

# Social-Emotional Intelligence [SEI] Reflective Journey Soft Skills Development Tool for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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## Rationale

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Academic institutions have been primarily focusing on cognitive learning and measures, echoing the more general perception that cognitive capacity and measures are the primary predictors of success - both at the academic level and the workplace.

In the last two decades there has been increasing realization that other abilities, skills and competencies may be as important for success and well-being. Such skills are often referred to as 'soft skills', and mostly fall under the umbrella term of Emotional Intelligence (EI), Social-Emotional Intelligence (SEI), or Social-Emotional Competence (SEC). However, there is little emphasis on such skills in higher education - in either cultivating them or assessing them as part of the general curriculum.

Assessment, which is not based only on achievement scores, is not only a change in methods. It is no less than a revolution in our cultural patterns of thinking in the last 200 years. One of these patterns is the profound belief that in order to assess students' abilities we need to test them in knowledge standards tests. This thinking is so deeply rooted in our minds that it is almost unacceptable to think that, in fact, it is meaningless to our life today. Another pattern is the belief that we must test each student in isolation from others, else how would we know what he or she knows.

The result of such thinking is a global race for standardized tests scores, thereby turning these scores to the ultimate life-value for learners, whether they are 5<sup>th</sup> graders or college students. This life-value managed to push aside the natural human need to learn and developed a social norm of struggling for scores rather than adding to oneself meaningful knowledge.

However, the need to change traditional methods of assessment is voiced louder and more frequently. Many educators sense and understand that 200-years old assessment methods can no longer meet the reality of the technological culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that the full range of skills necessary to face the contemporary, dynamic reality must be evaluated.



## *Theoretical background*

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‘Soft skills’ is a wide term. The concept of emotional intelligence (EI), a relatively recent psychological concept which emerged in the last 2-3 decades, captures a central place in the understanding of human behavior, performance and well-being. It refers to the effective integration of emotion and thought (Mayer, Ciarrochi, & Forgas, 2001; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). As such, it primarily concerns the ability to reason effectively with emotions, and the capacity of emotions to enhance thinking (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Interest in the concept developed from the growing understanding that emotions play an important role in thought, decision making and social interactions, and the realization that traditional notions of intelligence and cognitive measures are limited in their ability to account for the variations in success in people’s lives.

In their model of EI, Salovey and Mayer (1997) included four main components, which include the ability to perceive and express emotions, to use emotions to facilitate thought, to understand emotions, and to regulate emotions in oneself and in others. Others have broadened this definition to include skills and competencies, which underlie emotional intelligence and manifest themselves in behaviors. Such models increasingly referred to Social-Emotional Intelligence (SEI) and to Social-Emotional Competence (SEC), acknowledging the social context of emotions and emotional skills, and referring to skills and competencies that underlie emotionally intelligent behaviours.

Goleman (1998) suggested that SEC is comprised of the ability to be aware and regulate emotions in self and others and suggested that these four domains are comprised of twenty competencies. In his first book, Goleman credited interest in the concept to the fact that EI offered a new perspective on skills that could promote school and life success and noted education systems to be “the one place communities can turn to for correctives to children’s deficiencies in emotional and social competence” (Goleman, 1995: p. 321).

Bar-On (2006) referred to social-emotional intelligence (SEI), acknowledging the social context of emotions, and defined EI as “a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands” (p. 3). He included five main areas in his model: intra-personal, inter-personal, adaptability, stress management and general mood; each comprises several closely-associated competencies, for a total



of fifteen competencies and skills. These skills, according to Bar-On, are manifested in behaviors and closely related to life outcomes.

Indeed, EI has been promoted as an individual-difference variable that plays a role in determining success in various types of human performance (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2007). Studies have established links between EI and physical and psychological health, well-being, stress coping abilities, and quality of relationships. In terms of work and career, SEI has been linked to work effectiveness, success at work, retention and lower burnout rates, interpersonal relationships at the workplace, teamwork and leadership, across a variety of professions and in different levels of organizations (e.g., Abraham, 2005; Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, 2011; Carmeli, 2003).

