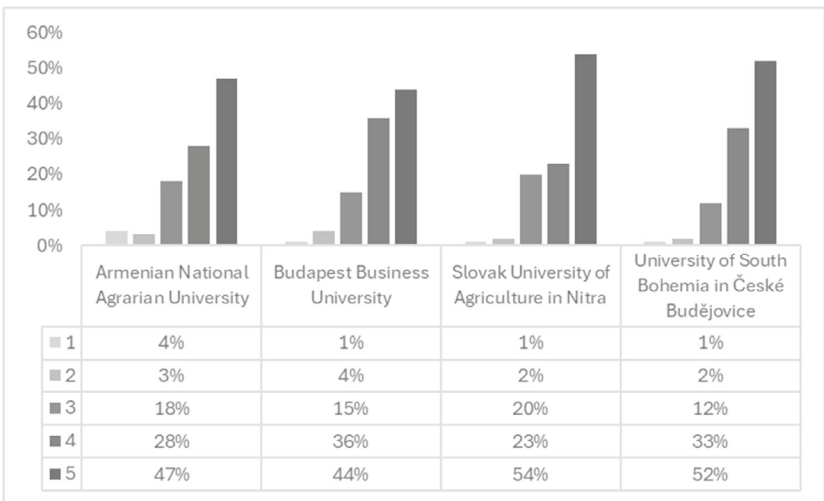
Last but not least, the category of “Avoiding Procrastination” was evaluated. Figure 41 shows the range of “Self-discipline” as self-reported by students at the four universities, on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Figure 39. Goal Setting and Planning preferences

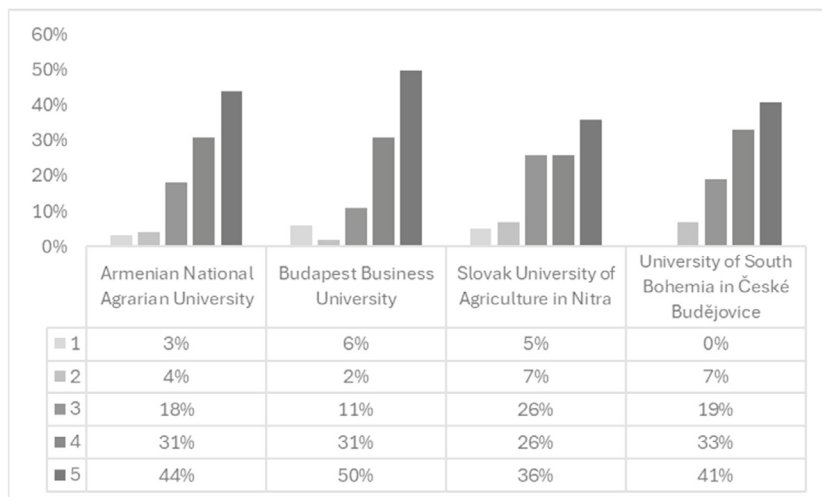


Source: Own processing

Figure 40. Self-discipline



Source: Own processing

Figure 41. Avoiding Procrastination

Source: Own processing

The chart compares the percentage distribution of responses across five rating categories (1 to 5) for four different universities. “Avoiding Procrastination” was given a high rating by BBU students, with over half (50%, average 4.18) of students choosing the top category (5). A neutral response was selected by 26% by SUA students (average 3.81), and it was least important by Slovak students, as shown by the rating categories 1 and 2, which in their case is 12%. For USB students it an average of 4.07 was observed, and for ANAU, 4.09. Hungarian and Czech students perceive this activity in the similar way.

The next step was evaluating the “Self-Management” discipline according to the level. Students rated themselves in every category on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Results are summarized in Table 9.

In “Time Management”, Armenian youth far outperform students from the other three universities. The most striking difference can be seen in the choice of category 5: while ANAU scores 31%, the other three universities scored 12% (SUA), 8% (BBU) and 7% (USB). It can be concluded that

Central European students feel they need to improve their time management activities. In categories 2 and 3, USB and BBU show similar results. In case of “Stress and Emotional Management”, we see that in the first two categories, BBU students come out on top with 43%, which clearly shows that they have difficulties in this area. However, for ANAU students it is only 16%. The neutral value is the highest for the Czech USB, at 29%. In terms of “Self-motivation”, ANAU’s score of 38% in category 5 shows that the self-motivation of Armenians is quite strong. For Hungarians (BBU), category 4 stands out with a result of 35%, while the Czech (USB) and Slovak (SUA) scores in the neutral category 3 show results of 33% and 30% respectively. Looking at “Goal Setting and Planning”, we see that the Hungarian (BBU) and Slovak (SUA) results show high scores in the first two categories (31%), which clearly indicates that they have difficulties in this area. Armenians’ 34.0% score in category 5 is impressive, as it indicates they feel capable of achieving their goals. Regarding self-discipline, 69% of Armenian ANAU students fall into categories 4 and 5, indicating strong control over their actions, while the majority of students from the other three universities show a more consistent picture in categories 3 and 4: USB and BBU 54%, and SUA 51%. In terms of procrastination, ANAU students experience the fewer problems, with 36% in category 5 and 30% in category 4, which is by far the best result of the other three universities. SUA students were the most likely to be in category 3, neutral category, with 35%. Students from USB and BBU show similar results in category 2 (31% and 29% respectively), and when categories 1 and 2 are combined, the results are nearly identical: 54% and 52%, respectively). It can be concluded that avoiding procrastination is a major challenge for Czech and Hungarian students at present. All averages are summarized in Table 10.

Table 9. Disciplines of Self-Management according to personal level

Discipline	ANAU		BBU		SUA		USB	
Time Management	1	8%	1	12%	1	11%	1	10%
	2	8%	2	25%	2	16%	2	23%
	3	21%	3	30%	3	29%	3	31%
	4	32%	4	25%	4	31%	4	29%
	5	31%	5	8%	5	13%	5	7%
Stress and Emotional Management	1	7%	1	17%	1	14%	1	8%
	2	9%	2	26%	2	18%	2	24%
	3	16%	3	27%	3	28%	3	29%
	4	38%	4	21%	4	28%	4	29%
	5	30%	5	9%	5	12%	5	10%
Self-motivation	1	7%	1	14%	1	15%	1	10%
	2	5%	2	24%	2	16%	2	20%
	3	21%	3	18%	3	30%	3	33%
	4	29%	4	35%	4	21%	4	25%
	5	38%	5	9%	5	18%	5	12%
Goal Setting and Planning	1	9%	1	11%	1	9%	1	4%
	2	7%	2	20%	2	22%	2	23%
	3	18%	3	33%	3	29%	3	29%
	4	32%	4	25%	4	24%	4	32%
	5	34%	5	11%	5	16%	5	12%
Self-discipline	1	6%	1	13%	1	10%	1	10%
	2	9%	2	19%	2	21%	2	21%
	3	16%	3	25%	3	29%	3	31%
	4	35%	4	29%	4	22%	4	23%
	5	34%	5	14%	5	18%	5	15%
Avoiding Procrastination	1	6%	1	23%	1	23%	1	23%
	2	4%	2	29%	2	15%	2	31%
	3	24%	3	18%	3	35%	3	24%
	4	30%	4	12%	4	14%	4	13%
	5	36%	5	18%	5	13%	5	9%

Source: Own elaboration

Table 10. Average values for personal levels of all disciplines

Discipline	ANAU	BBU	SUA	USB
Time management	3.70	2.92	3.18	3.00
Stress and emotional management	3.75	2.79	3.07	3.09
Self-motivation	3.86	3.02	3.13	3.09
Goal setting and planning	3.75	3.05	3.16	3.24
Self-discipline	3.82	3.12	3.16	3.12
Avoiding procrastination	3.86	2.72	2.77	2.56

Source: Own elaboration

In the following section, students responded to 15 statements related to self-management in the context of self-reporting. Students evaluated each statement on scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree”:

- I have the ability to achieve my goals.
- I accomplish everything that needs to be done throughout the day.
- I have to push myself to do things (I procrastinate).
- I handle difficult tasks without wasting time.
- When possible, I like to share tasks.
- I can meet deadlines without rushing at the last minute.
- I plan schedule where I record my fixed commitments/obligations (I have a system).
- I plan time for relaxation.
- I regularly reassess my activities concerning my goals.
- I decide for myself what needs to be done.
- I am not controlled (limited) by events or what others want from me.
- I have a clear idea of what I want to achieve in my work, personal life, and upcoming studies.
- I can choose a career path that aligns with my lifestyle.
- I can accurately assess my abilities, competencies, and talents.
- I can create a plan for my goals for the next five years.

If we take a closer look at the USB results, two statements stand out with the choice of categories 4 and 5: “I decide for myself what needs to be

done”, and “I have the ability to achieve my goals”. The former received 72%, and the latter 67%. Three statements received high neutral (3) scores: “I regularly reassess my activities concerning my goals” (46%), “I handle difficult tasks without wasting time” (44%), and “I accomplish everything that needs to be done throughout the day” (40%). The least satisfied were those who marked categories 1 and 2: “I can create a plan for my goals for the next five years” (51%), “I plan time for relaxation” (37%), and “I can meet deadlines without rushing at the last minute” (36%).

BBU results show that there are two stand-out statements in categories 4 and 5: “I have the ability to achieve my goals” (90%), and “I can choose a career path that aligns with my lifestyle” (77%). Category 3 shows the neutral responses, with these four statements receiving the highest scores: “I can create a plan for my goals for the next five years” (39%), “I handle difficult tasks without wasting time” (39%), “I regularly reassess my activities concerning my goals”, and “I can accurately assess my abilities, competencies, and talents”. (34%). Categories 1 and 2 reflect the least developed skills: “When possible, I like to share tasks” (46%), and “I am not controlled (limited) by events or what others want from me” (37%).

Young Armenians rated the following in the two highest categories (4 and 5): “I have the ability to achieve my goals” (69%), “I can choose a career path that aligns with my lifestyle” (68%), and “I can accurately assess my abilities, competencies, and talents” (67%). The highest neutral (category 3) responses were for the following statements: “When possible, I like to share tasks” (27%), “I handle difficult tasks without wasting time” (25%) and “I regularly reassess my activities concerning my goals” (24%). The least developed competences according to the scores obtained in categories 1 and 2 are: “I can create a plan for my goals for the next five years” (20%), “I handle difficult tasks without wasting time” (19%), and “I can meet deadlines without rushing at the last minute” (18%).

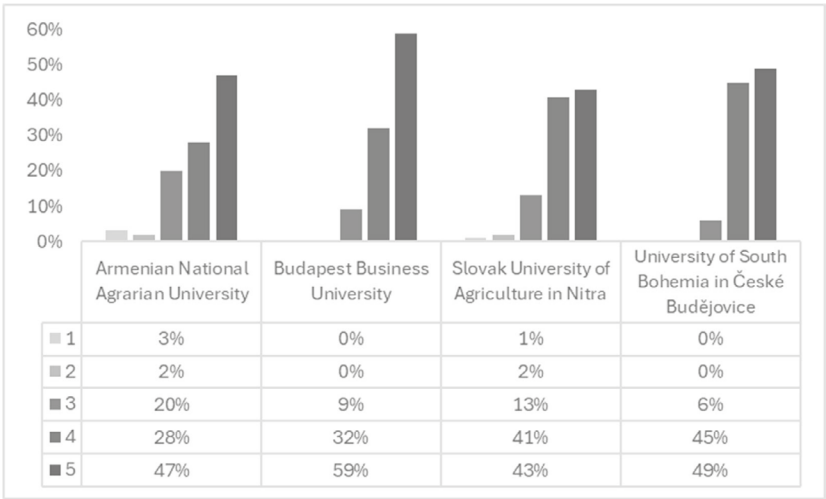
Slovak university students scored highly in the two highest categories (4 and 5) in: “I decide for myself what needs to be done” (65%), and “I have the ability to achieve my goals” (60%). For neutral responses (category 3), the following statements received relatively high scores: “I regularly reassess my activities concerning my goals” and “When possible, I like to share tasks” (39%), and “I handle difficult tasks without wasting time” (38%). The skills most in need of development, based on

scores in categories 1 and 2, are: “I can create a plan for my goals for the next five years” (39%), and “I can meet deadlines without rushing at the last minute” (36%).

