



# The Importance of Participation in Student Organizations for Soft Skills Development

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*Every skill you acquire doubles your odds of success*

Scott Adams

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## **Abstract**

The importance of developing transversal skills in a student's academic career arises mostly from the new demands of the labor market.

Performance and competency management issues in organizations have changed in recent years. Hard skills used to be fundamental, but the paradigm has changed, and today something different is needed that keeps people in line with the demands of the world we live and work in, and increasingly facilitates the necessary interaction with other people. This is so called soft skills.

As such, it is necessary to understand the level of adaptability of the higher education teaching model in view of this whole new labor market paradigm.

Students' participation in Student Organizations enables them to further develop the skills sought by employers by engaging in different challenges and activities and especially through the level of commitment given to each of their responsibilities.

This research aims to gather theoretical grounding on the topics described above and at the same time, through an online survey, obtain a personal opinion of several individuals with experience and active participation in student organizations, during their academic course.

Thus, it has become evident, both through literary review and data collection, that participation in Student Organizations is increasingly important and should be valued by employers, given their ability to further develop than the teaching model of higher education, the skills required by the labor market.

**Keywords:** Higher Education; Labor market; Soft Skills; Student Organizations.

**JEL Classification:**

A21 – University

JEL: L31 - Nonprofit Institutions

JEL: I23 - Higher Education Research Institutions

JEL: J40 - Labor Market

## Resumo

A importância do desenvolvimento de competências transversais no percurso académico de um estudante surge, maioritariamente, das novas exigências do mercado de trabalho.

As matérias da gestão do desempenho, performance e do desenvolvimento de competências dos colaboradores nas organizações têm vindo a alterar-se nos últimos anos. Antes, as *hard skills* eram fundamentais, no entanto atualmente é necessário algo que mantenha as pessoas em linha com as exigências do mundo em que vivemos e trabalhamos, e que facilite, cada vez mais, a necessária interação com os outros. A tudo isto dá-se o nome de *soft skills*.

Como tal, é preciso perceber o nível de adaptabilidade do modelo de ensino do Ensino Superior face a todo este novo paradigma do mercado de trabalho.

A participação dos estudantes em Organizações Estudantis permite-os desenvolver, ainda mais, as *soft skills*, através do envolvimento em diferentes desafios e atividades e principalmente através do nível de compromisso dado a cada uma das respetivas responsabilidades.

Esta investigação, tem como objetivo recolher fundamentação teórica sobre os temas acima descritos e ao mesmo tempo, através de um inquérito *online*, obter um parecer pessoal de diversos indivíduos com experiência e participação ativa em organizações estudantis, durante o seu percurso académico.

Através deste estudo, torna-se evidente que a participação em Organizações Estudantis é cada vez mais importante e deve ser valorizada pelos empregadores, tendo em conta a capacidade que estas possuem em desenvolver, ainda mais do que o modelo de ensino do Ensino Superior, as competências exigidas pelo mercado de trabalho.

**Palavras-Chave:** Ensino Superior; Mercado de Trabalho; Competências Transversais; Organizações Estudantis.

### Classificação JET:

A21 - Universidade

JEL: L31 - Organizações sem fins lucrativos

JEL: I23 - Instituições de Ensino Superior

JEL: J40 - Mercado de Trabalho

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## **Chapter I- Introduction**

## **Contextualization**

Higher education for most students is a crucial stage in their professional lives. It represents at the outset the most uncertain and difficult decision-making for a young person about 18 years old.

There are many challenges that students face in their academic experience and for many, not fitting with the requirements of the job market, is what scares them the most. These requirements are changing and higher education institutions in Portugal must be able to keep up with these same changes.

Major changes in the economy, especially through globalization, have had a big impact on companies and their employees. Companies are increasingly obliged to adapt their entire structure to the demands of the labor market, in order to make their staff as complete as possible in terms of skills.

To keep up with these changes in the economy, companies must bet on assets with innovative, creative and adaptive skills to cope with the rate of competition in the market (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990).

The skills that are sought by the job market today are not the same as a few decades ago. In 2010 the World Economic Forum listed the 10 key competencies considered in business. Nowadays, the same source cites new 5 key competencies that the job market considers essential.

Higher education institutions must be able to follow all these trends and educate their students for all the changes they will face in their professional future. However, it can be seen that some institutions are aware of the demands of the labor market and foster, through various programs, the development of student skills in leadership (Wender, 2011).