In particular, SEI skills have been found to be strongly related to students (Cohen & Sandy, 2007), including higher education students (Bradshaw, 2008; Low & Nelson, 2004; Nazir & Masrur, 2010; Vela, 2003): to improved learning and academic achievements (Brackett et al., 2009); higher retention rates and easy transition; increased pro-social behaviors and lower involvement in disruptive, violent and addictive behaviors (Brackett & Salovey, 2006); increase in quality social interactions (Brackett, Mayer & Warner, 2004); and enhanced well-being.

Looking at SEI's impact on both the educational and occupational spheres, it is apparent that the concept is strongly linked to both the present and future of higher education students, and thus important to be cultivated in students (Dolev & Itzkovich, 2017). Social-emotional skills have been noted to be even more important in the fast changing and increasingly challenging 21<sup>st</sup> century, in which knowledge has become a commodity and is constantly changing.

Challenges include the advent of new technologies, the different generations working side by side with different expectations and norms, stricter regulation, changes in professional requirements for a variety of positions, limited resources, and growing competition and expectations of clients and customers across domains (Tadmor, Dolev, Attias, Reuven-Lelong, & Rofe, 2006). Higher education systems similarly face many challenges such as redesigning the curriculum and rethinking teaching methods, demand for new technology, and integrating multicultural and international programs and students.

One of the main tasks and challenges of higher education is to prepare students for the world of today and to equip them with the skills that will be most required in a changing world. Such skills are increasingly included in many organizations' requirements of new recruits, or at least in their expectations from them, and are the skills underlying retention and promotion in organizations.



The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are, to a large extent, social emotional skills such as the ability to regulate emotions, to adapt to change, to work well with others, to provide creative and out-of-the box solution, skills that can be least replaced by machines and AI. Yet, despite the growing understanding of the importance of social-emotional skills and a growing interest in EI training in different occupational settings, higher education studies are focused on academic learning, and consequently, on its measurement. Social-emotional programs are not common in higher education.

If we accept that soft skills are among the main skills with which we must equip our students for the challenges of the 21st century, these skills must be included in the academic curricula and cultivated in higher education. The development of soft skills can take place simultaneously and synergistically with academic studies of any subject and be assessed.

### **Soft Skills Assessment**

As early as 1896, Dewey emphasized the social and emotional nature of the classroom, the links between social processes and learning, and the need to integrate social and emotional dimensions into teaching and learning. Day et al. (2007: p. 20), for example, warned that focus on academic output “leaves unmeasured (other) important features, such as social, affective and behavioral aspects”, which have been known to impact upon learning, while Low and Nelson (2005: p. 4) noted that by adopting such a narrow perspective educators may run the risk of losing “the true concept of education” and that social-emotional skills should be addressed.

It is becoming clearer that what is needed now is to create sound assessment tools that can evaluate processes rather than outcomes. Based on the vast body of evidence for the contribution and importance of soft skills (SEI, SEC and other important concepts such as resilience, growth mindset, grit and empathy), it is clear that they should be cultivated and assessed.

Taking into consideration that higher education professionals are not necessarily familiar with the concepts and are not equipped to develop them, we propose a formative assessment tool which takes the students through a development and reflection process on the skills less addressed in higher education.

This formative tool also stands in contrast to the existing measures of SEI, which measure the current level of SEC through performance measures, designed to evaluate the maximal performance level of individuals on EI-related tasks



(Wilhelm, 2005), or self-report measures which are based on individuals' self-perceptions and use self-rated lists of EI-related descriptors.

Furthermore, as soft skills are typically not taught in higher education, in particular not as part of the subject matter, we designed a soft skills development tool that can be carried out as part of any teaching subject. It is a self-directed process carried out by the student and assessed by both the student and the teacher during the journey and at its end.



## *Learning environments*

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The soft skills assessment tool can be used in any constructivist learning environment and course subject in higher education. It particularly appropriate to promote learning in learner-centered courses which foster students' participation and learning activities. For example, problem-based learning.

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a teaching-learning method based on the idea of using problems as the starting point of acquisition and integration of new knowledge. The goal of PBL is to place the learners at the center of the teaching-learning-assessment activity and to give them full responsibility for their learning. The student becomes an independent learner who integrates experience with multidisciplinary knowledge acquisition, the learner is an active partner in the learning process, initiates it, and contributes to its content (Ertmer & Glazewski, , 2015).