4.6 Self-Presentation

Figure 42 presents the importance of self-presentation in professional and personal life using a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The distribution of responses provides insight into how students perceive the importance of self-presentation in both professional and personal life.

Figure 42. The importance of self-presentation



Source: Own processing

Figure 42 illustrates the percentage distribution of responses across five rating categories (1 to 5) regarding the perceived importance of self-presentation in both professional and personal life, based on data collected from students at four universities. A strong emphasis on the importance of self-presentation is evident across all institutions, with the highest

proportion of respondents selecting the top rating (5). This ranges from 43% at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra to 59% at Budapest Business University. Overall, the majority of respondents at all universities rated the importance of self-presentation highly, predominantly within the top two categories (ratings 4 and 5). Notably, respondents from Budapest Business University (average 4.50) demonstrated the strongest consensus, with no respondents selecting the lowest ratings (1 or 2), indicating a universally high valuation of self-presentation at that institution. Meanwhile, Armenian National Agrarian University (average score of 4.14), the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (average score of 4.23), and the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (average score of 4.42) recorded only minimal responses in the lowest rating categories (1 and 2), ranging from 0% to 3%. These findings suggest that, although slight variations exist among the institutions, self-presentation is broadly recognized as an important factor in both professional and personal contexts across all surveyed universities.

Table 11 illustrates how students perceive the level of importance of various aspects of self-presentation rated on the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “not important” and 5 means “the most important”.

Among Armenian students, “Confidence and authenticity” emerged as the most valued aspect, with 43% rating it as highly important. This was closely followed by “Personal branding” (42%), “Verbal communication” (41%), “Written communication” (38%), and “Non-verbal communication” (32%). A moderate proportion of respondents, ranging from 16% to 20%, rated these aspects with a neutral score (3), indicating a balanced perception of their relevance. Conversely, a relatively small percentage of students (2% to 9%) rated all aspects as less important, selecting the lowest ratings (1 or 2). These results suggest a generally strong recognition among Armenian students of the importance of various components of self-presentation in both academic and professional settings.

Table 11. The importance of various aspects of self-presentation

Service	ANAU		BBU		SUA		USB	
Verbal communication	1	2%	1	1%	1	0%	1	1%
	2	9%	2	0%	2	3%	2	0%
	3	17%	3	2%	3	15%	3	8%
	4	31%	4	10%	4	28%	4	41%
	5	41%	5	87%	5	54%	5	50%
Non-verbal communication (body language, facial expression)	1	5%	1	1%	1	0%	1	1%
	2	9%	2	1%	2	6%	2	1%
	3	16%	3	20%	3	23%	3	12%
	4	38%	4	21%	4	33%	4	46%
	5	32%	5	57%	5	38%	5	40%
Written communication (resume, cover letters)	1	3%	1	1%	1	1%	1	2%
	2	6%	2	4%	2	8%	2	7%
	3	20%	3	9%	3	32%	3	29%
	4	33%	4	44%	4	31%	4	40%
	5	38%	5	42%	5	28%	5	22%
Confidence and authenticity	1	2%	1	1%	1	1%	1	0%
	2	6%	2	0%	2	2%	2	2%
	3	18%	3	3%	3	18%	3	11%
	4	31%	4	18%	4	19%	4	32%
	5	43%	5	78%	5	60%	5	55%
Personal branding	1	5%	1	2%	1	2%	1	1%
	2	2%	2	11%	2	7%	2	7%
	3	18%	3	22%	3	32%	3	28%
	4	33%	4	27%	4	28%	4	36%
	5	42%	5	38%	5	31%	5	28%

Source: Own elaboration

The majority of Hungarian students (87%) identified “Verbal communication” as the most important aspect of self-presentation, followed by “Confidence and authenticity”, which was rated highly by 78% of respondents. “Written communication” was also perceived as highly important, with

86% of students assigning it ratings of 4 or 5. In comparison, “Non-verbal communication” was rated as highly important by 57% of students, while “Personal branding” received more moderate ratings overall. A mid-level importance rating (score of 3) was selected by 20% of students for “Non-verbal communication” and by 22% for “Personal branding”, suggesting a degree of uncertainty or neutrality regarding the significance of these aspects. The proportion of students who assigned a medium rating to “Written communication” and “Confidence and authenticity” was relatively low, at 9% and 3% respectively. Low importance (ratings 1 or 2) was attributed to all aspects by a small minority of students, generally ranging from 0% to 10%. These results suggest a strong overall recognition among students of the relevance of verbal and written communication, as well as confidence and authenticity, in effective self-presentation.

Among students from the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, “Confidence and authenticity” emerged as the most highly valued aspect of self-presentation, with 60% rating it as extremely important (rating 5). This was followed by “Verbal communication”, which was rated with the highest importance by 54% of respondents. Other aspects of self-presentation were also perceived as important, albeit to a lesser degree. “Non-verbal communication” was considered highly important (rating 5) by 38% of students, with an additional 33% assigning it a rating of 4. “Written communication” received a rating of 5 from 28% of respondents, while 31% rated it as very important (rating 4). Similarly, “Personal branding” was considered the most important by 31% of students and was rated as very important by another 28%. Moderate importance (rating 3) was assigned as follows: 15% for verbal communication, 23% for non-verbal communication, 32% for written communication, 18% for confidence and authenticity, and 32% for personal branding. The proportion of students who attributed low importance (ratings 1–2) to any aspect of self-presentation remained minimal, ranging from 0% to 8%. These results suggest that Slovak students generally place the highest value on internal attributes such as confidence and authenticity, closely followed by communication skills, while written communication and personal branding are also regarded as significant but slightly less emphasized.

At the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, students identified “Confidence and authenticity” as the most important aspect of

self-presentation, with 55% assigning it the highest rating (5). This was closely followed by verbal communication, rated as most important by 50% of respondents. Non-verbal communication was rated at the highest level by 40% of students, while personal branding and written communication were considered most important by 28% and 22% of students, respectively. When combining the top two levels of importance (ratings 4 and 5), the results indicate a broader recognition of the significance of these skills: non-verbal communication was rated as important by an additional 46% of students, verbal communication by 41%, written communication by 40%, personal branding by 36%, and confidence and authenticity by 32%. A moderate level of importance (rating 3) was selected by a varying proportion of students, ranging from 8% for verbal communication to 29% for written communication. Only a small minority of students – between 0% and 7% – assigned low importance to the assessed aspects (ratings 1 or 2), indicating a generally strong recognition of the relevance of self-presentation skills across the student population. These findings suggest that Czech students, similar to their Slovak and Armenian peers, place the highest value on internal attributes and communication competencies, though written communication and personal branding receive comparatively lower emphasis.

The analysis of student responses from Armenia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic reveals a broadly consistent recognition of the importance of self-presentation skills, with notable national differences in the prioritization of specific aspects. Across all four countries, confidence and authenticity and verbal communication consistently ranked among the top-rated aspects. Armenian and Slovak students placed the greatest emphasis on confidence and authenticity, while Hungarian students rated verbal communication as the most significant. Czech students also emphasized confidence and authenticity, closely followed by verbal communication. Written communication was particularly valued by Hungarian students, whereas it received comparatively lower ratings in Armenia, Slovakia, and especially in the Czech Republic. Non-verbal communication showed moderate importance across all countries, with highest top ratings in Hungary and the Czech Republic, and slightly lower in Armenia and Slovakia. Personal branding was consistently rated lower than other aspects, though Armenian students assigned it relatively high importance, while Czech and Slovak students rated it more modestly.

Hungarian students viewed it with moderate importance, with a significant proportion assigning it a neutral score. Neutral ratings (score of 3) were most frequent for written communication and personal branding, particularly in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Low ratings (scores 1–2) were rare across all countries, generally below 10%, suggesting that all five components of self-presentation are widely acknowledged as relevant by students regardless of national context. In summary, while there is a shared understanding of the importance of self-presentation across countries, Hungarian students most strongly emphasize verbal and written communication, Slovak and Czech students prioritize confidence and authenticity, and Armenian students exhibit a relatively balanced distribution across all components. Averages for self-presentation skills according to the level of importance are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12. Average values for self-presentation skills according to importance

Discipline	ANAU	BBU	SUA	USB
Verbal communication	4.00	4.82	4.32	4.40
Non-verbal communication	3.83	4.33	4.02	4.23
Written communication	3.97	4.22	3.76	3.74
Confidence and authenticity	4.07	4.72	4.33	4.38
Personal branding	4.05	3.89	3.81	3.84

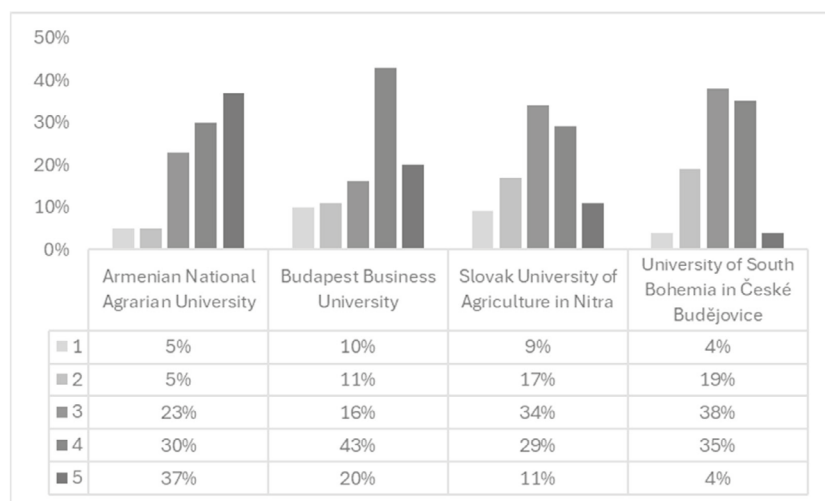
Source: Own elaboration

Figure 43 presents the rating of verbal communication skills (personal level) such as “public speaking and presentations“. Respondents used the scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

The responses reflect students’ confidence in “public speaking and presentation” competencies across diverse educational contexts. Budapest Business University stands out with the highest concentration of responses in category 4 (43%, average 3.52), suggesting a strong perception of above-average communication competence, though only 20% rated themselves at the highest level (5). In contrast, students from Armenian National Agrarian University demonstrated a higher proportion of top ratings (5–37%), closely followed by those rating

themselves as 4 (30%), pointing to a generally high confidence level in verbal communication. The Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra showed a more balanced response (average 3.15), with the majority of students selecting category 3 (34%) and category 4 (29%), while only 11% considered their skills to be at the top level (5). This distribution suggests a more neutral or moderate self-perception. Students from the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (average 3.15) most frequently selected rating 3 (38%) and 4 (35%), with only 4% opting for the highest rating. Interestingly, this university also had one of the highest combined percentages of low ratings (1 and 2), indicating more mixed confidence levels among respondents. In summary, while students from all universities generally rated their verbal communication skills positively (majority in categories 3–5), Armenian students displayed the highest level of self-confidence (average 3.89), while students from South Bohemia reflected more varied perceptions, including a notable share of lower self-assessments.

