

Exploring empowerment and soft skills, substantial arguments for organizational work innovation

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Abstract

Objective. The present theoretical construct allowed us to discover how the actions of human resources through their soft skills become a source and source of innovation in organizations.

Methodology. The study was based on positivism as a philosophy, deductive theoretical approach, single-method quantitative methodology, cross-sectional horizon, research strategy based on the survey and as a technique the questionnaire and statistical analysis in order to verify the correlation of variables. The target population was limited to merchants registered in the Chamber of Commerce of the city of Ocaña, which allowed applying the instrument to a sample of 306 key informants.

Results. The organizations consider the action of the human resource as supra important, it is necessary to empower the collaborator for his participation, therefore, he demands stability, and participates by being motivated emotionally and not so much economically, and they see in the trainings an important niche. Human resources are willing to take risks in their decisions up to the level of their responsibility, and motivation and work environment are key syntheses. The level of empowerment on the part of the company is fundamental to go in search of continuous improvement, and that, the support is fundamental so that the leadership is engendered and is also prone to the creation of value. Another aspect is that with their soft skills they are willing to make additional efforts for the team and the entity, which will ultimately lead to the creation of the organization's brand through the positioning of the service and/or product. But in short, the overall importance of soft skills in terms of innovation and labor impact is manifested by the corporate culture of trust in the development of activities.

Researchers' contributions. Under the auspices of the connoisseurs of theories on human resource management, it becomes a non-negotiable requirement to attend to and understand that soft skills are the universe of conditions for the collaborator to contribute unconditionally to the creation of value and organizational brand.

Conclusions. The brand is definitely created when the employee is motivated and when the actions of the organizational culture directly and clearly contribute to the spiritual growth, not in a religious sense, but in the sense of consolidation of the employee and then reverting it to the entity. Appreciating and encouraging employees' soft skills will allow the organization to

operationalize innovation and mutual value creation. Assertive communication spaces and full trust are fundamental in modern organizations.

Keywords. Skills, empowerment, value, innovation.

INTRODUCTION

From the same human conception, each human being must be understood as a particularity and from this, forms a whole full of setbacks, but also of strengths that make it unique and unrepeatable. This same human conception fits within the organizational argument, and it is obvious that each particular entity must attend to these virtues or particularities or enhance them towards the creation of value and brand.

Research on work engagement has become fundamental today in this globalized and competitive world, because it is the collaborators or human resource with their individualities that under the auspices or in collusion with the companies, generate committed people who with their apprehensions achieve better health and greater well-being, while contributing to organizational effectiveness, performance, sales and customer satisfaction (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Now, it is conceivable to understand that modern living organizations are involved in constant external pressures that generate internal pressures which necessarily lead them to constantly update their structures and processes, or rather to reinvent themselves. It is increasingly evident that motivated employees are needed to strategically anchor sustainable management in organizations. In this regard, human talent management and organizational development have become key tools for efficient administrations, as they allow the identification, development, management and retention of human talent.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, the globalization of the market, the advance of technology, the increase in productivity and competitiveness justify the change of business strategies in organizations and therefore the need for a new approach in the management of human talent, in order to enable the achievement of strategic organizational objectives.

With all of the above, the challenge is clear: paradigm shifts, the new world order and economic pressures require organizations to make serious and decisive changes to address these new shifting stages and workload assignments filled with complex tasks (Drescher et al., 2016). These changes impose unrealistic expectations on formal leaders, as it is unlikely that any one person can effectively perform all leadership responsibilities (Holbeche, 2023). As a result, organizations have increasingly begun to question this conventional paradigm of empowerment in their work.

Harney and Collings, (2021), comment that human resources management today must assume a more strategic perspective, meaning that it must be involved in the organization's plans, in such a way that it definitely contributes to achieving its objectives. Employees are becoming more and more valuable to companies and that is why a more effective management of them is needed.

From the previous chapters, it is essential to turn to the collaborator as a source to generate organizational value, who, through his soft skills, but also hard skills, invite and urge us to understand his individualities, but also absorbing him to place them for mutual benefit and to know how to jointly empower them towards success.