With relation to the current tool, in problem-based learning, the teacher may choose the skills that are most relevant to the problem-solving process, for example, teamwork, independent learning, growth mindset etc. When introducing the problem, the teacher may discuss the skills most needed to succeed in working on the problem. The teacher will note that an important part of the process is developing those skills and will focus on one particular skill (or highlight two and ask the students to choose one of them). The teacher may explain that this is going to be a self-directed learning (introducing the map, card and work process). Throughout the course, the teacher will connect the problem to the skill. The teacher will check the mid-term assignment, and comment also to things he/she observed while working with the students on the problem, to increase awareness and development.

**Target audience:** undergraduate, graduate students.



## *Soft skills assessment tool: General description*

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The soft skills assessment tool combines development and its assessment. In its development section it is designed as a roadmap for the development of SEI skills within a specific course. It is a formative tool that captures a process rather than an end goal, and is personal for each student, taking into consideration their own starting point, unique profile and needs, and their own pace and preferences. It is a self-directed development process.

Within a number of skills selected by the teacher as related to the course, and which can be developed within it, students choose the skill they wish to develop. They develop the selected skill and monitor their development using a guide, which includes suggested development tools (to complete every 1-2 weeks), and which create the milestones for development.

Development assignments (practice tools) are documented by the students and shared with the teacher twice during the course - after setting the goals and at the end. The end product should include the development assignments with a reflection on the personal journey. An option of sharing with peers in small groups and receiving their feedback is also available.

Integrating the tool within any course does not require deep knowledge and understanding of the teacher, nor is it time consuming, as it is a self-directed process, in which tools for developing SE skills are provided with the map. As students monitor their own progress through the development tools (provided as part of the tool), teachers are not required to invest large amounts of work, but rather a general appreciation of the importance of their students' development.

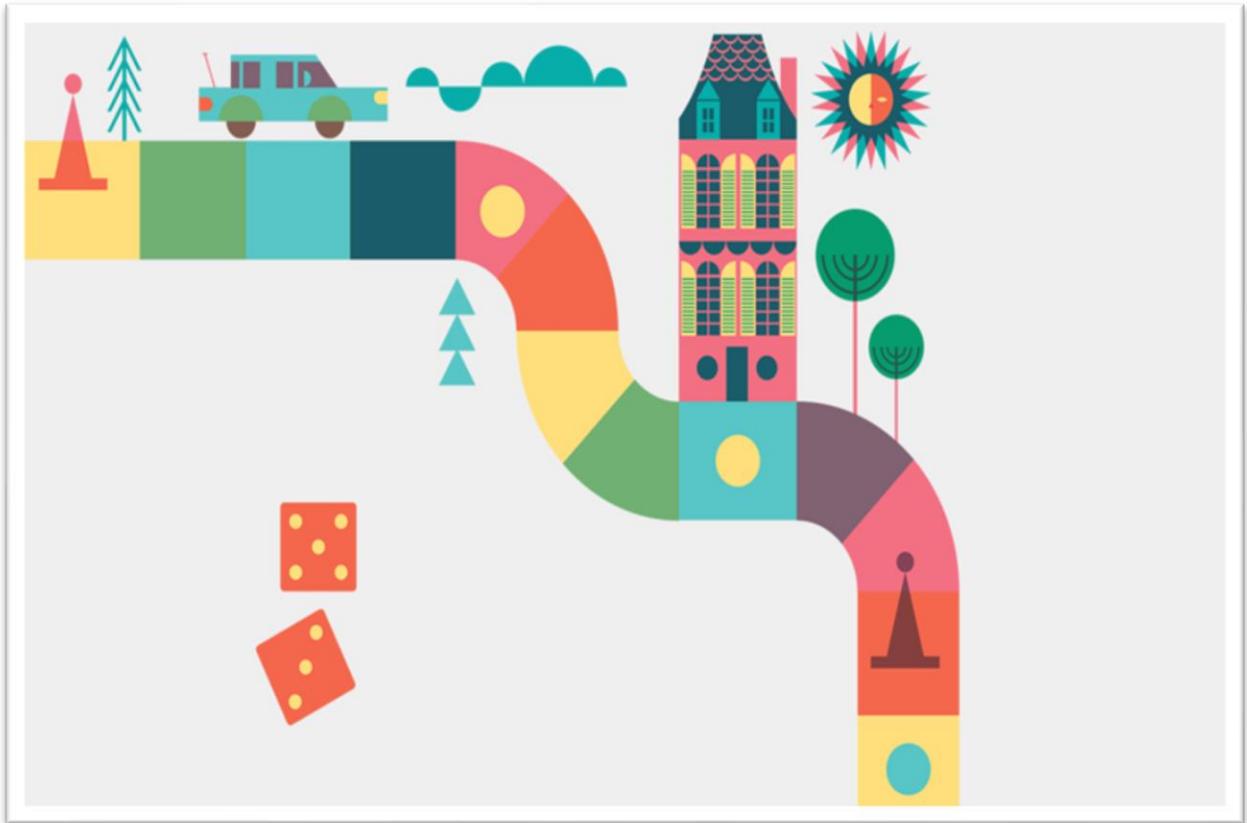
The end-of-course assessment is based on the assessment of the existence of a reflective process, engagement, understanding and effort that the student has demonstrated, rather than on actual change (a guide for assessment is provided).