It is evident that with all this, students feel more pressured during their academic life, because they no longer have only the concern of developing technical skills and they give more importance to what the market seeks: soft skills.

In Portugal, there are colleges that are increasingly aware of the market and are trying to get closer to adapting the offer of training to their students. José Varejão, Director of the Oporto Faculty of Economics (FEP), in an interview in October 2017 with the “Económico” newspaper, about new skills in the labor market, reports that his institution “maintains close collaboration with various

organizations and companies where one of the concerns is precisely listening to their needs and trying to adapt both the teaching and assessment modalities and even the curriculum offer to those needs”. It also states that the FEP develops initiatives and supports student organizations that foster the development of personal and social skills. In the same interview, Fernando Soares, Nova SBE's Director of Corporate & Alumni Relations, says that his school also promotes the creation of student clubs, today more than 30, in various areas that regularly organize events and workshops to develop this type of skills.

In the midst of the extracurricular activities organized by the colleges, there are student organizations that are solely and exclusively formed by students enrolled in some course. These organizations have as their main objective, to promote and enrich the academic path of the students of their college, through various activities. Involvement in student organizations is also a means of developing soft skills.

The motivation for this study comes from my involvement in a student association during my academic course where I became, during a mandate, the president of the ISCTE-IUL Student Association. For about 5 years, I was in contact with countless student organizations in Portugal, having the possibility to create a contact network with many participants in this type of organizations. It was possible to draw the conclusion that the vast majority of students decide to become involved in such organizations as soon as they enter in higher education to ensure the development of skills required by the labor market.

Although there is no large literature on the subject of student organizations, the purpose of this study is to understand how important they may be in developing competencies in the students who constitute them.

## General Objective

The main objective of this dissertation is to collect data that can contribute to the theme in question, taking into account two perspectives:

1. **Theoretical foundation of the theme:** Research information related to the development of competences through Student Organizations.
2. **Collection of information by people who are or have been part of student organizations:** Collect the opinion of each individual with experience in student organizations in order to understand the feelings of each one in the development of soft skills during their journey in this type of Organizations.

## Specific Objective and Research Questions

In order to meet the objective described above, the following 3 questions were developed to guide all research and ensure that no topic escapes:

### 1. Question 1: What are the new demands of the job market?

1.1. **Specific Objective:** Understand the evolution of skills required by the Labor Market and what led him to change them.

1.2. **References:** Oliveira et al. (2012); Carson (1962); Carrol (1979); Mansfield (2004); Cascão (2004); Charlot (2016); World Economic Forum (2016); Almeida (2014); Ana Maria Laranjeiro (2016); Ceitil (2007); Zarifian (2003); João Eduardo Araújo (2017); Inês Casaca (2017); Pfeffer (1998); Dunford, Snell & Wright (2001); Jain (2010).

### 2. Question 2: Is the higher education model adapted to the new demands of the labor market?

2.1. **Specific Objective:** Analyze the capacity of the higher education model to respond to the demands of the labor market.

2.2. **References:** Castells (2003); M.G. Alves and Pires (2009); Miranda (2007); Costa (2001); Mansfield (2004); Hirtt (2010); Garavan and MacGuire (2001); Cabral-Cardoso (2006); Humphreys (1997); Rae (1997); Patterson (2012).

### 3. Question 3: Are Student organizations important in developing the required skills?

- 3.1. **Specific Objective:** Collect literary and personal data on the importance of student organizations in developing the skills required by the labor market.
- 3.2. **References:** Ebede (2015); Wender (2011); Todd & Fakharzadeh (2010); COX ER et al. (1998); Holzweiss & Wickline (2007), Astin (1984), Hood (1984), Martin (2000); McCluskey – Titus (2003), Hall (2012), Flowers (2014); Kuk Banning (2010); Bryant (2007); Cheetham & Chivers (1998); Gassmna (2014); Dunzan and Kamives (2007).