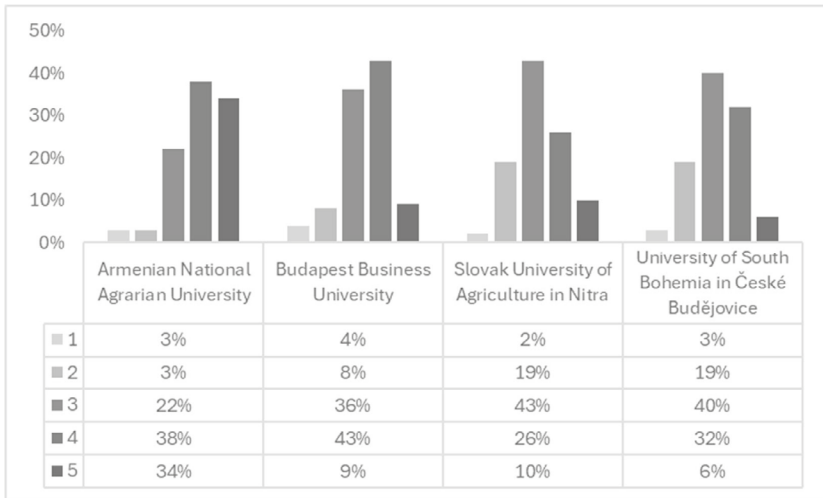
Figure 43. Rating of verbal communication skills



Source: Own processing

Figure 44 presents the rating of non-verbal communication skills (personal level) such as body language, eye contact, facial expressions. Respondents used the scale form 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Figure 44. Rating of non-verbal communication skills



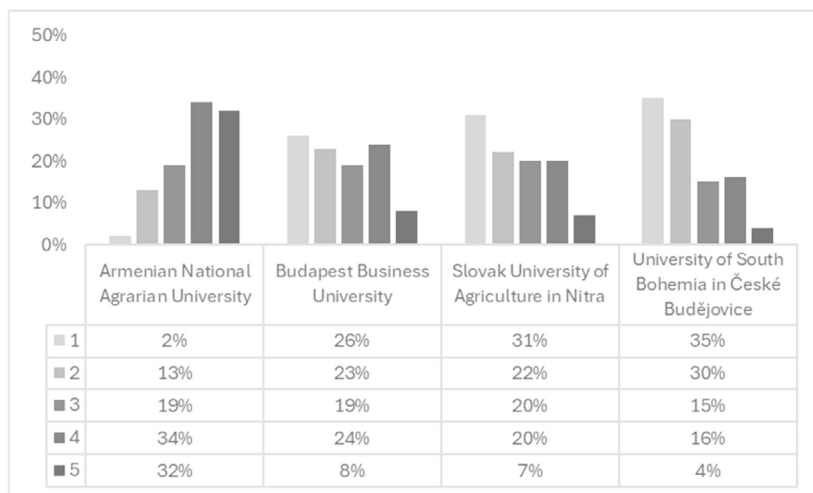
Source: Own processing

The evaluation covers body language, eye contact, and facial expressions as key indicators of effective communication beyond verbal expression. Students from the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice demonstrated a generally positive self-assessment of their non-verbal communication skills (average 3.18). Specifically, 6% rated their skills at the highest level (5), and 32% gave a rating of 4. This indicates that over 36% of the students perceive their non-verbal communication abilities as strong or excellent. Conversely, only 3% rated themselves at the lowest level (1). At Armenian National Agrarian University, responses were similarly favourable (average 3.97). A notable 34% of students selected the highest rating (5), and 38% chose level 4. Additionally, 22% opted for the neutral rating (3), reflecting a generally confident but balanced self-perception. In contrast, students from the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra

most frequently selected the neutral category (3) at 43% (average 3.22), followed by rating 4 at 26%. Only 10% awarded themselves the top rating, while a combined 21% chose the lower ratings (1 or 2), indicating a more moderate and reserved self-assessment of their non-verbal communication skills. Students from Budapest Business University showed the lowest proportion of top ratings (average 3.46), with only 9% assessing their skills at level 5. However, the most common response was level 4, chosen by 43% of participants. Together with a substantial share of neutral responses (36%), the results suggest that Hungarian students may approach their self-assessment of non-verbal communication skills with greater reservation. In conclusion, while all universities reflect generally positive views on non-verbal communication, students from the University of South Bohemia express the highest self-confidence in this area, whereas students in Nitra and Budapest show more moderate or cautious self-evaluation. Armenian students' responses appear well-balanced but still favorably inclined.

Figure 45 illustrates the self-reported frequency of anxiety or nervousness related to public speaking or presentations among students from four partner universities, using a five-point scale where 1 = “always” and 5 = “never”.

Figure 45. Frequency of anxiety or nervousness



Source: Own processing

Students from Armenian National Agrarian University reported the lowest frequency of anxiety, with 34% indicating “rarely” (4) and 32% choosing “never” (5). Only 2% of respondents selected “always”, while 13% chose “often” (2). This suggests that Armenian students feel relatively confident in public speaking settings compared to peers (average 3.81). In contrast, students from Budapest Business University expressed greater nervousness, with 26% selecting “always” and 22% “often” (average 2.63). Only 8% reported never feeling anxious. This distribution reflects a significantly higher level of discomfort related to public speaking within this student population. Responses from the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra were similar to the Hungarian pattern (average 2.50), with a large portion of students indicating frequent anxiety – 31% selected “always” and 22% “often”. Only 7% reported never feeling nervous. These findings suggest that a majority of Slovak students experience regular stress related to public performance. The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice had the highest reported frequency of nervousness (average 2.24), with 35% of students indicating “always” and 30% selecting “often”. Only 4% reported never feeling anxious, highlighting a pervasive sense of discomfort among Czech students when it comes to public speaking. In summary, Armenian students appear the most confident and composed when speaking in public, while students from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary report significantly higher levels of nervousness. This divergence may reflect differences in training opportunities, cultural factors, or personal exposure to public performance contexts within the respective institutions.

Attention was also given to skills, which students would like to develop or improve. Students were rating the following skills: “Public speaking and presentation skills”, “Writing effective resumes and cover letter”, “Improving non-verbal communication”, “Building personal branding and online presence”, “Managing anxiety and nervousness”.

Students at Armenian National Agrarian University showed a strong and balanced interest in developing a wide range of self-presentation skills. The top-rated areas included “Public speaking and presentation skills” (43% rated 5) and “Managing anxiety and nervousness” (42%). High levels of interest were also noted in “Writing effective resumes and cover letters” (35%) and “Improving non-verbal communication” (36%).

Ratings of 4 were also prevalent across all skills, suggesting a generally positive and consistent attitude toward self-improvement. Only minimal percentages of students assigned ratings of 1 or 2, reflecting the perceived relevance of all evaluated skills.

At Budapest Business University, the most prioritized area was “Managing anxiety and nervousness”, with 57% of students rating it as extremely important (5). This was followed by “Public speaking” (40%) and “Non-verbal communication” (38%). In contrast, interest in resume writing and personal branding was more moderate, with about a quarter of students giving these categories the top rating. Notably, Budapest students also displayed slightly higher shares of neutral or low ratings (categories 1 – 3), particularly in the areas of resume writing and online presence, suggesting more critical or selective priorities.

Students from the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra most frequently prioritized “Public speaking and presentation skills” (45%) and “Managing anxiety and nervousness” (48%) as areas for improvement. Other skills such as “Non-verbal communication (25%) and personal branding” (30%) were rated somewhat lower in top-category responses. Interest in writing effective resumes was comparatively modest, with only 23% giving the highest rating. While the distribution of responses remains mostly favourable, the overall tendency shows a focused but narrower range of preferences compared to Armenian peers.

Among Czech students, “Public speaking” (48%) and “Managing anxiety and nervousness” (49%) received the highest ratings. These results indicate a strong focus on performance and emotional regulation. The interest in non-verbal communication (29%) and personal branding (31%) was moderate, while resume writing stood out with the lowest level of top ratings (only 14% rated it as most important). Nevertheless, a large portion of students still selected ratings of 4 across all categories, indicating a broader appreciation for skill development, even if priority levels vary.

Across all four institutions, students most prioritized the development of public speaking and managing anxiety and nervousness. These two skill areas received the highest ratings (category 5) consistently, particularly in Czechia (48%+), Hungary (57% for anxiety), and Slovakia (44–47%). Armenian students displayed the most balanced interest across all categories, with high ratings for all five skills and minimal low ratings, suggesting

a comprehensive awareness of the importance of self-presentation. Hungarian and Slovak students focused strongly on anxiety management and public speaking, but their interest in written and branding skills was less emphasized. Czech students showed the strongest prioritization for public speaking and anxiety reduction, while assigning lower relative importance to resume writing, possibly reflecting a preference for interpersonal over written self-presentation. In conclusion, while national priorities vary, the overall results highlight a pan-European recognition of the importance of communication confidence and emotional regulation, with differences emerging in the perceived value of writing and branding skills. Averages for all disciplines are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13. Average values for self-presentation skills according to desire for development or improvement

Discipline	ANAU	BBU	SUA	USB
Public speaking and presentation skills	4.04	3.87	3.92	4.23
Writing effective resumes and cover letters	3.87	3.56	3.42	3.29
Improving non-verbal communication	3.92	3.88	3.72	3.79
Building personal branding and online presence	3.95	3.52	3.67	3.79
Managing anxiety and nervousness	4.07	4.10	3.97	4.10

Source: Own elaboration

The last part of self-presentation skills involved evaluating the following statements on scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree”:

- It is okay to show others that I am not perfect.
- I don’t like making mistakes in public.
- I try to set an example for others to follow.
- I feel calm and confident about my ability to find suitable job opportunities in the job market.
- I feel calm and confident about my ability to present myself in the job market and attract the interest of potential employers.

Students at Armenian National Agrarian University reported high levels of self-awareness and confidence. The most supported statement was

“I try to set an example for others to follow”, with 40% choosing the highest rating and 33% selecting 4. Similar levels of agreement were seen for “I feel calm and confident about presenting myself in the job market” (37% rated 5), indicating strong self-belief in employability and professional self-presentation. The statement “It is okay to show others that I am not perfect” received 34% in category 5, reflecting a mature attitude toward authenticity. Low ratings (1 or 2) remained minimal across all statements, pointing to a generally confident and motivated student population.

Students from Budapest Business University displayed very strong agreement with the most positive self-statements. Particularly notable is the high share of students who agreed with “It is okay to show others that I am not perfect” (46% rated 5) and “I don’t like making mistakes in public” (43% rated 5), suggesting a strong awareness of image and vulnerability. Similarly, 42% reported full confidence in their ability to find job opportunities. While responses to job-market confidence were also favourable, they were slightly more moderate compared to attitudes about personal image. Ratings of 1 and 2 remained low in all categories.

The Slovak students showed a dual pattern of high personal standards and moderate job-market confidence. Most students agreed with “I don’t like making mistakes in public” (44% rated 5), and “It is okay to show others I am not perfect” (37%). However, fewer students expressed strong confidence regarding job search and presentation: only 16% rated their ability to find a job highest, and 15% felt fully confident about presenting themselves to employers. Neutral responses (rating 3) were prevalent in job-related areas, indicating some hesitation or uncertainty.

Students from the University of South Bohemia showed high self-awareness and cautious career confidence. Strong agreement was expressed with “I don’t like making mistakes in public” (36% rated 5) and “It is okay to show others I am not perfect” (38%). They also highly agreed with “I try to set an example for others to follow” (38%). However, job-market-related statements received lower top ratings: only 9% strongly agreed with the ability to find a job, and 6% felt fully confident about attracting employers. Neutral and mid-level ratings dominated these two areas, indicating uncertainty in employment readiness.

Across all four universities, students agreed most strongly with statements related to personal standards and identity, especially: “I don’t like

making mistakes in public” (35–44% rated 5 across all schools), “It is okay to show others that I am not perfect” (34–47%). Armenian and Hungarian students demonstrated the strongest job-market confidence, with 33–42% selecting the highest category for both job opportunity and self-presentation items. In contrast, Slovak and Czech students showed more scepticism or modesty in job-related areas. Only 14–16% of Slovak students and under 10% of Czech students expressed strong confidence in job-market skills. However, their ratings for self-awareness and leadership (e.g., “trying to be an example”) remained high. To sum up, Hungarian and Armenian students appear more assertive and confident in career contexts while Czech and Slovak students emphasize personal standards but reveal reservations about employment readiness.