The issue of labor empowerment arises then, which, according to Gerdenitsch et al. (2015) can provide support to the employee, to develop and feel valuable within the organization, which in turn allows them to perform better in their work. Linked to the previous concept, proactivity in the workplace is of utmost importance in the workplace since it is shown as a motivating action

focused on change that can encourage self-initiation (Cui & Yin Li, 2021). Also, Jeske and Olson (2022) point out that proactivity in the workplace is oriented towards the future and change, comprising behaviors such as taking charge, expressing one's voice, showing individual innovation and demonstrating problem prevention.

Empowering leadership is conceived as leadership through which authority is delegated to the employee in order to promote autonomous and self-directed decision making. It involves sharing power with employees, encouraging self-management and supporting employees by giving them the space and confidence to handle challenging work without direct interference.

According to the above reasons, modern organizations are implementing new ways of working with the participation of new technologies, artificial intelligence and digitalization, all with a spectrum of improvement in terms of organizational agility to cope with changes. To say also, that smart strategy requires incorporating soft and hard power tools to deal with threats. That is to say, to make room for people with their individualities to assume the leadership of their roles in favor of high-impact results and long-term positive effects for the company and its individuals. All this leads us to ask ourselves if, by empowering employees through soft skills, could they give rise to better job performance, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization?

Theoretical foundation and frame of reference.

As we mentioned, the changing global and local conditions have paved the way for the organization to definitely see in its main stakeholders (employee) the key ally towards the achievement of goals. Hence our research and theoretical reference for the answer as to whether soft skills and employee empowerment are effective tools towards innovation and organizational sustainability.

Empowerment theory

The structural empowerment theory of Kluska et al. (2004) includes a discussion of organizational behavior and empowerment. According to this theory, empowerment is promoted in work environments that provide employees with access to information, resources, support, and the opportunity to learn and develop. Thus, empowerment is a process as an outcome, where the most vulnerable and marginalized individual or group creates awareness and action against demonstrated discrimination to create a change in circumstances or structure, enabling their free strategic life choices (Yuan et al. 2024).

Empowering Sustainability in the Workplace

Psychological empowerment, as defined by Crittenden et al. (2019) based on Spreitzer (1995), examines individual employees' perceptions of the extent to which they can perform their work independently, motivated, and self-effectively. Active orientation emphasizes that empowerment is a construct that reflects employees' individual perceptions, desires, and feelings about the possibilities of shaping the job role.

Soft Power

It is believed that the concept of soft power can be framed within the realist theory of international relations, which was laid down in 1948 by H. Morgenthau in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle For Power and Peace*. In his work, Morgenthau states that the main characteristic of his theory is the existence of nations that act rationally and are in constant competition for power; the importance of military capabilities is mainly emphasized, although economic and cultural powers are also important.

Soft power, also called soft power, is a concept that identifies three main ways of influencing the behavior of others: coercion, incentives and attraction (Priya et al. 2024).

Theories of organizational change

Today, organizations and managers are more frequently confronted with the demands of change

imposed on them by the environment. According to Krajcsák and Bakacsi (2024), pressures in all sectors of the economy are related to responding to and anticipating continuously changing competitive, technological, market, economic and social conditions. Therefore, one of the main concerns at the organizational level is to understand how to respond in a timely and effective manner to the different changing conditions that are generated externally. On the other hand, Sandoval (2014) exposes two main causes for organizational change to occur: external and internal causes.

Soft skills

Skills that are not technical in nature, such as the ability to communicate effectively, are soft/adaptive skills. According to Pons et al. (2024), soft skills are defined as behaviors that include life skills and abilities, whether for oneself, a group or community, and God. Having soft skills makes one constantly surrounded by the community. Communication, emotion, language, group, ethical and moral skills are areas of soft skills.

Teamwork

According to Sharma et al. (2015), teamwork means work performed having the same goal in a group, even though individuals in the group have different ways of working to complete a task. This was also supported by Gallie, et al. (2012) Teamwork skills involve the ability to work together with others to achieve the same goal.

The values

This source of soft power is aimed at influencing the behavior of people inside and outside the country. Each particular territory aims to exalt its values and characteristics, in order to ensure trust and empowerment (Polak, 2023).

The policies

This component is the responsibility of governments, organizations, and society in general, and aims to ensure that people inside and outside the country embrace their development in accordance with the regulations (Martin et al. 2024).