## **Dissertation Structure**

In order to correspond to the purpose of the present study and its objectives, this dissertation was conducted through the following structure:

- Chapter I - Introduction: Contextualization of research by demonstrating the general and specific objectives, as well as the formalized questions according to the scope of the study.
- Chapter II - Literature Review: Demonstration of the collection of literary contents in the research scope, as well as critical analysis of them, in order to expose different scenarios and perspectives that support the research objectives of the present study. This chapter will make a strong contribution to the final part of the dissertation as it provides inputs to the final conclusions.
- Chapter III - Methodology: Demonstration of the strategy developed for research by identifying the methods and processes used. At the same time, the characterization of the sample defined for the study will be demonstrated, in order to make known the intervenients of the analysis.
- Chapter IV - Data Analysis: Demonstration of the results obtained and their analysis, using data structuring methods and tools, in order to obtain possible conclusions that contribute to the objective of the present study. At the same time, a comparison will be made, when necessary, of the results obtained by the questionnaire with the literature review.
- Chapter V - Conclusions: Demonstration of the conclusions obtained through the results extracted from chapter II and IV, answering in a structuring way to the initial questions raised. Description of the limitations found throughout the investigation, as well as possible recommendations for future research. Finally, an analysis will be made of the contribution that the conclusions can make to the sector in which the dissertation theme is inserted.

## **Chapter II- Literature Review**



## **The Evolution of the Labor Market**

The last three centuries have been marked by the industrial and technological revolutions that culminated in the emergence of new productive techniques. All this change has caused organizations to increase their production capacity in an accelerated manner (Oliveira et al, 2012). The respective management models were over time, adapting to the demands of the labor market, bringing significant effects to the society.

At a general level, society began to face the aggravation of problems such as the concentration of wealth, social inequality, unemployment and environmental damage (CARSON, 1962) and in the relations between companies and society. (CARROLL, 1979).

All these facts have been widely studied and analyzed in order to understand the best management model to be implemented, taking into account the behavior generated by the relations between society and the labor market (Oliveira et al, 2012).

Organizations and management practice have always been and will be influenced by prevailing political, economic, social and technology forces. Studying the evolution of management thinking is important as it provides context, allowing for a better understanding of the impact on society and organizations and guides strategic thinking.

Large companies aimed to achieve high levels of productivity, closely related to Taylorist approaches, easy-to-access, low-skilled workforce focused on their tasks without wasting time on any distractions. Their concerns today are looking for a skilled, flexible and easily adaptable workforce (Mansfield, 2004). Human resources are now the most important asset of organizations and they want their assets to be committed and interventionist as possible in their strategy (Cascão, 2004).

Globalization has become one of the major factors influencing the strategy of organizations. This effect has exponentially changed the labor market paradigm, increasing competitiveness among companies. It becomes necessary to produce even more attractive goods and services because of their quality and price, using efficient and expensive machines and processes. The risk follows the increase in investments, given that competitors may place the same or even better products on the market (Charlot, 2016).

Disruptive changes to business models will have a profound impact on the employment landscape over the coming years. Many of the major drivers of transformation currently affecting global industries are expected to have a significant impact on jobs, ranging from significant job creation to job displacement, and from heightened labour productivity to widening skills gaps. (World Economic Forum, 2016).

The concept of competence has gained greater influence in the organizational context, closely related to the increasing competitiveness in the global labor market and its consequent transformations in organizations. (Casção, 2004).

In the study by the World Economic Forum in 2016, on the future of the jobs it is possible to read that the technological, demographic and socioeconomic disruptions in business models will have a direct impact in employment landscape and skills require.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, employers were looking for physical and mental skills to perform tasks, while the effect of globalization and consequently technological developments changed the demands of the labor market, turning the focus to the search for high qualified individuals and with knowledge and skills to keep up with the pace of organizations.

Organizational human resources move from management based on body capabilities (dexterity, gesture ability, and speed of execution) to management looking for high-knowledge assets and creative intelligence (Almeida, 2014).

## **Soft Skills**

This point comes as a basic introduction to what will be discussed next. It is not intended to make an intensive study over the concept of competences, however, it is relevant to make a rationale in order to understand its evolution and in what ways it has been applied.

There are some studies on the concept of competence and Elliot and Dweck (2013) have defined as a condition or quality for effectiveness, ability, sufficiency or success. They also states that the manner in which competence is assessed influences its psychological significance and at the same time the effort that is put into any given situation.

*“Competence is applicable across a broad range of levels, from concrete action (e.g, putting a peg in a hole) to identifiable patterns of skill and ability (e.g, piano playing) to overarching characteristics (e.g, intelligence) to omnibus compilations (e.g., a life).”* (Elliot and Dweck, 2013, p. 6).