### **Detailed tool description**

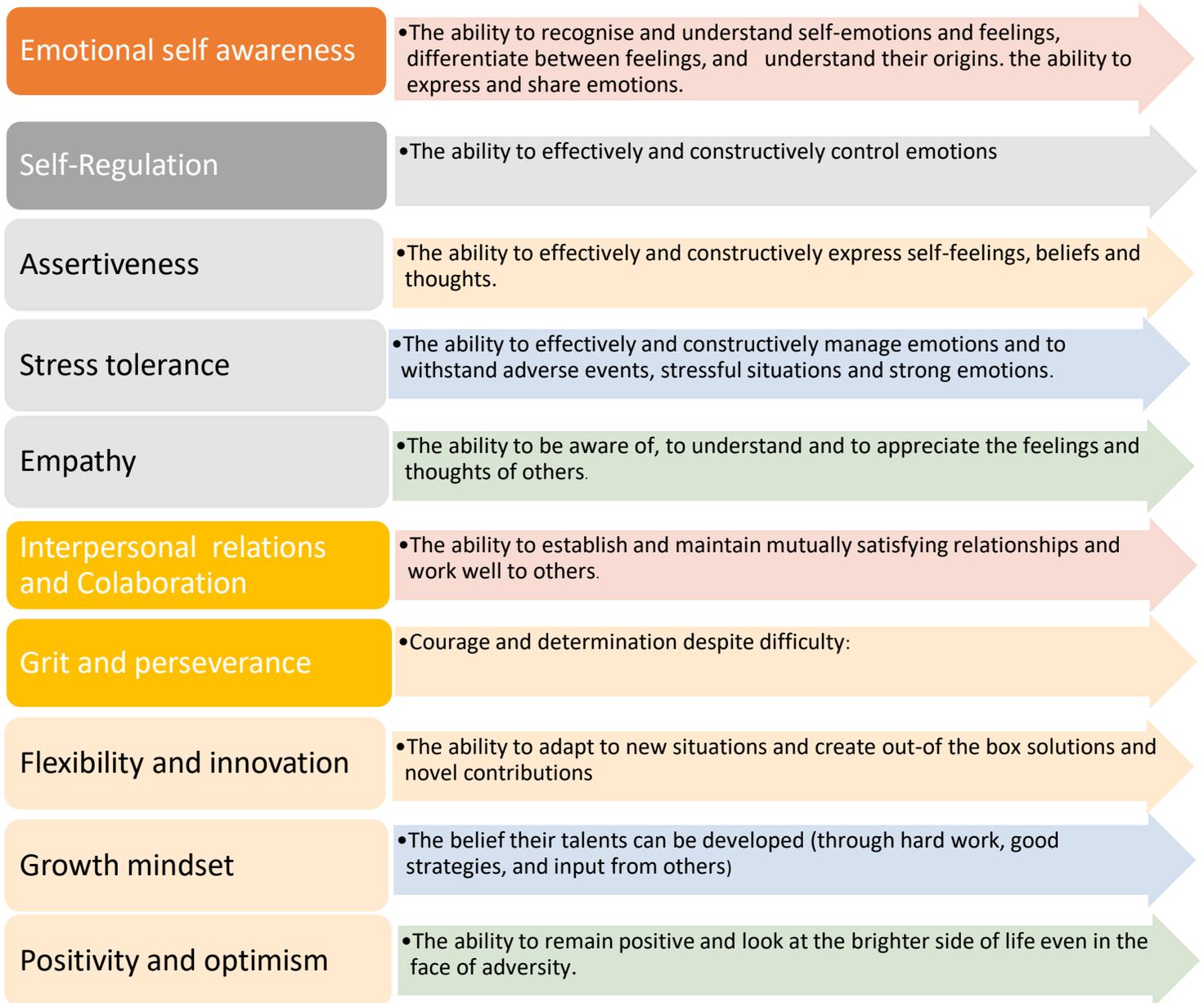
1. The soft skills assessment tool includes a development tool (for students) and an assessment tool (for teachers).
2. The SEI development tool for students includes a map which acts as a roadmap for soft skills development following a one-semester course. It is a general and generic tool that can be used with any soft skill selected for development and in any taught course.