Organizational Innovation

According to Garrido-Moreno et al. (2024), organizational innovativeness is composed of managerial innovation and technological innovation. Managerial innovation involves the development of new strategies and forms of business, while technological innovation is related to the development of products, services and processes interrelated to these business activities. So, a company with a strong organizational innovation capability means that it will have a superior ability (compared to competitors) to combine, augment and transform internal competencies to achieve changes in its business environment, creating and capturing value for the company and its customers (Beuren 2022).

To conclude this section, we unveil the conceptual model shown below developed to answer the question of whether empowerment and soft skills are a source of labor innovation in the organization, which led to the testing of the following hypothesis:

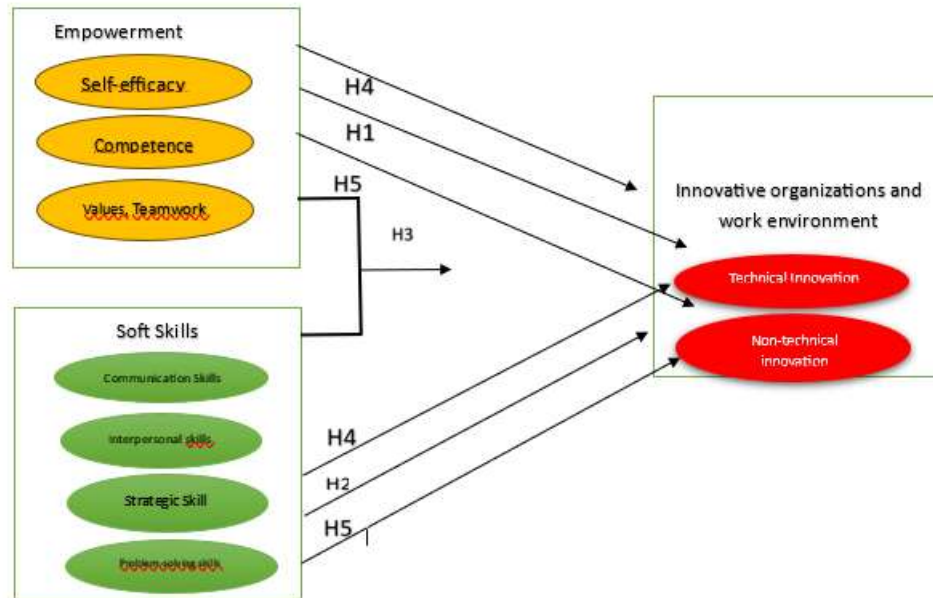


Figure 1. Conceptual Model assumed by researchers 2024

- H1: Empowerment is positively associated with organizational innovativeness.
- H2: Interpersonal skills are positively associated with organizational innovativeness.
- H3: The interaction between empowerment and soft skills is positively associated with organizational innovativeness.
- H4: Empowerment and soft skills are positively associated with technical innovation in organizations.
- H5: Empowerment and soft skills are positively associated with non-technical innovation in the organization.

METHOD (DESIGN, PARTICIPANTS, INSTRUMENTS, PROCEDURES)

This section of the present construct delimits the data that cover the scientific attribute of the research methodologically, determines the design used to obtain the results and the analysis of the data, as well as the description of the participant population, the instruments and the procedure carried out in the fieldwork.

Design.

The type of research developed was supported by the positivist paradigm conception (Hernández, et al 2014) with quantitative methodology and a deductive approach, attending through the evaluation to the relationship between empowerment and soft skills in the workplace as a factor of innovation, thus, the data and results obtained under its manifest importance were defined as contribution to the research.

On the other hand, Saunders et al. (2019, p. 186) states that "research can be designed to fulfill an exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, or evaluative purpose, or some combination of these." Based on the research purpose and question, this study is explanatory. The deductive framework approach to the research led us to first propose hypotheses with guidance from previous studies and then collect data to test the hypotheses. Since this study focuses on determining relationships between variables, primary data will be collected in numerical and standardized form and analyzed using statistical techniques.

Participants.

According to the purpose of this study, the research question and the survey design, the population of this survey is limited to employees, leaders, and managers of the productive sector. Twenty-two companies were selected to respond to the questionnaire. In addition, it was also sent to the human resources departments of these companies in the sector.

Instruments.

According to Carhuacho et al. (2019), "techniques comprise procedures and activities that allow the researcher to obtain information necessary to answer the research question". They can be, among others, documentary reviews, observations, surveys and sociometrics, which in their foundation will make it possible to obtain the data in a reliable and objective manner.