4.7 Keyword Analysis

The following text aims to summarize the definitions related to the concepts of soft skills, well-being, self-management and self-presentation and to create its own definitions by means of keyword analysis. In addition, a comparison between these original definitions and those generated by the ChatGPT 4 Artificial Intelligence generative language model will be provided. The selected definitions will also be visually represented using keywords. The online software Voyant Tools was used for keywords analysis performance.

This chapter is structured according to the order of the concepts in this chapter, i.e. soft skills definitions will be evaluated first, including the visual representation, followed by well-being, and so on.

4.7.1 Soft Skills

Definitions for soft skills are given in the relevant chapter but are listed again for completeness. These are the following views on the concept:

- The dictionary defines soft skills as “*personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people*” (Lexico, 2020).

- In general terms, soft skills are defined as „*the interpersonal, human, people, or behavioral skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace*” (Weber et al., 2011, p. 98).
- Moss & Tilly (2001) provide another perspective, describing soft skills as skills, abilities, and traits that pertain more to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than formal or technical knowledge.
- “Soft” skills refer to skills that enable employees to fit in at a workplace, including skills related to individual personality, traits, flexibility, motivation, goals, and preferences (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).
- Soft skills are skills, behaviors, and personal qualities that help people to navigate their environment, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals (Lippman et al., 2015).
- Soft skills are internationally recognized as important personal characteristics that promote an individual’s well-being and success (Heckman, 2011).
- The term “soft skill” encompasses the ability of people to communicate with each other and work well together (Andrews & Higson, 2008).
- Another definition of soft skills is provided by Kechagias (ed.) (2011, p. 33), who suggests that soft skills are “*intra- and interpersonal (socio-emotional) skills, essential for personal development, social participation, and workplace success. They include skills such as communication, ability to work on multidisciplinary teams, adaptability.*”
- Grugulis & Vincent (2009, p. 598) list “*communication, problem-solving, team-working, an ability to improve personal learning and performance, motivation, judgment, leadership, and initiative*” as soft skills. However, many of these tasks do require some form of abstract reasoning, in contradiction to the definition given earlier.
- Newell (2002) states that soft skills are a behavioral reflection of one’s emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-governance, emotional control, and social skills.
- Laker & Powell (2011, p. 112) explain that soft skills are “*intrapersonal skills such as one’s ability to manage oneself as well as interpersonal skills such as how one handles one’s interactions with others.*”
- Succi’s (2019) and Succi & Canovi’s (2020) define soft skills as a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills; interpersonal, intellectual, and practical skills; and ethical values. These soft

Keyword analysis revealed the following. By far the most frequently occurring words are “soft” and “skills”, which is obvious given the nature of the definitions. Therefore, these words were excluded. Subsequently, the most frequently occurring words were found to be the following: people (6 occurrences in total); interpersonal (6); personal (5); cognitive (4); and ability (4). A closer look at other frequently inflected words is provided in Figure 46. As shown in Figure 47, the following links between words can also be observed.

Figure 47. Soft skills keywords links



Source: Own processing

The diagram highlights the central role of personal skills in the context of soft skills, and shows a direct link to the concept of “people”, which may imply an emphasis on interpersonal and social skills in relationships.

The extension of the concepts to “intellectual”, “ethical”, and “socio” underscores that soft skills encompass a wide range of skills from ethics

to social behavior to intellectual development. This expansion to include “meta” suggests a reflective and transcendent understanding of all these skills, which is crucial for the successful mastery and integration of soft skills into everyday life and the work environment. The connection between “values”, “working”, and “workplace” emphasises that soft skills are not just theoretical but have a direct impact on practical work and professional environments where values and ethical behaviour play a significant role. This diagram, therefore, effectively illustrates the complexity and interconnectedness of the skills needed in contemporary professional and personal life.

Based on the analysis, soft skills are defined as ***“Personal and interpersonal abilities, skills and cognitive values necessary for personal and working success”***. Artificial Intelligence defines soft skills as *“a set of informal competencies that enable an individual to communicate, adapt and collaborate effectively in a variety of social and professional contexts. They include emotional intelligence, teamwork, critical thinking and problem-solving, which are key attributes for building relationships and achieving goals”* (ChatGPT 4, 2025). If we compare the two definitions, we find that the authors’ definition is more focused on the necessity of these skills for success, while AI’s definition focuses more on the sheer scope and scope of soft skills in communication and adaptability. But both definitions emphasize the importance of soft skills for personal and professional development.

4.7.2 Well-being

The second area addressed, namely well-being, is treated in the same manner. A list of definitions and approaches that form the basis for the subsequent discussion is provided below:

- *“Wellbeing can be understood as how people feel and how they function both on a personal and social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole”* (Michaelson et al., 2012, p. 6)
- Huppert (2009) states that well-being is the combination of feeling good and functioning well; the experience of positive emotions such as happiness and contentment as well as the development of one’s

potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships.

- Well-being from a student's perspective can be understood as *"the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community"* (Fraillon, 2004, p. 6).
- According to Noble et al. (2008, p. 7), well-being is defined within the study as *"a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school."*
- Hascher (2008, p. 86) define well-being in school as *"an emotional experience characterised by the dominance of positive feelings and cognitions towards school, persons in school and the school context in comparison to negative feelings and cognitions towards school life."*
- Well-being is also described as being on a continuum, ranging from a state of emotional health and positive beliefs about the self and life, to a mid-range state of well-being where some distress is experienced but overall coping with life is capable, to a state where individuals struggle with stress and an inability to cope. In contrast, some theorists describe a dual continua model in which well-being and distress are considered separate, albeit related, dimensions of mental health (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010).
- *"Well-being means developing as a person, being fulfilled, and making a contribution to the community"* (Shah & Marks, 2004, p. 2).
- The World Health Organization's (1997) working approach to well-being is the realization of one's physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual potential.
- Ereaut & Whiting (2008, p. 1) argue that *"wellbeing is no less than what a group or groups of people collectively agree makes a 'good life'"*.
- National Accounts of Well-being (n.d.) states that well-being is *"the dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going, through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and psychological resources or 'mental capital' "*.
- Wellbeing is the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy and is fundamental to one's ability to function and live well (Cram, 2014).
- According to White (2008) well-being is conceptualised as a dynamic process of inter-related material and environmental circumstances

- (such as assets, welfare, standards of living), relational aspects (social relations, access to public goods, capabilities and attitudes to life), and subjective aspects (including personal perceptions and cultural values).
- Svane et al. (2019) offers summarized overview on well-being concept – claim that wellbeing definitions capture concepts of health, contentment and flourishing, refer to personal and communal aspects and to having the psychological, social and physical resources needed to meet life challenges.
 - *“Wellbeing is the balance point between an individual’s resource pool and the challenges faced”* (Dodge et al. 2012, p. 230).
 - Well-being can also be understood from the child’s perspective. Such a possibility is offered by UNICEF, whose understanding of well-being is offered by Peill (2022, p. 3), where it is argued that *“wellbeing concerns how happy, healthy, and satisfied children are”*.
 - Gillett-Swan & Sargeant (2015) state that well-being is influenced by an individual’s capacity to manage constructive and undesirable ‘inputs’ to maintain this balance point, and to repeatedly do so over time.
 - Šolcová & Kebza (2009, p. 129) define well-being as *“a long-term emotional state in which an individual’s satisfaction with his life is reflected”*.
 - Wellbeing can be described as a mental and emotional condition that enables everyone in a school community to actively participate in and develop from all areas of school life, such as effective teaching and learning (Tynan & Nohilly, 2018).
 - Aked & Thompson (2011) understand well-being as a complex state of mental health and well-being that can be promoted through specific daily activities and behavioral changes.
 - *“Well-being aligns one’s health to social, emotional, mental, physical and intellectual wellness. With respect to these elements, factors considered to be important include agency, autonomy, respect, community, happiness, being valued, satisfaction and relationships”* (Cassidy et al., 2024, p. 635).

Keyword analysis of the selected definitions and approaches to the concept of well-being revealed the following findings. First of all, it was necessary to remove certain phrases from the analysis, as was done

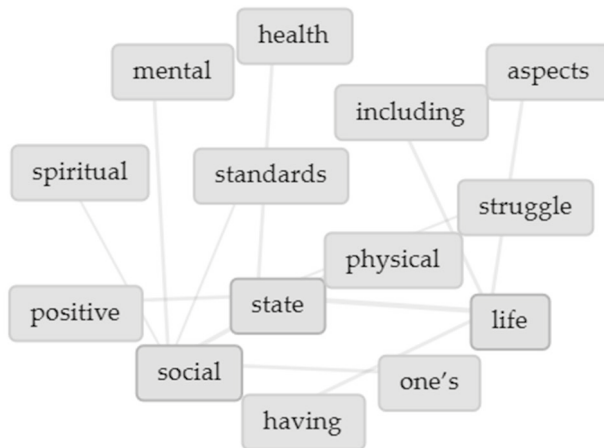
previously in the case of soft skills. The term well-being was removed from the analysis, as it understandably had the highest frequency of occurrence, and likewise the term school was removed, which appeared in the analysis mainly because different approaches to defining the term were taken. After stripping out the selected terms, the most frequently inflected keywords are: life (9 occurrences in total); state (8); social (5) and positive (5). Figure 48 then provides a more comprehensive overview of the most frequently inflected issues in relation to the term well-being. Figure 49 then highlights the potential links between the keywords.

Figure 48. Well-being keywords



Source: Own processing

The diagram shows the interconnection of key concepts related to the concept of “well-being”. At the Center of the diagram are terms such as ‘state’, ‘life’ and ‘social’, highlighting that well-being is understood as a condition encompassing various dimensions of life, particularly the social and personal domains.

Figure 49. Well-being keywords links

Source: Own processing

The term ‘social’ is linked to other keywords such as ‘positive’, suggesting the importance of positive social relationships and resources in wellbeing. “State” is linked to the terms “physical” and “mental” (through “social”), which represent essential dimensions of well-being – that is, physical and mental health. These dimensions are further expanded by ‘spiritual’, which shows that well-being includes the spiritual aspects of human life. There is also a clear link between “health” and “standards”, suggesting a relationship between quality of life and health standards. In addition, the term ‘including’ links different aspects of well-being, such as ‘struggle’ and ‘aspects’, indicating that well-being is not only about the positive aspects of life, but also about the ability to cope with challenges.

Based on the above analysis, a definition of the term well-being is offered, which can be described as ***“a physical and psychological state of well-being that includes both positive and negative aspects of personal and social life”***. Artificial Intelligence defines well-being as *“a state where an individual achieves physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being, feels fulfilled, copes with life’s challenges and has meaningful relationships and purpose in life”* (ChatGPT 4, 2025). Both

definitions understand well-being as a complex state encompassing both the physical and psychological aspects of life. The first definition emphasises the balance between positive and negative aspects of the personal and social spheres, emphasising that well-being is not only about happiness but also about the ability to cope with difficulties. The second definition expands the concept to include social and spiritual dimensions, adding elements such as fulfilment, meaning in life and coping with challenges. While the first definition is more neutral and analytical, the second one emphasizes more active experiencing and achieving a state of total harmony.

4.7.3 Self-Management

The topic of self-management is another area of focus in this text. The following definitions and approaches have been used to further clarify and formalize this concept:

- Self-management is perceived as the process in which individuals acquire strategies, knowledge and skills in managing physical, psychological, emotional, and social impacts (Sadler et al., 2017).
- According to Al-Mahrazi (2017, p. 13) self-management is *“a set of priorities used by an individual in multiple situations to improve his behaviour, identify his needs, and thus achieve his goals”*.
- Bakker (2017) perceive this discipline as how employees manage their behaviour, evaluate their performance and discipline themselves when they do not reach necessary personal standards.
- *“Self-management means being able to set work and personal objectives and develop individual skills and strengths”* (Mládková, 2015, p. 179).
- Self-management provides employees with strategies that may improve their performance without intervention from their managers (Unsworth & Mason, 2016).
- Ryan (2009) notes that self-management can be understood as a process by which individuals and families use knowledge and beliefs, self-regulation skills and abilities, and social facilitation to achieve health-related outcomes.