3. The map includes 13 steps - the number of lessons in a typical semester allowing students to document their weekly development. However, some activities are given two weeks to complete, and furthermore, the development pace is flexible, meaning that students can complete the tasks at their own pace, as long as they meet the guidelines for submission at the middle and end of the course (see map below).



4. The set of skills which have been identified as particularly important for coping, succeeding and experiencing well-being, and which can be addressed by the assessment tool, include: self-awareness, impulse control, assertiveness, stress tolerance, empathy, interpersonal relations and collaboration, grit and perseverance, growth mindset, positivity and optimism (see diagram below).



5. The development tool for each skill is built with a similar structure:
  - a. Gaining knowledge/understanding of the skill, its manifestations, its importance and contribution (through articles, TED talks and guided questions);
  - b. Identifying one's personal starting point and setting development goals;
  - c. Reflective and practice exercise to develop the skill in daily life.
6. Each of the assignments is documented and becomes part of the assessment. It is submitted twice during the course. The two assignments are built one on top of the other.
7. The assessment tool for teachers includes two tools: a mid-term and a final assessment tool, in congruence with the students' submission stages. This allows for formative feedback and support in development. Additional support can be given by teachers if they wish to do so.

## Process steps

**Step 1:** The teacher selects and presents the students with 2-3 SEI skills that are relevant for the course, are integral to it, contribute to it, or can be cultivated within it (from the list provided, or can add others).

**Step 2:** At the beginning of the course, the teacher presents the concept of soft skills for success and well-being in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (an explanation and a short presentation are included). The teacher explains the importance of cultivating SE skills and their inseparable role in learning and academic achievements.

**Step 3:** The teacher presents the skills selected to be part of the course, explains them and highlights their relevance for the course.

**Step 4:** Each student selects one of the skills presented by the teacher to be his or her target of development within the course. The selection should be made based on self-reflection and guiding questions incorporated in the tool. The choice should be explained as part of the reflective journey.

**Step 5:** The student is then given a personal roadmap with a set of tool cards. The cards include activities for the development of the skill including cognitive (knowledge and understanding the skill, its manifestation and value), emotional, and behavioral.



**Step 6:** The students document their development, using the activities, reading materials, reflection questions and exercise guidelines provided to them. They mark them briefly on the milestones in the map, and in a detailed manner in the reflective journal.

**Step 7:** After the goal setting stage (5-6 weeks into the course), the students should submit whatever they had done up to that point and receive feedback. The teacher is provided with a formative assessment tool. The student integrates the feedback into his/her assignment, and it becomes part of the final assignment, to represent the formative nature of the assessment and the development as a continuous journey. The final assessment therefore contains all the assignments and exercise of the entire semester including the intermediate one.

**Step 8:** At the end of the course, students submit their review of the entire process they have experienced, including the map, the exercise, a general reflection of their journey, the development of the skill, their insights, and areas for further development (reflecting the fact that SEI development is an on-going process).