In such, for the particular construct that concerns us, the survey technique was used, which was applied to the collaborators, leaders, managers and human resources departments of the productive sector of the selected companies. A "descriptive survey" (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2018, p. 119) is chosen to collect information on a specific topic, such as managers' innovativeness. As a summary of the research process we will allude to the research onion which according to (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130), provides a pictorial understanding of the process of this research design by layering each stage from the first step (outer layer) to the last step (inner layer).

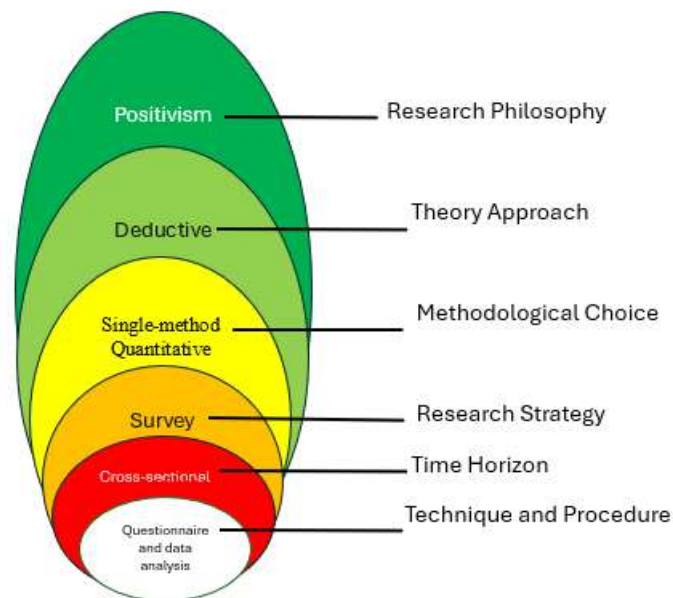


Figure 2. Research onion. Source. Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2018.

Procedures

As a starting point, the hypothesis to be tested was defined and it was circumscribed to verify if, by empowering employees through soft skills, do they give way to a better job performance, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization and are a source of innovation? Based on the deductive conception, first proposing the hypothesis with the guidance of previous studies and then collecting data to test the hypotheses. It was intended, to determine the relationships between variables, the primary data will be collected in numerical and standardized form and analyzed using statistical techniques. The research strategy through the survey was implemented as a support to the deductive method and that suits the quantitative paradigm.

The survey designed used Hendarman et al. (2018) as a guide. The three constructs are measured

at the individual respondent level using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1: Strongly Disagree", "2: Disagree", "3: Neutral", "4: Agree", and "5: Strongly Agree" (Boone et al., 2012). The responses received are analyzed statistically, to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions.

On the other hand, empowerment was operationalized through three variables, namely: Self-efficacy (SA), Competency of ability to use tools and applications (CHA) and Values and teamwork (VT). The geometric mean of these variables gives the measure of empowerment.

The soft skills are: communication skills (HC), interpersonal skills (HI), strategic influencing skills (HIS) and problem solving skills (HRP). These soft skills are operationalized and the geometric mean is used to measure the level of soft skills of all staff.

Innovation capacity was analyzed under two categories: technical innovation (TI) and non-technical innovation (NTI).

From the above, we obtained the problem in the lack of empowerment of employees within organizations, whose causes found were: feeling the work performed as an obligation, lack of initiative, professional stagnation, lack of knowledge management, and stability in the comfort zone, thus, very worrying effects emerge as low productivity, unstable management, customer dissatisfaction, zero innovation and creativity and decreases the skills and tasks used in the position, triggering business crisis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below, we present the main findings in order to test the described hypothesis and that allowed us to conclude the research construct.