- According to Agolla & Ongori (2009), self-management can be seen as the capacity to work effectively toward meaningful goals, and to be flexible in the face of setbacks.
- *“In general, the self-management approach involves the use of problem assessment, goal-setting, performance monitoring, and self-reinforcement strategies to improve effectiveness”* (Unsworth & Mason, 2016, p. 712).
- Another possible view of this ability is that it is the capability to directly steer one’s personality, behavior, and cognition towards accomplishing objectives or tasks (Novitri et al., 2022).
- Thoreson & Mahoney (1974) shows self-control by opting for actions that he has chosen less frequently in the past, even when external restrictions are minimal.
- Thus, as Martins et al. (2024, p. 2) state, self-management can also be encountered in the context of career development, whereby it is understood as *“a process of managing personal and contextual resources through processes such as goal setting and planning, among others, that lead to positive career outcomes”*.
- *“Career self-management can be seen as a challenge because it holds the potential for competence development and recognition”* (Runhaar et al., 2019, p. 368).
- Self-management, on the other hand, implies that people control their own behavior by establishing personal standards, assessing their work against those standards, and selfmanaging consequences based on their self-esteem (Sajeevanie, 2020).
- Lorig (1993, p. 11) defined self-management as *“learning and practicing skills necessary to carry on an active and emotionally satisfying life in the face of a chronic condition”*.
- Bandy & Moore (2010) suggested that the ability to control the emotions and consequential manners that are socially suitable is what self-management is. It enables students to deal with undesirable results, perseveres when facing difficulties, and sets goals for the best achievement.
- CASEL (2020, p. 2) definice self-management as *“the ability to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations”*.

- Steyn & Van Staden (2018, p. 1) claims, that this term is defined as *“an essential managerial competency and entails taking responsibilities for one’s own actions and behavior”*.
- Self-management starts with observing and assessing one’s own actions, and then progresses by encouraging enhancements in one’s performance (Hughes & Lloyd, 1993).
- Self-management as a managerial skill encompasses ethical behavior and integrity, personal motivation and resilience, self-awareness and self-development, as well as balancing work and personal life. (Hellriegel et al., 2013).
- Goldfried & Merbaum (1973, p. 12) have defined self-management as *“a personal decision arrived at through conscious deliberation for the purpose of integrating action which is designed to achieve certain desired outcomes or goals as determined by the individual himself”*.

Within the keyword analysis of the term self-management, the phrase itself was of course excluded from the analysis, as well as the word “define”. After removing these terms, the following keywords were found to occur most frequently: self (number of occurrences 6); personal (6); goals (5); behaviour (5); work (4). The term ‘self’ was retained for the analysis, as definitions often refer to skills and abilities other than self-management, but also, for example, to self-esteem or self-control. From this perspective, the word ‘self’ itself is important. Figure 50 shows the result of this analysis using keyword cloud. As in the previous cases, the possible connections between the words were investigated. The result is shown in Figure 51.

Figure 51 illustrates how the various concepts associated with self-management are interconnected around the core concept of “self”. Concepts such as “goals” or “work” are directly linked to the word “self”, suggesting that self-management involves setting and achieving both personal and professional goals. These goals are further divided into specific areas such as “standards” or “outcomes”, which are the basis for measuring success and personal development.

Furthermore, ‘self’ is linked to ‘situations’, indicating that effective self-management requires the ability to recognise and respond to diverse life contexts. Likewise, ‘personal’ is associated with ‘development’, emphasizing the need for continuous personal and professional growth.

(ChatGPT 4, 2025). Here, again, we can observe differences in definitions. The first focuses on personal development, behavior management, and goal-setting within the context of specific situations. This approach suggests a more targeted application of self-management techniques to specific aspects of one's life and professional environment. The second definition broadens the scope to include controlling one's actions, emotions, and thoughts, which encompasses a more comprehensive management of one's overall behavior and mental processes. It highlights the importance of resilience and self-awareness, suggesting that self-management involves a continuous adaptation to changes and challenges, not just in specific situations but across all facets of life. These perspectives provide a fuller picture of self-management, showing it as both a focused and holistic practice, each complementing the other to enhance personal effectiveness and well-being.

Figure 51. Self-management keywords links



Source: Own processing

4.7.4 Self-Presentation

As in the previous cases, the analysis of self-presentation primarily offers an overview of approaches, definitions and views on the concept:

- *“Self-presentation refers to the strategic presentation of components of your identity so that other people find you more attractive, likeable, or competent”* (Faelens et al., 2021, p. 10).
- Leary & Kowalski (1990) explained that people engage in self-presentation as a means of creating their identity.
- Self-presentation is the strategic display of certain aspects of your identity to make yourself appear more attractive, likable, or competent to others. (Kim & Dindia, 2011).
- *“Self-presentation is behavior that attempts to convey some information about oneself or some image of oneself to other people”* (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987, p. 71).
- Self-presentation speaks to how we “perform” differently to different audiences in order to manage others’ impressions (Goffman, 1959).
- According to Schlenker & Wowra (2003, p. 871) self-presentation is defined as *“the goal-directed activity of controlling information to influence the impressions formed by an audience about oneself”*.
- *“Self-presentation has been defined as regulating one’s own behavior to create a particular impression on others”* (DePaulo, 1992, p. 205).
- Tedeschi & Reiss (1981) then understand self-presentation as behavior by an individual aimed at influencing or shaping the perceptions others form about them.
- Jones & Pittman (1982, p. 233) defined it as *“those features of behaviour affected by power augmentation motives designed to elicit or shape others’ attributions of the actor’s dispositions”*.
- Leary et al. (2011, p. 412) suggest *“self-presentation involves the process of controlling how one is perceived by other people”*.
- *“Self-presentation is the process by which we portray ourselves to others to make a desired impression”* (Strimbu & O’Connell, 2019, p. 804).
- Self-presentation is actions taken by a specific person in order to create the impression they prefer (Wojciszke, 2002).
- *“The higher self-presentation efficacy one feels, the more strongly one internalizes his/her own self-presentation”* (Ueda et al., 2024, p. 2).

- According to Fullwood et al. (2020, p. 1) *“self-presentation refers to the ways in which individuals share aspects of the self to portray a particular image”*.
- *“Self-presentation is defined as behaviors used for creating, modifying, and maintaining other people’s impression about oneself”* (Bartsch & Subrahmanyam, 2015, p. 339).
- Self-presentation entails putting up a desired image of oneself with the hope of gaining positive feedback and social approval from others (Bazarova & Choi, 2014).
- As Yang & Brown (2016, p. 402) claimed, self-presentation is *“the process through which individuals communicate an image of themselves to others.”*
- *“Self-presentation enables initiation of interaction, building relationships, and access to knowledge resources”* (Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012, p. 387).
- Self-presentation can be intentional when we provide specific information and signals to other people intentionally and purposefully, but it can also take place automatically, in situations where we unconsciously and unintentionally give certain information and clues to others (Fiore, 2010).
- *“The goal of self-presentation is to make others accept the images that individuals claim for themselves”* (Chiang & Suen, 2015, p. 517).

As with previous concepts, the definitions were modified as necessary before the actual analysis was carried out. Words such as “self-presentation”, “refers” or “defined” were removed. After these adjustments, the following terms were found to have the highest frequency of occurrence: people (5 occurrences); impression (5); oneself (4); information (4); image (4). Figure 52 presents the overall output of this analysis in a graphical representation. Subsequently, Figure 53 then illustrates the interrelationships identified between the terms.

Interconnections are centered around the word “impression”, which is highlighted in blue. It is connected to various related words, forming a network of associations. The words “people” and “oneself” are also highlighted in blue, suggesting their significance in the context of impression formation. Other connected words include “prefer”, “behavior”, “create”, “likeable”, “people’s”, “signals”, “image”, “person”, “putting”, “process”,

appearance and other expressions to influence how others perceive them. This process can be spontaneous or deliberate and plays a key role in social interactions, professional life and personal relationships.” (ChatGPT 4, 2025). The first definition is brief and focuses on the process of impression creation itself, emphasizing information sharing and image formation. It is more general and does not specify specific strategies that people use. The second definition is more detailed and describes self-presentation as a continuous process in which people strategically choose their behavior, communication, appearance, and other expressions in order to influence the perceptions of others. It also mentions that this process can be spontaneous or deliberate and plays a significant role in social interactions, professional and personal life. Overall, the second definition is more comprehensive and provides a broader context.

Figure 53. Self-presentation keywords links



Source: Own processing

4.8 Statistical Analysis

The first question tested was RQ1: “*Do universities differ in their use of Career Center services?*” Testing was performed using a chi-square test of independence at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, as supported by the professional literature described in the Methodology. The following null and alternative hypotheses were established:

H_0 : The use of Career Center services does not vary by university.

H_A : The use of Career Center services varies by university.

The resulting p-value of the test is < 0.001 . Based on the independence test performed, a statistically significant correlation was demonstrated between affiliation with a specific university and the use of Career Center services. This means that the distribution of responses varies more between individual universities than would be expected under the assumption of statistical independence. The most significant deviation from the expected distribution is shown by ANAU, which recorded a significantly higher number of positive responses than would be expected under the independence model. Conversely, SUA shows a significantly lower proportion of positive responses than would be expected. These results suggest that the specific characteristics of individual universities may play a significant role in shaping respondents’ attitudes and deserve deeper qualitative or quantitative investigation. In conclusion, we reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

This was followed by determining the answer to RQ2: “*Do universities differ in assessment of soft skills?*” Hypotheses based on literature were also established for this question. The other test conditions remained unchanged. The established hypotheses are:

H_{0a} : The level of communication among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Aa} : The level of communication among students differs between universities.

H_{0b} : The level of critical thinking among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ab} : The level of critical thinking among students differs between universities.

H_{0c}: The level of leadership among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ac}: The level of leadership among students differs between universities.

H_{0d}: The level of teamwork among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ad}: The level of teamwork among students differs between universities.

H_{0e}: The level of conflict management among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ac}: The level of conflict management among students differs between universities.

H_{0f}: The level of flexibility and adaptability among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Af}: The level of flexibility and adaptability among students differs between universities.

H_{0g}: The level of emotional intelligence among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ag}: The level of emotional intelligence among students differs between universities.

H_{0h}: The level of time management among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ah}: The level of time management among students differs between universities.

H_{0i}: The level of creativity among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ai}: The level of creativity among students differs between universities.

Data analysis using the chi-square test reveals statistically significant differences between individual universities in the distribution of all monitored soft skills. For all observed soft skills, the p-value is < 0.001 (except for emotional intelligence, where it reaches a value of 0.004). This means that the emphasis placed on individual soft skills varies significantly between schools, and it cannot be said that all universities develop these competencies in the same way.

The most significant differences are observed in skills such as leadership, communication, creativity, and teamwork, where p-values are extremely low, indicating a statistically substantial difference between

universities. For example, in the field of leadership, some schools show significantly higher student engagement than other – this may reflect different teaching styles, priorities, or institutional focus. Differences are also evident in critical thinking, flexibility, conflict management, emotional intelligence, and time management, although they are not as pronounced as in the areas mentioned above. Nevertheless, the test confirmed the statistical significance of these skills as well, indicating that there are differences between schools that could be the result of varying curricula, teaching methods, or value priorities. In all cases, the null hypothesis can be rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

Subsequently, RQ3 was evaluated: “*Do universities differ in well-being?*” The testing was conducted in the same manner as in the previous cases, with the hypothesis again supported by the literature, as outlined in the Methodology chapter. The wording of the hypothesis to answer this research question is as follows:

H₀: Overall level of well-being does not vary by university.

H_A: Overall level of well-being varies by university.