For Foss and Knudsen (2013), competence is understood as a capital of knowledge that enables an individual to perform his tasks, particularly in solving problems in different ways and in different contexts, always with the greatest possible effectiveness. It also states that competencies may be inherent to each individual, however they can be the property of organizations and their strategic management, making it difficult to imitate.

*“Competencies are the key assets of firms; they are tacit and social knowledge-capital that tells its holders how to go on with problem-solving.”* (Foss & Knudsen, 2013, p.10).

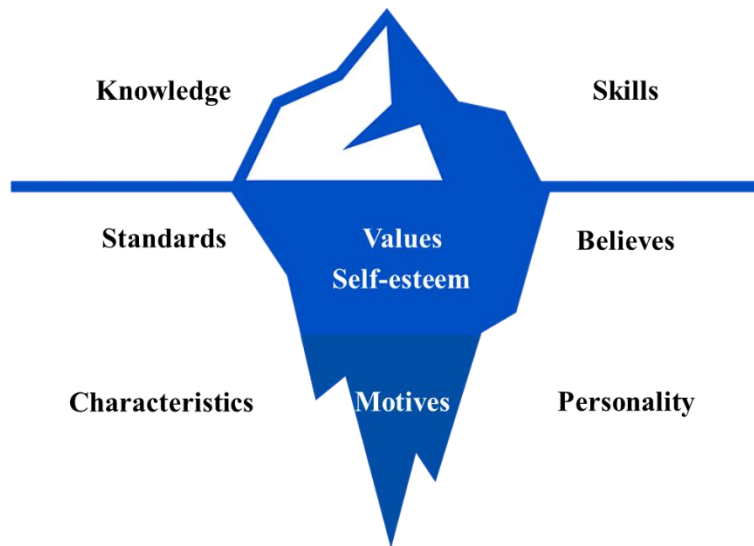
On the other hand, Spencer and Spencer (1933) define the concept of competence through two typologies:

1. Threshold skills- Skills with characteristics that are indispensable for the performance of minimum tasks at work;
2. Differentiating skills - Skills that lead to high level performance and confidence.

In an article by Vazirani (2010), McClelland's Iceberg theory of competences is mentioned, saying that a person's knowledge and skills represent the upper part of the water, while the underlying personal characteristics, traits and motives such as self-confidence, initiative, empathy and results orientation represent the part of the iceberg that is submerged.

Both Spencer and Spencer and Vazirani's theory seem to converge with respect to the differentiation of competences on two levels. Spencer and Spencer's threshold competences represent the level of competences above sea level, while differentiating competences represent the rest below sea level.

**Figure 1 - Mc Clelland's Iceberg Competences**



Skills that are "below the waterline" have, over the years, gained a more significant place on the qualities sought in the effectiveness of an individual working in the labor market (Vazirani, 2010).

A 2005 study by Hewitt Associates conducted leadership development among 373 US companies, 20 of which were rated as the "Top 20 Companies for Leaders" (Vazirani, 2010). These 20 respondents linked skills to project success and over 65% of companies surveyed replied that in the leadership assessment process the skill level is taken into account as well as to determine certain levels of income of their employees.

The same study also concluded that the importance given to competencies created recruitment processes in the most robust companies, which facilitates the placement of candidates in the appropriate opportunities, managing to capture talent for the teams.

For Le Boterf (1994), competences emerge as a responsible action recognized by third parties, that is, an action practiced by the environment that includes the domains of "know-know", "know-how to be" and "know-how to do". In this sense, he explains that skills can be valued in various ways, depending on the type of organization in which individuals are inserted and their positions at work.

## **The Skills Required by the Labor**

Ana Maria Laranjeiro (2016), in her thesis, mentions that since the 1970s, the debate on labor market skills has been on the table, starting in the United States, through France, the United Kingdom and gradually around the world, giving rise to various theories and approaches on the subject.

The accelerating pace of technological, demographic and socio-economic disruption is transforming industries and business models, changing the skills that employers need and shortening the shelf-life of employees' existing skill sets in the process. (World Economic Forum, 2016)

The concept of skilled labor emerges after World War II, with the increasing importance given to technical skills as a consequence of what Taylorism has driven (Ceitil, 2007). Workers are no longer an asset with fixed tasks and their criticality and ability to think outside the box is what makes an organization efficient and able to adapt to any change in the labor market.