**Step 9:** The teacher accordingly assesses the work done by the students and provides feedback twice in the course of the process: after the goal setting stage and at the end of the course. The assessment of the end product is based on the extent to which the student shows understanding of the concepts, commitment to the process, insights along the way, development since the starting point, and not by the level they have reached at the end of the process

### **Peer feedback (optional)**

Twice during the semester, students gather in small groups, share and discuss their journeys, provide support and insights to each other. The groups can be formed by the skills selected for development. The students comment based on guiding questions provided to them at the beginning of the course (which are created as part of the tool). Feedback is documented by the respective student and is added to the reflective journal with the student's feelings, thoughts and 'take-away' from the feedback.

### **Teacher preparation for using the SEI formative assessment**

Before introducing the tool, teachers go through a workshop in which they are presented with the rationale for soft skills formative assessment, and with the importance of developing SEI skills in higher education, and in particular in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are also presented with the SEI skills and the relevance of each one to learning and different subject matters. A document summarizing the knowledge,



which can be used with the students at the beginning of any course, will be provided. The teachers will also get familiar with the assessment tool.

### **Student development tool**

See attached document (example for Self-Awareness).

### **Teacher Assessment tool**

See attached document for the intermediate and final teacher evaluation tool.

### **Evaluation of students' perceptions of the process and tool**

(Evaluation of the assessment for quality assurance purposes based on Farrah, 2012). In this questionnaire, the student indicates the extent to which he/she agrees with the following statements regarding his/her views about journal writing by putting a tick in the appropriate box using a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree.

The items of the soft skills tool:

1. The soft skills tool helped me to talk about my experiences.
2. The soft skills tool helped me to express my feelings, ideas and opinions.
3. The soft skills tool helped me to respond to my thoughts and feelings.
4. The soft skills tool stimulated my critical thinking skills.
5. The soft skills tool was a way of thinking to explore my learning.
6. The soft skills tool was an opportunity to gain self-knowledge.
7. The soft skills tool helped me understand what I was learning.
8. The soft skills tool allowed me to describe what I understood.
9. The soft skills tool offered me a chance to develop and reinforce my writing skills.
10. The soft skills tool enhanced my communication skills.
11. The soft skills tool increased my creativity.
12. The soft skills tool motivated me to write more.
13. I did not understand what I was supposed to do or write in my journal.
14. I did not have enough time to develop my skills.
15. The soft skills tool is a waste of time.
16. I find it easy to write in my journal.
17. The soft skills tool should be encouraged and/or continued.
18. I would like to share with the class what I wrote in my development journal.
19. Overall, this was a worthwhile experience .



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## Assessment tools for the student

### ASSIGNMENT #1

Getting to know the skill:

Read the attached article (see link).  
What did the article teach you about the skill?

In your view, what are the three most important things about the skill?

### ASSIGNMENT #2

Watch the TED lecture (see link).

Three things I took from the lecture:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Define the skill based on both the article and lecture.

### ASSIGNMENT #3

What is the relevance of the skill to your success in the course?

What is the relevance of the skill to your success in learning and life in general?

### ASSIGNMENT #4

From the general to the personal:  
Think about the skill on a personal level. How do you use it? (Use examples.)

Ask someone who knows you well how they think you use this skill.

Compare with your own view.

What would you like to improve?

Define it as clearly as possible.

How would its improvement promote the quality of your everyday life and your success? How would you do it and who can help you? What could get in the way of achieving the goal?



### ASSIGNMENT #5

#### Emotional literacy:

List 15-18 emotions.

Sort them into groups by any criterion you choose.

Choose 5 emotions from your list and explain their meaning.

What is the connection between this assignment and the soft skill that you chose to develop?

### ASSIGNMENT #6

#### Emotional timeclock:

For 4 days, at least twice a day, stop and ask yourself how you feel.

Record your emotions, and write what had caused them.

What did you learn about yourself?

What is the connection between this assignment and the soft skill that you chose to develop?

### ASSIGNMENT #7

#### Understanding emotions:

Tell about an incident you experienced in class this week. What did you feel? How strongly (on a scale of 1 to 10)?

What caused the emotion?

What did you think? What did you do? How often do you have this emotion? What is the connection between this assignment and the soft skill that you chose to develop?

### ASSIGNMENT #8

#### Expressing emotions:

For 3 days – check how often you use words that express emotions or share your feeling.