The results show that there are significant differences between universities in terms of student well-being ratings, and these differences are statistically highly significant, as the p-value is <0.001. ANAU performs best in this regard, with students most often rating their well-being highly – in particular, A grades are represented above expectations. This suggests that the environment at ANAU is likely to promote mental well-being, personal balance, and overall student satisfaction. Although USB has the most significant number of students, their responses tend to be concentrated in the middle range (especially grades 3 and 4), with the highest grade (5) occurring surprisingly infrequently. This means that although USB provides a stable environment without extreme negative experiences, there is a lack of factors that would lead to an exceptionally high sense of well-being. BBU tends to be in the middle range – the results are balanced and stable but do not lean towards either significant satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Students here probably experience a certain degree of comfort and balance but less often achieve truly high subjective well-being. SUA has a relatively even distribution of responses, with no extremes of negative ratings or above-average positive results. The results for this school appear to be the least distinct, which may reflect a standard but

not particularly supportive environment. We reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

Subsequently, RQ4 was evaluated: “*Do universities differ in self-management assessment?*” Statistical testing was used to answer this question, as in previous cases. Time management was excluded from the self-management skills testing, as differences in this discipline had already been tested in the soft skills section. The following hypotheses were established for this research question:

H_{0a}: The level of stress and emotional management among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Aa}: The level of stress and emotional management among students differs between universities.

H_{0b}: The level of self-motivation among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ab}: The level of self-motivation among students differs between universities.

H_{0c}: The level of goal setting and planning among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ac}: The level of goal setting and planning among students differs between universities.

H_{0d}: The level of self-discipline among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ad}: The level of self-discipline among students differs between universities.

H_{0e}: The level of avoiding procrastination among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ae}: The level of avoiding procrastination among students differs between universities.

The results of the chi-square test analysis indicate statistically significant differences between the ANAU, BBU, SUA, and USB groups in all five areas examined. In each case, the p-values are significantly lower than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the distribution of responses between groups is not random but is related to group membership. In all cases, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

The most significant difference was observed for students from ANAU, as they consistently reported above-average results in all disciplines. On the other hand, at the other end of the spectrum are USB and SUA, whose results were closer to or even below average. These results indicate issues with students' internal motivation, difficulties in implementing plans, and their ability to cope with stressful situations. The situation at BBU is balanced and consistent. No extreme fluctuations are observed.

Overall, ANAU is a highly functioning organization in terms of student self-management, which can serve as an inspiration to others. At USB and SUA, it would be appropriate to consider various support interventions for students.

The last area analyzed was self-motivation. It was included in RQ5: *“Do universities differ in self-motivation assessment?”* The approach to the analysis remained the same at this stage. The following two hypotheses were established for this area:

H_{0a}: The level of verbal communication skills among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Aa}: The level of verbal communication skills among students differs between universities.

H_{0b}: The level of non-verbal communication skills among students does not differ between universities.

H_{Ab}: The level of non-verbal communication skills among students differs between universities.

The test results confirm statistically significant differences between universities in both cases examined. Here, too, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis in all cases.

As in the previous case, ANAU performs best, with the highest ratings. Students here have the best communication skills and emotional regulation. On the other hand, USB and SUA can again be identified as the two worst universities. The results are distributed evenly across the scale, with slight fluctuations towards the negative and positive extremes. We observe a need for targeted self-development to support a shift to higher ratings. BBU still appears to be the most balanced group.

In summary, the differences between the groups are not random; instead, they are systematic and relatively profound. The results can

serve as a basis for establishing mentoring programs and targeted training focused on developing communication skills.

4.9 Evaluation of Workshops

In May 2025, three soft skills workshops – Well-being, Self-management, and Self-presentation – were held at Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU) in Yerevan. Following each session, participants received electronic questionnaires to evaluate the workshops. The overall response rate was 23%. Despite the relatively low return rate, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive: 100% of respondents rated the trainers' approach, the relevance of the topics, and the overall benefit of the workshops favorably.

Participants were also invited to suggest topics they would like to explore in future career development sessions. While no single topic was repeatedly mentioned – indicating a wide range of interests – three suggestions stood out: investment, working with social media, and e-recruitment, with the latter being proposed twice. These insights provide valuable direction for planning future workshops that align with participants' evolving professional development needs.

Most of these participants also expressed a great interest in furthering their personal and professional development. This fact is supported by their interest in completing evaluation questionnaires, which provided participants with the opportunity to express their opinions on the future direction of training courses and workshops. Although the response rate was relatively low, it is still important to appreciate that even such a sample provided valuable information that could be very useful for the organizers and members of the project team. As can be seen, all the proposed training directions reflect current trends and the needs of the younger generation, who wants to be prepared for the modern job market.

This type of educational activity is essential because it not only helps students develop their professional skills but also enhances their soft skills. As this monograph shows, these soft skills are increasingly in demand in today's world of work. Workshops of this type can help boost students' self-confidence and prepare them for future work challenges, thereby

increasing their chances of securing employment. In future, however, it would be advisable to consider ways to motivate training participants further to complete the questionnaires. One alternative would be to collect responses anonymously online or to incorporate various interactive tools during the workshop. A higher response rate would allow for a more comprehensive evaluation of the relevance of the topics discussed.

Overall, the workshops had a positive impact and represent a very valuable contribution to the personal development of students. The evaluation results indicate that continuing these activities is meaningful and suggest that it is appropriate to expand the topics discussed further, aligning with current trends and participants' expectations.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Comparative Assessment of Participating Universities

Changes in the nature of the labor market, digitalisation, globalisation, and the growing importance of competences related to personal development are leading to a need to rethink the approach to higher education. This monograph aims to contribute to a better understanding of the importance of soft skills in the context of career counseling and students' personal development. This monograph provides a comprehensive perspective on the issue of soft skills development in the higher education environment, particularly in the context of career counseling. Its content is the result of international cooperation within the Visegrad Fund project involving four universities – the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Budapest Business University and Armenian National Agrarian University. The monograph combines theoretical background with the results of practical research, which was carried out in the form of a questionnaire survey among students.

The research results clearly confirm that soft skills – i.e. skills such as self-regulation, teamwork, stress management, self-presentation, time management or adaptability – play an increasingly important role in graduate employability. Nevertheless, there remains a gap between their declared importance and the level of their acquisition. While students across the participating universities understand the importance of these skills, uncertainty prevails in their self-assessment of their mastery, especially in relation to specific work situations such as interviews, communication with supervisors or teamwork in unfamiliar environments.

In addition to the differences between the different soft skill areas, cultural and institutional differences also emerged as significant. While students from Armenia and Hungary showed higher levels of self-confidence, students from the Czech Republic and Slovakia were more reserved

in their assessment. This may be a consequence of different levels of support from university Career Centers, but also of differences in teaching approaches or the extent to which academia is linked to the labor market.

Career counseling plays an important role in supporting students on their journey to finding employment. The analysis revealed significant differences between universities. For example, Armenian National Agrarian University has a very high average score for all questions related to the Career Center, at 4.09. This value indicates the systematic nature of career counseling, both at the individual level and, for example, in cooperation with external partners and the local labor market. The high rating reflects not only the quality of the services provided but also the trust that students place in the center when seeking employment, preparing for an interview, or developing the skills necessary to find employment. In contrast, the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra has a very low average rating for career counseling, at 2.90. This score points to the need for improvement and innovation in the services provided. A suitable recommendation would be to focus on developing partnerships with external partners or developing workshops that can help students increase their competitiveness in the job market. All universities are compared in Table 14 (total average for all career counseling questions).

Table 14. Total average values for career counseling

University	Average	Rank
Armenian National Agrarian University	4.09	1.
Budapest Business University	3.69	2.
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra	2.90	4.
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	3.47	3.

Source: Own elaboration

Soft skills are an essential part of success in today's job market. Developing these skills enables students to communicate more effectively, collaborate in teams, and solve increasingly complex and challenging problems. Among the universities surveyed in this area, students at Armenian National Agrarian University stand out, with an average score of 4.02

across the entire set of questions related to this area. In contrast, the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra shows the lowest results (average score of 3.53), indicating a need for systematic improvement of subjects and courses focused on soft skills, an increase in the number of seminars, or innovation in practical exercises. It is essential to introduce the teaching of these skills across study programs so that they can become a natural part of students' professional preparation for their careers. Teaching methods also need improvement. All results are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15. Total average values for soft skills

University	Average	Rank
Armenian National Agrarian University	4.02	1.
Budapest Business University	3.61	2. – 3.
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra	3.53	4.
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	3.61	2. – 3.

Source: Own elaboration

Well-being, encompassing both mental and physical health, is a critical factor for students' academic and professional success. Armenian National Agrarian University scored the highest, with students reporting high satisfaction with mental health services, stress management, and study support. In contrast, Slovak University of Agriculture and, to some extent, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, exhibit lower values, indicating a need to strengthen support services for well-being, psychological counseling, and preventive programs. We recommend that universities integrate well-being topics directly into the curriculum, for example, through workshops focused on stress management and self-care, and create accessible support systems available to all students. After some required changes, total averages were calculated as in previous cases. All results are summarized in Table 16.

Table 16. Total average values for well-being

University	Average	Rank
Armenian National Agrarian University	3.93	1.
Budapest Business University	3.58	2.
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra	3.35	4.
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	3.42	3.

Source: Own elaboration

Self-management encompasses the ability to plan tasks, set goals, manage time effectively, and adapt flexibly to changing circumstances. Armenian National Agrarian University again recorded the highest average score, reflecting its significant focus on developing these skills through courses and individual student support. In contrast, the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice shows lower values, indicating potential for improvement in training related to time management, goal setting, and other organizational skills. Given the importance of these skills for future career success, we recommend that universities place greater emphasis on practical courses that enable students to apply tools and strategies for managing their time and goals effectively. For more information, see Table 17.

Table 17. Total average values for self-management

University	Average	Rank
Armenian National Agrarian University	3.83	1.
Budapest Business University	3.54	2.
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra	3.41	3.
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	3.39	4.

Source: Own elaboration

Self-presentation, or the ability to present oneself effectively, is a key competence in today's digital age, both in job searching and professional development. Armenian National Agrarian University once again achieved the highest score, which is likely related to its emphasis on

practical training, workshops, and individual consultations focused on building a professional identity. Lower scores from the Slovak University of Agriculture and the University of South Bohemia indicate room for improvement. We recommend focusing on developing students' self-presentation skills through workshops, presentation techniques, and practical simulations of job interviews. All results are summarized in Table 18.

Table 18. Total average values for self-presentation

University	Average	Rank
Armenian National Agrarian University	3.95	1.
Budapest Business University	3.92	2.
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra	3.66	4.
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	3.68	3.

Source: Own elaboration

5.2 Recommendations for Universities and Career Counseling

Based on the average ratings from students across the examined areas of career counseling, soft skills, well-being, self-management, and self-presentation, the Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU) ranks as the highest-rated institution, according to Table 19. ANAU students exhibited the highest usage of the career center, a high level of satisfaction with its services, excellent ratings for their soft skills, and the highest scores in the areas of subjective well-being and self-development management. Budapest Business University (BBU) ranked second, excelling in the importance students place on self-presentation, particularly verbal communication. BBU had high satisfaction with career services, although with lower levels of usage. The University of South Bohemia (USB) ranked third, recording high awareness of the career center, good experiences with seminars, and support for soft skills. The Slovak University of Agriculture (SUA) received the lowest ratings. Students showed the lowest levels of awareness and use of the career center, a low score in the area of

well-being, limited experience with soft skills training, and weak abilities in planning and stress management.

Table 19. Total average university ratings

University	Average	Rank
Armenian National Agrarian University	3.96	1.
Budapest Business University	3.67	2.
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra	3.37	4.
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	3.51	3.

Source: Own elaboration

Based on the findings, we can propose the following brief recommendations for each evaluated topic:

- 1) **Career Centers.** The universities under investigation should intensify the promotion of career centers through targeted communication via social media, workshops, or mandatory introductory lectures for first-year students. It is also important to improve the visibility of the centers on university websites, including easy access to online tools and internship, workshop, or job offers. Furthermore, the service offerings should be more personalized, such as through individual consultations, online support chats, or themed webinars that meet the current needs of students from various study programmes.
- 2) **Soft skills development.** Improving the quality and availability of soft skills courses can be achieved by integrating them into study programmes as elective or mandatory subjects. Emphasis should be placed on practical teaching methods – simulations, team projects, and solving real-life situations. Collaboration with external experts from companies who can provide practical experience and examples from practice is also recommended. Motivating students can be further enhanced through certifications for completed courses.
- 3) **Improving well-being.** Universities could invest more in preventive mental health care, such as providing accessible psychological support, relaxation spaces on campus, or regular activities (e.g., yoga, meditation). In addition, topics such as stress management, work-life balance,

or mindfulness should be incorporated into the curriculum. Well-being support should be systematic and also reflected in the approach of lecturers (e.g., appropriate workload, individual support, flexibility in deadlines).