Companies' human resources knowledge and skills are increasingly valued and identified as the key factors in achieving competitive advantage. Recruitment processes are no longer just about looking for human resources with technical skills, but also about looking for human resources that have high levels of knowledge and, above all, for effective ways to apply it in various working contexts. They become the asset that, besides being influenced by the system, is able to influence and participate in it (Zarifian, 2003).

A new society is emerging, characterized by high knowledge, flexibility and unpredictability that challenges people to quickly develop their problem-solving skills and adapt to any situation (Cascão, 2004).

This is why Mansfield (2003) defends the idea that in the development and operationalization of tasks, technical skills are of utmost importance. However, they become insufficient with the constant changes and demands of the labor market.

Technical requirements are no longer the key to the success of any task and individuals are increasingly challenged to develop skills that go beyond specific or technical ones. It is very

important that every worker becomes a fit asset to perform as many tasks as possible, even if they are outside their comfort zone.

In an interview with *Jornal Económico* in 2017, João Eduardo Araujo (Manager of RAY Human Capital) says that the increasing demands and competitiveness of the labor market have been fostering the bottleneck of the skills most valued by employees. It also points to adaptability in the face of ambiguity, the ability to influence others, and the flexibility to communicate to any stakeholder, such as key skills that are highly valued by today's employers. These make workers able to follow the strategic changes of organizations and to retain others in the ideas they develop.

In the same interview, Inês Casaca (Senior Manager POR of Randstad Portugal) talks about the fact that the required technical skills continue to play an important role in specific sectors of activity, however, he says that they will quickly become transversal skills that allow them to follow labor market trends. Finally, it leaves a suggestion to those preparing to enter the job market, saying that the profiles to be recruited will be increasingly robust and that the challenge of each one is to gather all the traits that will be required across the board.

Overall, social skills—such as persuasion, emotional intelligence and teaching others—will be in higher demand across industries than narrow technical skills, such as programming or equipment operation and control (World Economic Forum, 2016).

Business success in the context of an increasingly competitive market is largely dependent on human resources and their ability to innovate and adapt. (Pfeffer, 1998). Dunford, Snell & Wright (2001) show that no matter how much a company holds the most valuable human asset, if it is not managed and strategically developed, it can hardly achieve competitive advantage.

One of the major problems evidenced by Jain (2010) in the view of employability is the distinction made between tasks, firm entanglements and skill occupations. Distinguishes skill in various contexts: Task skill; Skill in a business context; skill at the level of an occupation.

“Skill at a task is the ability to carry out that particular task. Skill in the context of a firm is the ability to do a particular job as specified by the employer or by a contract to carry out a commission. Skill at the level of an occupation, on the other hand, concerns that ability or potential ability to fulfill all the tasks associated with or negotiated for an occupation.” (Jain, V., 2010, p.53).

In the same study, Jain refers to the 2002 Report, *Employability Skills for the Future*, published by the Australian Business Council and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which identifies the company's eight core human capital skills:

1. Communication skills, which contribute to productive and harmonious relationships between employees and customers;
2. Teamwork skills, which contribute to relationships and productive work outcomes;
3. Problem solving skills that contribute to productive results;
4. Initiative and company skills, which contribute to innovative results;
5. Planning and organizational skills, which contribute to long and short term strategic planning;
6. Self-management skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth;
7. Learning skills that contribute to continuous improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and results.
8. Technological skills, which contribute to the effective of tasks execution.

The skills of a newly graduated student are no longer the same as those previously sought. In 2010 the World Economic Forum listed the 10 key competencies considered in business: Being able to solve complex problems, have critical thinking, being creative, know how to manage, coordinate with others, being able to make decisions, being customer/service oriented, being endowed with emotional intelligence, good negotiator and have cognitive flexibility.

Nowadays, the same source cites new 5 key competencies that the job market considers essential: Creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, time management. It also foresees changes not only in the industries that are growing and hiring because of this disruption, but in other sectors, reinforcing the urgency to redefine the skill set needed for future employees. By 2020, it is estimated that over a third of core skills will have changed. These skills are not even taught in schools today, which makes the topic a global priority.