In this way, how important is the human resource for your company in your first question, and 77.5% corresponding to 237 of the informants to whom the survey was applied concluded that human talent is fundamental and important, the above allows under the theories of human resources to prove that they see in their collaborators a strategic ally. Therefore, the above findings are relevant and of great value because they support the models of empowerment and improvement in soft skills, giving an alternative approach in the study to achieve success,

Also, what do you understand by empowerment, where 58% (180) respondents defined it as delegating, which implies involving others in the task, allowing them to contribute from their vision, giving them a space in decision making and responsibility for the results. And 24.5 % (75) informants referred to it as leading by thinking, that empowerment flourishes in an atmosphere of openness, good communication and trust. This leads us to understand that there is meridian clarity and therefore they are ready to create value. Therefore, citing Llorente et al. (2024), empowerment can be defined as a cognitive, subjective and motivational process by which individuals perceive themselves as effective and competent to carry out tasks, with sufficient capacity to ensure their completion. Furthermore, the tasks themselves are seen as relevant and meaningful, and individuals feel that they have freedom of choice in relation to them.

On the other hand, why is it so important to empower employees in the workplace? 132 out of 132 respondents, 46.1% of the universe, stated that the importance of empowering employees in the workplace goes from enabling greater job performance, creating job satisfaction, driving innovation, creating commitment to the organization, and allowing them to make an extra effort. Forty-five percent (45%) defined the importance as allowing greater job performance, creating job satisfaction, and promoting innovation. Organizational attractiveness can also predict retention and help prevent employees from leaving a company. Thus, citing Lang-Lehmann et al.

(2024) the definition of organizational attractiveness includes a focus on both potential and current employees; among job seekers, organizational attractiveness is a factor that draws their attention to potential employers and comprises the "anticipated benefits a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization."

One of the questions on the type of security demanded by workers in the organization, 48% described as 147 respondents that the most demanded is to have stability, and 37.4% (11) have good pay and recognition. The result can be interpreted as that although the economic factor is crucial, the collaborator already sees the future as a definitive ally and to make career. In this regard, organizations depend on the commitment of their employees to adopt measures to avoid, manage and recover from crises (Gifford et al., 2022).

It was also asked whether the company satisfies the security and stability that the employee demands, the response was 74%, 219 respondents determined that they are satisfied and that there is job security as elements towards development in the organization. However, it seems to us that even the remaining 2% who stated negatively is a factor to be taken into account for a future study. Furthermore, in volatile and uncertain times, it is vital to assess the effects of job security, insecurity and burnout on organizational commitment and understand the need for organizations to maintain continuity and navigate instability (Ananda et al. 2023).

One importance given by the study was in what situation, position, level, circumstance, etc., it is logical to ask for and expect initiative from the collaborator where in Table 1 there are relevant findings to determine empowerment and higher competence in soft skills.

Table 1. Work motivation

Cause	Number of respondents	Percentage
When motivated	147	48
When you are adequately remunerated	60	19,6
When you have schedule flexibility	57	18,6
When working towards goals	27	8,80
When you have an indefinite term contract	15	4,90

Construction of authors 2024

From the above, we can conclude that motivation is an unrestricted factor towards initiative and contribution to organizational development, but no less important is adequate remuneration. Thus, understanding the attributes that contribute to motivation can help leaders in the production sector to better manage their organization in terms of employee attendance, efficiency, turnover and productivity. More so, with the challenges facing companies, including technological advances, the transformation taking place in workforce demographics and diversity, changing customer needs, improved relationships between marketing team members and customers, the increased cohesion needed among employees, and the collaboration needed between the organization and its staff (Kofi et al. 2016).

In general, there are 4 fundamental pillars in the organizations surveyed to address the incentive of empowerment, which in general depends on the entities where the activity is developed:

Training	43 %	
Talks	15%	
Monetary incentives	13%	

Recreational activities	9%	
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Our meta-analysis compared the effects of employees who were rated as more empowering by their direct peers with those who were rated as less empowering. Moreover, leaders who were perceived as more empowering were more likely to delegate authority to their employees, solicit their input and encourage autonomous decision making. Hence, the importance of empowerment in increasing employee trust, commitment and productivity (Nwachukwu, 2016). By accepting more responsibility, employees are motivated to increase their skills and capabilities, which generates greater commitment to the organization (Afram et al. 2022). where committed and loyal employees accepted more knowledge management to have soft skills and thus can more easily achieve organizational goals, are more productive, have greater responsibility and job satisfaction, and are satisfied and highly motivated people.

In the same line, it is observed how the collaborator is willing to contribute in decisions, sometimes of high complexity, all because it always coexists with the condition of dependence and marked subordination, however, the results were revealing. Thus, they are willing to commit themselves to decisions as far as their responsibilities go 44.1%, on the other hand, some not less ignored with 39.2% are willing to take the risk as far as their competences go, and eventually 7% as far as their fear of failure or rejection goes. For this reason, a well-designed organizational ecology fundamentally requires coherence and dynamism, so that not only physical but also environmental space is one of several co-evolutionary elements that support the way people work and interrelate and make better decisions.