- 4) **Self-management and self-presentation development.** Students need guidance in planning, prioritizing tasks, and overcoming procrastination. This can be supported through interactive training, mentoring programmes, or digital tools (e.g., planners, time management apps). In the area of self-presentation, it is essential to focus on public speaking training, CV writing, and personal branding, ideally linked with the Career Center. Building students' self-confidence can be reinforced through positive feedback, coaching, and the public sharing of successful practical examples.

An important added value of this monograph is that it offers concrete recommendations for academics, career advisers and students themselves. The results of the research can inspire the innovation of teaching methods, structuring of courses focused on personal development and the creation of workshops in the field of wellbeing, time management or effective communication. From the perspective of institutions, the results can be used for strategic planning of Career Center activities, the development of educational policies and support for curriculum internationalisation.

In conclusion, at a time when the labor market is facing frequent and rapid changes, the emphasis on soft skills and their targeted development is one of the key prerequisites for the successful career development of university graduates. This monograph contributes to a deeper understanding of the issue and opens up space for further research, innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration in the field of career counseling and personal development of students.

A recommendation for the future is to support the systematic integration of soft skills into all levels of higher education, not only through optional seminars and workshops, but also especially through their direct embedding in the curricula of professional courses. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of Career Centers, invest in their staff development and technological equipment so that they can fulfil not only an informative, but also above all a developmental and motivational role. Given the growing importance of mental well-being and adaptability,

emphasis should also be placed on linking career counseling with psychological and social support. Such a comprehensive approach can lead not only to higher graduate employability rates but also to long-term satisfaction in both professional and personal life.

5.3 Research Limitation and Future Research Opportunities

Although the monograph provides valuable insights into the importance of soft skills and career counseling at four universities, its research is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the study was based exclusively on a student questionnaire survey, which carries the risk of subjective responses and limits the potential for a deeper understanding of individual motivations and contextual factors. Furthermore, the selection of universities was geographically and thematically restricted to project partners, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to the broader university student population. Another limitation is the short data collection period (October 2024 – January 2025), which does not allow for capturing changes in attitudes over a longer timeframe. Lastly, potential cultural differences between the participating countries – which may influence both the perception and development of soft skills and career counselling – are not thoroughly analyzed within the monograph.

Based on the findings of this monograph, several directions for future research emerge. In the future, it would be beneficial to extend the study to include more higher education institutions from diverse regions and cultural backgrounds in order to enhance the generalisability of the results and identify potential differences in student needs. Further research could focus on longitudinal tracking of the impact of soft skills development on graduates' success in the labor market. Additionally, in-depth qualitative studies (e.g., interviews or focus groups) would be beneficial for gaining a more detailed understanding of students' individual experiences with career counseling. It would also be important to examine the effectiveness of specific forms of support – such as workshops, mentoring, or one-to-one counselling – and their influence on particular areas of soft skills. Furthermore, it would be valuable to monitor how students' needs

in self-management, well-being, or self-presentation evolve in response to changes in society and the labor market. Future research could also examine regional differences and identify practical national approaches that could serve as a model for broader international applications.

We thank the reviewers for the valuable suggestion regarding the expansion of interpretation to include cultural differences and the varying levels of development of Career Centers at the respective universities, as well as the obstacles and challenges these institutions face. We fully agree with this observation and acknowledge that such aspects play a significant role in practice. However, our research was primarily focused on the student perspective through a questionnaire survey, and the collection of supplementary data from university Career Center staff was not included in the research design. We recognize that this is an important research topic that warrants separate examination – for example, in the form of a qualitative comparative study focusing on institutional conditions, stages of development, and the strategic direction of Career Centers in different cultural contexts. In this regard, we consider the reviewer’s suggestion to be a valuable inspiration for future research activities.

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APPENDIX 1 – QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please indicate your gender by selecting the appropriate option.

Select one answer.

- Male
- Female
- Other

2. Please specify your age in years.

Open-ended question.

3. Please select the university you are currently attending.

Select one answer.

- University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice
- Armenian National Agrarian University
- Budapest Business University
- Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra

4. Please select your faculty.

Answers according to university, Select one answer.

5. Please select the level of your degree program.

Select one answer.

- College (for Armenian Students)
- Bachelor
- Master

6. Please indicate your current year of study.

Select one answer.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- 4.
- 5.

7. Do you work during your studies?

Select one answer.

- Yes
- No

8. Please indicate form of your study.

Select one answer.

- Full-time
- Part-time

9. Are you aware of the existence of a career center at our university?

Select one answer.

- Yes
- No (Skip to question 19)

10. Do you visit or use services of your career center? (e.g., personal visit, seminar, workshop, individual consultation, etc.)

Select one answer.

- Yes
- No (Skip to question 19)

11. How did you learn about the career center?

Select one or more answers.

- ☐ University website
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Email communication
- ☐ Faculty members
- ☐ Recommendations from peers
- ☐ Information posters

12. How would you rate the information available about the career center?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

13. Which of the following career center services are you familiar with?

Rate every service on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “I am not familiar” and 5 means “I am familiar”

- Job search counseling
- Career workshops and seminars
- Individual consultations with a career advisor
- Internships and placements
- Online job search tools

14. How would you rate the following services of the career center?

Rate every service on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

- Job search counseling
- Career workshops and seminars
- Individual consultations with a career advisor
- Internships and placements
- Online job search tools
- Assistance in understanding your interests, skills or personal strengths
- Assistance in understanding values in relation to career choices
- Assistance with finding and researching career, educational, and employment information
- Assistance in setting and planning career goals
- Assistance in exploring career options

15. How would you rate your overall experience with the career center?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

16. How would you rate the efficiency of the career center’s response to your inquiries or requests?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

17. How would you rate the approach of the career center staff?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

18. Career counseling has helped me in the following areas:

Rate every area on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Did not help” and 5 means “Helped me a lot”

- Awareness of my potential
- Searching for job opportunities
- Understanding my advantages/disadvantages
- Writing a resume, cover letter
- Preparing LinkedIn profile
- Preparing for job interviews
- Communicating with potential employers
- Planning skill development
- Planning personal growth
- Planning development of soft skills
- Understanding rights and responsibilities related to employment

19. If you have not used the career services at all, please indicate the reasons by checking the options below:

Select one or more answers.

- ☐ Not aware of the offered services
- ☐ The center seems unattractive
- ☐ I know what I want to do and how to do it
- ☐ Inconvenient location
- ☐ Not a priority for me yet
- ☐ Other reasons (please specify)

20. Evaluate your level of following soft skills.

Rate every skill on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “I really need to improve” and 5 means “I do not need to improve”

- Communication
- Critical thinking
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Conflict management
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Emotional intelligence
- Time management
- Creativity

21. How important do you consider soft skills for your future career?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Not important” and 5 means “The most important”

22. Rate following soft skills according to your level of interest in learning or developing.

Rate every skill on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Not interested” and 5 means “The most interested”

- Communication skills
- Critical thinking
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Conflict resolution
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Emotional intelligence
- Time management
- Creativity

23. Do you have experience with learning soft skills at the university?

Select one answer.

- Yes
- No (Skip to question 28)

24. How would you rate the current offerings of soft skills subjects at the university?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

25. How would you rate the quality of soft skills subjects at the university?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

26. Do you feel that the university sufficiently supports the development of soft skills?

Select one answer.

- Yes
- Not sure
- No

27. Have you noticed development in your soft skills since starting at the faculty?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “I did not notice” and 5 means “I noticed”

28. I am confident in my ability to solve problems that I might face in life.

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Strongly disagree” and 5 means “Strongly agree”

29. I feel that I get along well with others.

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Strongly disagree” and 5 means “Strongly agree”

30. I feel that I am open to new ideas.

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Strongly disagree” and 5 means “Strongly agree”

31. How would you like to learn to improve your soft skills?

Select one or more answers.

- ☐ University courses and workshops
- ☐ Online courses or webinars
- ☐ Individual coaching or mentoring
- ☐ Self-study using books or e-learning
- ☐ Practical activities (e.g., presentations before a group, public speaking practice)

32. Where are you currently learning about soft skills?

Select one or more answers.

- ☐ At university (e.g., during courses or workshops)
- ☐ Online courses or webinars
- ☐ Books, articles, podcasts
- ☐ Personal experience or consultation with an expert
- ☐ Nowhere, I am not learning yet

33. What programs or activities would you welcome at the university to support the development of soft skills?

Select one or more answers.

- ☐ Regular workshops on public speaking and presentation skills
- ☐ Courses on writing resumes and cover letters
- ☐ Individual coaching on self-presentation
- ☐ Programs to improve non-verbal communication

34. How would you rate your current overall wellbeing?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

35. How would you rate your ability to cope with stress?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

36. What skills or knowledge would you like to gain to improve your wellbeing?

Rate every skill on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Not interested” and 5 means “The most interested”

- Techniques for managing stress and anxiety
- Healthy eating habits
- Improving physical fitness and health
- Meditation and mindfulness
- Improving sleep quality
- Time management and work-life balance
- Strengthening social connections and interpersonal relationships

37. What activities or programs would you welcome at the university to support wellbeing?

Rate every activity on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Not interested” and 5 means “The most interested”

- Regular workshops on stress management and time management
- Sports activities and group exercises
- Programs focused on healthy nutrition and cooking
- Meditation and mindfulness classes
- Mental health support (e.g., consultations with a psychologist)

38. How would you rate your current level of knowledge about well-being?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

39. How well do you think you manage to maintain your wellbeing?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

40. In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Strongly disagree” and 5 means “Strongly agree”

41. In general, I feel optimistic about the future.

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Strongly disagree” and 5 means “Strongly agree”

42. How often do you feel that you are not managing your study or work?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Always” and 5 means “Never”

43. How often do you feel motivated for your studies?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Never” and 5 means “Always”

44. How often do you manage to maintain a balance between study/work and personal life?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Never” and 5 means “Always”

45. Please rate following aspects of self-management according to your personal preferences.

Rate every aspect on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Not important” and 5 means “The most important”

- Time management
- Stress and emotional management
- Self-motivation
- Goal setting and planning
- Self-discipline
- Avoiding procrastination

46. Evaluate the following aspects of self-management according to your level.

Rate every aspect on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “I really need to improve” and 5 means “I do not need to improve”

- Time management
- Stress and emotional management
- Self-motivation
- Goal setting and planning
- Self-discipline
- Avoiding procrastination

47. Evaluate following theses:

Rate every thesis on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Strongly disagree” and 5 means “Strongly agree”

- I have the ability to achieve my goals
- I accomplish everything that needs to be done throughout the day
- I have to push myself to do things (I procrastinate)
- I handle difficult tasks without wasting time
- When possible, I like to share tasks
- I can meet deadlines without rushing at the last minute
- I plan schedule where I record my fixed commitments/obligations (I have a system)
- I plan time for relaxation
- I regularly reassess my activities concerning my goals
- I decide for myself what needs to be done
- I am not controlled (limited) by events or what others want from me
- I have a clear idea of what I want to achieve in my work, personal life, and upcoming studies
- I can choose a career path that aligns with my lifestyle
- I can accurately assess my abilities, competencies, and talents
- I can create a plan for my goals for the next five years

48. How important do you think self-presentation is in professional and personal life?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Not important” and 5 means “The most important”

49. Rate following aspects of self-presentation according to the level of importance.

Rate every aspect on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Not important” and 5 means “The most important”

- Verbal communication
- Non-verbal communication (body language, facial expression)
- Written communication (resume, cover letters)
- Confidence and authenticity
- Personal branding

50. How would you rate your verbal communication skills (public speaking, presentations)?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

51. How would you rate your non-verbal communication skills (body language, eye contact, facial expressions)?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Very poor” and 5 means “Excellent”

52. What self-presentation skills would you like to develop or improve?

Rate every skill on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Not interested” and 5 means “The most interested”

- Public speaking and presentation skills
- Writing effective resumes and cover letters
- Improving non-verbal communication (body language, facial expressions)
- Building personal branding and online presence
- Managing anxiety and nervousness

53. How often do you feel anxious or nervous about public speaking or presenting?

Rate on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Always” and 5 means “Never”

54. Evaluate following theses:

Rate every thesis on scale 1 – 5, where 1 means “Strongly disagree” and 5 means “Strongly agree”

- It is okay to show others that I am not perfect

- I don't like making mistakes in public
- I try to set an example for others to follow
- I feel calm and confident about my ability to find suitable job opportunities in the job market
- I feel calm and confident about my ability to present myself in the job market and attract the interest of potential employers

55. What would you recommend to improve the services of the career center or development of soft skills at your university?