If you share your feelings, what makes you do so? How does it help?

If you don't share, what stops you?

Try to share with someone something you felt – record what happens and how it affects both of you. What is the connection between this assignment and the soft skill that you chose to develop?



## FINAL ASSIGNMENT

Throughout the semester, you worked on developing one of your personal skills. Create a portfolio of all your assignments throughout the course. Complete the last assignment and

### FINAL ASSIGNMENT 2

1. **On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you summarize the process?**
  1. I feel the process was meaningful for me. 1....2....3....4...5
  2. I feel it needs more time.. 1....2....3....4...
  3. I began an important process. 1....2....3....4...
  4. I want to continue this process.. 1....2....3....4...5
  5. I had insights that have never had before.. 1....2....3....4...
  6. I learned to look at myself in a more reflective way.. 1....2....3....4...5
  7. I felt a need to share the process with others.. 1....2....3....4...5
  8. I made changes in my everyday life.. 1....2....3....4...5
9. **Freely and reflective**
  10. How would you summarize the process you experienced?
  11. What did you learn about yourself?
  12. How was the process expressed you would like it to be expressed in your everyday life? (Give at least 3 examples.)
  13. Connect the exercises you performed to your development – What did you do? How did they work? What was their effect?
  14. How useful was this process to you? In what ways?



## Assessment of intermediate assignment (teacher)

### The learner:

1. Demonstrated understanding of the theoretical material (article summary, TED lecture).
2. Demonstrated an ability to link the relevant concepts with introspection.
3. Was able to provide examples for the concepts.
4. Related to the comparison between personal perceptions and perception of others.
5. Demonstrated understanding of the contribution of the improved skill to everyday life.
6. Formulated the goal of improving the skill coherently, including the ability to identify obstacles and helps.



## Assessment of final assignment (teacher)

Category	Level		
	A	B	C
<b>Knowledge – cognitive understanding of the concept, organization of writing</b>	At least 8 assignments were concluded fully and in depth. Most of the writing is in paragraphs and written coherently. The concept is clear and explained in depth.	At least 6 assignments were concluded fully and in depth. Some of the writing is in paragraphs and is generally clearly written. The concept is explained clearly.	The student concluded less than 6 assignments, or did not answer the questions, or answered superficially. Most of the writing is not formulated clearly. The concept is unclear and is explained superficially/partially.
<b>Introspection Description of the process and its observation by means of the concept/skill/ability</b>	A clear, specific goal was defined. The student gave specific, relevant examples from everyday life. There is full, in-depth connection of the student's experiences, emotions, feelings and thoughts with the concept and theoretical materials.	A general goal was defined. The student gave short but specific, relevant examples from everyday life. There is partial connection of the student's experiences, emotions, feelings and thoughts with the concept and theoretical materials.	The goal was not clearly defined. The student gave short, general examples, some of which were not relevant. There is little connection of the student's experiences, emotions, thoughts with application of the concept and the relevant theoretical materials in the examples.
<b>Reflective process</b>	The student demonstrated meta-cognitive thinking that describes and explains processes such as doubts, dilemmas, considerations, and personal beliefs. The student related in-depth to challenges and difficulties s/he dealt with during the process. The student revealed and explained in detail the process s/he had undergone throughout the course, in a way that demonstrated his/her development and actions. The student related to issues in which the process helped or would help in the future in various contexts, including ideas for future improvement.	The student demonstrated partial meta-cognitive thinking. In some assignments, doubts, dilemmas, considerations, and personal beliefs were described and explained. The student related to some challenges and difficulties s/he dealt with during the process. The student revealed but did not explain the process s/he had undergone throughout the course, in a way that demonstrated his/her development and actions. The student related to issues in which the process helped or would help in the future in various contexts, but had only one idea for future improvement.	The student did not demonstrate meta-cognitive thinking, but used 'slogans' without relating to processes such as doubts, dilemmas, considerations, and personal beliefs. The student related briefly and superficially to only one challenges s/he dealt with during the process. The student summarized briefly, without examples or explanations, the process s/he had undergone throughout the course, with only general reference to the characteristic. The student related in general to issues in which the process helped or would help in the future in only one context, without referring to ideas for future improvement.



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