From the above evidence, the sample defined that the factor that goes against implementing empowerment processes is motivation with 37.3% and the second dilemma is the work environment with 33.6% and the third aspect, not less important, is knowledge with 19.6%. These previous aspects, especially the first and second, should be proscribed by the organizations, but the third most certainly with a higher level of personal, but also organizational commitment. Similarly, citing Llena et al (2023) stated that empowerment is an active social process that occurs in relation to others and varies according to the environment and the people involved. They also pointed out that it is difficult to separate the individual from the community, the personal from the environment, which should be further observed.

Within this framework, the increase in decision-making responsibilities puts at risk the stability and positioning of both the empowered employee and the employee responsible for the decisions taken, which definitely shows that the higher the level of responsibility, the greater the risk in terms of stability and positioning, and the fear or stage fright of going beyond and assuming roles that may shake us out of our comfort zone. 68.6% mentioned that the risk is high.

In addition to the above, forty-six percent agree that all of the following elements must come together in unison in order to cultivate improvement; for their part, we then have to embrace change such as digital transformation, recognize employee contribution to the business, reward responsible ownership in the workplace, foster a culture of employee engagement, and retain the best talent. Others on the other hand somewhat more conservatively seventeen point six percent say that just fostering a culture of employee engagement would suffice and fifteen percent say that recognizing employee contribution to the business would suffice (Correa and Neves, 2018).

For all these reasons, empowered team leaders can contribute to the company, by inspiring and motivating they would be able to pull the strings of transformation, as well as facilitating appropriate work processes and providing information when requested would fit. The truth is that the empowered leader would be prone to gestate serious options and valuable contributions, since empowerment is a motivational concept of self-efficacy, which considers that if employees adopt new roles they will have additional opportunities to reach their potential and motivation for various issues and tasks.

Finally, the key to the empowerment of its employees is the culture of the company, since through the organizational culture the employee is empowered, generating confidence in the workplace, and should lead to the reality of the vision of the company and in order to improve dialogue at work, i.e. to reach real assertive communication throughout the company. Linked to this, says Doneys et al. (2020), the tending aspects treated as soft skills and empowerment are necessary for labor innovation, since they are two elements that together create spaces for reinvention, the contribution of value and the co-creation of individualities with a high standard of societal commitment, in this regard, the human-centered approach embodied by Industry 5.0, advocates the advancement and utilization of emerging technologies, such as the integration of networked sensors, cobots, knowledge and skills transfer between digital systems and their physical counterparts, as well as deep learning and machine learning (Zhao et al. 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

With the above we can say with meridian certainty that:

- The hypothesis could be tested in that by empowering employees through soft skills, do they lead to better job performance, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, and are they a source of innovation?
- We must encourage and see in our human resources the permanent and unrestricted ally who, in the face of adversity, is willing to give a little more.
- The economic context can certainly not be neglected, but other forms of allocations are prescribed to fill the gaps, and the organization must always keep pace with them.
- The human talent is in need of real trust, trust in treatment, work and justice in order to fulfill expectations and commit him/her as a social being.
- Empowerment allows for reasonable security, positive attitude, total action and inescapable commitment to the common horizon.
- The human resource has been under the situation of returning to its own strengths of having stability, which puts it before payment and recognition, a transcendental factor under the paradigmatic changes of seeing the organization as an ally and not as a giver of money.
- Motivation is definitely the driving force towards other levels and common interests of the diptych community organization.
- Fortunately, training is recognized as an element towards brand supremacy and promotion.
- The employee is willing to take risks to the extent that he/she is given the confidence and opportunity to do so.
- Points of equidistance and alienation towards improvement were found when the culture is fostered and the collaborator participates in the organizational action.

In summary, soft skills are essential to enrich interpersonal interactions, foster effective

collaboration and teamwork, promote adaptability and resilience, drive innovation, establish strong relationships and support personal and professional development. In addition, these skills are indispensable to face challenges and seize opportunities that empower in order to strengthen the labor market, where employability is ensured, provide a competitive advantage.

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