Open-ended question.

APPENDIX 2 – REVIEW REPORTS

Reviewer 1

This monograph addresses the current and important topic of soft skills development and career counseling in higher education. It is a socially highly relevant area, as it responds to the need for systematic support for students as they prepare for the rapidly changing labor market of the 21st century.

A significant contribution of the publication is its international dimension – it is the result of cooperation between academic institutions from the Visegrad Four countries and Armenia, which not only gives it regional and transnational reach but also provides a space for mutual sharing and transfer of proven approaches and solutions.

The monograph is structured, linking theoretical foundations with practical research and providing specific recommendations for universities and Career Centers. The authors appropriately combine a theoretical framework (e.g., career counseling, soft skills development, well-being, self-management, and self-presentation) with research findings obtained through a questionnaire survey.

The publication's content is divided into logically connected chapters, with each thematic area clearly defined, supplemented by specific cases, and supported by the results of international research.

The introductory part of the monograph provides a suitable theoretical background. To enhance its informative value, consider adding a more precise definition of the research problem and formulating specific research questions. It would also be beneficial to identify the gaps in the literature review that the monograph addresses more clearly and to reflect in more detail on the specifics of the V4 region in the area of soft skills development.

The presentation of the results is clear and systematic. The research is based on the actual needs of students and sensitively captures their attitudes and experiences. I appreciate not only the identification of areas

where students perceive a need for support (especially in the areas of self-management and well-being) but also the inclusion of feedback on the services provided by Career Centers. These findings make the research practically useful.

When interpreting the results, it is recommended to consider the specific characteristics of individual universities and countries, as well as to acknowledge the limitations of the research and potential directions for further investigation. It would also be beneficial to expand the interpretation to include cultural differences and varying degrees of development of Career Centers in individual countries, as well as the obstacles and challenges faced by universities.

The monograph presents specific proposals for enhancing the functioning of Career Centers and educational institutions that support the systematic development of soft skills, thereby increasing graduates' readiness to enter the workforce.

Conclusion:

This monograph is a valuable contribution to the discussion on the development of soft skills and the effectiveness of career counseling at universities. By linking academic knowledge with the practical needs of students and strengthening cooperation between the V4 countries and Armenia, it offers inspiring solutions and recommendations. The comments in the text are stimulating for further development of the topic, and I strongly recommend the monograph with recommendations for publication.

Reviewer 2

The monograph is the result of an international project funded by the Visegrad Fund, which aimed to evaluate the importance of career counseling and soft skills development for students at four universities – three from V4 countries and one from Armenia. The publication is a collective work of experts from various institutions and offers both a theoretical foundation for the topic and empirical findings based on an extensive questionnaire survey of more than 600 students.

The topic of soft skills development is highly topical at present. In a time of rapid technological change, globalization, and increasing

uncertainty in the labor market, it is clear that skills such as communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and adaptability are crucial for graduates' career prospects. The monography rightly reflects this need and provides valuable insights into how students perceive the importance of these competences and what forms of support they expect from universities. The significance of the publication extends beyond academia, as its findings are applicable to Career Centers, university management, and education policymakers.

The aim of the monograph is clearly formulated and corresponds to the current needs of higher education. The chosen methodology – a combination of systematic literature search and quantitative questionnaire survey – is adequate and well justified. The questionnaire was carefully structured, enabling the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The statistical treatment is clear, and the interpretation of the results is factual and well-founded. I also appreciate the comparative approach, which allows the identification of differences between institutions and educational cultures.

The conclusions of the monograph are appropriate for the data obtained and reflect not only strengths but also areas for improvement. The authors offer specific recommendations for innovating Career Centers' services, developing training programmes, and systematically promoting soft skills. The results have high applicability both in theory and in practical application – not only for academic institutions, but also for students themselves, educators, and HR professionals.

I find the inclusion of chapters on self-management and self-presentation very beneficial. These areas are often neglected in the academic environment, even though they play a crucial role in students' personal development and career readiness. The ability to 'manage one's time', set goals, manage stress, and effectively communicate one's skills and value are among the key competencies for successful employment. The monograph provides not only a theoretical definition of these concepts but also practical guidelines and techniques that can inspire the creation of workshops, courses, or mentoring programmes. I also appreciate the connection between these topics and the concept of well-being, which is particularly important in the current educational context.

Conclusion:

The monograph represents a high-quality, up-to-date, and practically applicable research output that inspires the development of career counseling and systematic support of soft skills in the university environment. I recommend the book publication and also see it as a valuable basis for the further development of educational strategies in the field of personal and professional development of students.

APPENDIX 3 – ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alena Čarvašová

Alena Čarvašová is an assistant professor at the Department of Management, Faculty of Economics, University of South Bohemia, and also serves as an assistant to the head of the JU Career Center. She teaches courses such as “Career Management and Personal Growth” and “Managerial Communication”. She has extensive professional experience: since 2006, she has been working as an entrepreneur (lecturer, coach, mentor), and since 2015, she has been teaching at the Department of Management at the Faculty of Economics, University of South Bohemia, and working as an advisor at the University of South Bohemia Career Center. Since 2018, she has also been working as a mentor to career advisors and a lecturer on motivational courses and labor law issues.

Garegin Hambardzumyan

Garegin Hambardzumyan is an Armenian scholar and university lecturer who works at the Armenian National Agrarian University (ANAU), where he serves as the Head of the International Relations Department. In recent years, he has been actively involved in coordinating and implementing international educational projects, particularly within the Erasmus+ and Visegrad+ programmes, which support the internationalization of Armenian higher education and the enhancement of English-language instruction quality. His engagement in the field of internationalization contributes to the development of modern teaching methods and strengthens the integration of Armenian universities into the European educational area.

Lukáš Klarner

Lukáš Klarner is an assistant professor at the Department of Management, Faculty of Economics, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. His teaching focuses primarily on management, project management, operations management, and management techniques. He graduated from

the Faculty of Economics at the University of South Bohemia, where he obtained his degree in Economics in 2022, and is currently pursuing his doctoral studies in Economics and Management. In addition to teaching, he is actively involved in research and development projects. His professional interests primarily focus on change management in small and medium-sized enterprises, the implementation of technologies under the Industry 4.0 concept, and the examination of company-level imbalances.

Anna Sára Kovács

Anna Sára Kovács serves as the Head of the Office of Student Support. This department is responsible for coordinating activities that support students' academic development and career planning, including providing counseling and mentoring, as well as ensuring accessibility for students with special needs. In addition to her responsibilities in student support, she also plays a key role in coordinating international projects. In this role, she acts as a liaison between projects and the academic environment, ensuring effective communication across institutions. In her capacity as a negotiator and organizational leader, she contributes to establishing partnerships and ensuring the coordination of both administrative and academic projects.

Monika Maříková

Monika Maříková is an assistant professor and vice-dean for development and external relations at the Faculty of Economics of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, where she also heads the JU Career Center. Her teaching focuses on subjects related to entrepreneurship, career development, and entrepreneurship support, including courses such as Company 1, Company 2, Entrepreneurship Support, and Career and Personal Growth Management. She is active in project activities – for example, she has been leading the development of the JU Career Center (since 2020), is involved in Czech-Bavarian cross-border projects focused on the development of entrepreneurship and the involvement of students in the labor market, and participates in the implementation of Invest Day, a competition for entrepreneurial students. At the JU Career Center, she coordinates the team, organizes workshops, and ensures cooperation with companies, thereby significantly supporting the career development of students.

Ľudík Rudnák

Her pedagogical endeavours concentrate on master's and doctoral programmes. She is a lecturer in several subjects at the Management and Leadership MSc and Doctoral School of Economics and Regional Sciences: The following areas are covered: multicultural management, leadership and organisational theory; negotiation and conflict management; and leadership skills development and business communication. She employs experiential learning techniques in the delivery of specific subjects. She is a guest trainer at other higher education institutions and in the competitive sector. The focus of her research endeavours encompasses multiculturalism, the labor market and management science, as evidenced by a substantial publication record. The author has contributed to the field through the publication of 100 book chapters and 74 journal articles, 19 of which are indexed in Scopus. Under her supervision, nine doctoral students have obtained their PhD degrees, and she has been the thesis supervisor for more than 300 students. She is an active participant in EU and V4 projects.

Petr Řehoř

Petr Řehoř is an associate professor and head of the Department of Management at the Faculty of Economics, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. His teaching focuses on management, managerial communication, change and innovation management, operational and strategic management, and human resources; he teaches both Czech and English courses. His research focuses on management, public administration, change management, innovation, soft skills, and the labor market. He is an active researcher and co-researcher on several projects, including those funded by the Visegrad, INTERREG, GAJU, and MŠMT programs, which focus on the development of soft skills, Industry 4.0, innovation management, and the sustainable development of SMEs.

Loreta Schwarczová

Loreta Schwarczová works at the Institute of European Policies and Public Administration, part of the Faculty of European Studies and Regional Development at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra. Her teaching and research activities focus on public administration management, marketing communication within the specific context of the public sector, and the

strategic development of public relations. A significant part of her academic focus lies in examining the processes of coordination, management, and the effective functioning of institutions involved in public policy-making and the provision of services to citizens. She pays particular attention to issues of governance quality in public administration and its impact on institutional credibility and performance. In her teaching, she leads the course “Communication with the Public,” where she systematically focuses on the development of soft skills, particularly the ability to communicate effectively in diverse professional and cultural environments. She is actively involved in international project activities as a principal investigator or co-investigator in several initiatives that support the internationalization of education, innovation in teaching methods, and stronger connections between higher education and practical needs. She collaborates on projects within Erasmus+ (e.g., the International Master of Science in Rural Development – joint degree), the International Visegrad Fund, the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, and the INVEST European University Alliance.

Liana Vardanyan

Liana Vardanyan is a dedicated educator with 25 years of experience, with a PhD in Pedagogy, specializing in Teaching English. As an Associate Professor, English lecturer at Armenian National Agrarian University and Head of the Center for International Cooperation and Development of the Public Administration Academy of the Republic of Armenia, she brings extensive experience in curriculum development, international collaboration, and educational innovation. A certified Soft Skills trainer, Liana has actively participated in numerous international trainings and projects, contributing to cross-cultural academic exchange and institutional development. She is the author of 2 instructional manuals and 15 scholarly articles focused on language education and modern pedagogical approaches. Her teaching expertise spans TOEFL, IELTS, General English, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), designed to meet the needs of diverse learners in both academic and professional contexts. In the Visegrad+ Improving soft skills for the 21st century in career counseling: Transfer of V4 experience project she is the head trainer for three Modules /Wellbeing, Self-Management and Self-presentation/ from ANAU and co-author of the monograph.

IMPROVING SOFT SKILLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY IN CAREER COUNSELING: TRANSFER OF V4 EXPERIENCE

**Petr Řehoř
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