It is evident that with all this, students feel more pressured during their academic life, because they no longer have only the concern of developing technical skills and they give more importance to what the market seeks: transversal skills.

At the end all of this effect makes evident the need for higher education to built tools appropriate to the constantly changing labor market (Charlot, 2016).

## **The Development of Soft Skills in Higher Education**

The world has rapidly evolved from an industrial society to a new knowledge-based society, where organizations require not only highly trained specialists, but professionals with flexible skills and competences. These skills represent the permanent ability to adapt to fast changing rates and the ability to cope with unpredictability in an environment characterized by economic instability (Castells, 2003).

It is in this context that arises the importance of higher education institutions to develop and enable their resources for the proper training of their students. Today they represent one of the main drivers of knowledge and learning, as they play a fundamental role in research, education and training, in the personal development of citizens and in boosting the competitiveness of the economy, employment and social cohesion (Pires, 2010).

Alves and Pires (2009) state that education is expected to promote equal opportunities, economic growth, human development, progress, citizenship, employability, quality of life, etc.

The Bologna process has emerged as a major engine for the development of higher education in the European Area. Higher Education Institutions have been forced to construct a formative provision pattern that can meet the needs required by the effect of globalization. (M. G. Alves and Pires, 2009)

All of this has caused an exponentially increase of students enrolled in higher education in the major European and North American countries (M. G. Alves and Pires, 2009). In Portugal, the growth in the number of students enrolled in higher education expanded further in the 1980s, the phenomenon being explained by the high expectations of social mobility and the need to develop and improve the qualifications of the population (M. G. Alves, 2009).



The educational system of Higher Education has, over many years, gained a fundamental characteristic of adaptation, being sometimes conquered in a long way in view of the development of society (Miranda, 2007). With each passing generation, teaching models are expected to be able to respond to social needs and to be able to act and not only react to the constant trends and challenges of society in general.

The evolution from an industrial society to an information-based society highlights the shift from focus on the development of physical capital and the production force to focus on the development of human and intellectual capital, as well as on its speed and adaptability (Miranda, 2007).

Organizations are increasingly operating on the basis of information flows and the constant creation and development of knowledge, making higher education and its institutions confronted with the need to adapt their educational offer, which is more focused on developing numerous cross-cutting skills such as flexibility and capacity for reflection and analysis.

The University has to meet, in a consistent way, not only the students in normal school time, but also the new emerging publics in an effort to adapt the increasingly flexible and distributed educational and training offerings, as well as the methodologies scientific and pedagogical aspects to be adopted (Costa, 2001).

New labor market trends have to be seen as key points in the agendas of higher education institutions. With the evolution of a global economy and a society increasingly characterized by knowledge, labor market demands are also accompanying this evolution (Mansfield, 2004). All of this has brought a number of challenges for education and training systems, which increasingly require greater adaptability to different situations, both in the labor market and in society at large (Hirtt, 2010).

The curriculum offer of higher education institutions therefore needs to be more focused on cross-cutting skills, in order to further empower and facilitate their students in the transition to the labor market. Garavan and MacGuire (2001) reinforce this need for the education system to adapt its teaching tools, saying that higher education should not only focus on theoretical knowledge but also on the preparation of more developed individuals in transversal competences, allowing them to communicate, interact and cooperate more effectively with society and the labor market.

In Portugal, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, made an assessment to the two years of the publication of Decree-Law No. 74/2006, of 24 March, on the Bologna process, saying that, *“Há igualmente que atingir uma das outras metas do Processo de Bolonha, a da transição de um sistema de ensino baseado na transmissão de conhecimentos para um sistema baseado no desenvolvimento das competências dos estudantes, em que as componentes de trabalho experimental ou de projecto, entre outras, e a aquisição de competências transversais devem desempenhar um papel decisivo.”*

To do this, universities should include in their curricular units, teaching practices that promote the development of transversal competences, by investing in fieldwork, projects or internships, so that the student can, early on, put into practice all lessons and begin to get used to the demands of the labor market (Cabral-Cardoso et al., 2006).

In addition to the above, it is equally important that the effort to adapt teaching practices is made by teachers. They should look for the most appropriate and effective teaching practices that enable the student to have a more collaborative and proactive academic experience. Group work is perhaps the quickest and easiest tool to apply in these learning models, as students have the ability to cope and work in similar situations that they will encounter in the job market. In an organization, individuals spend most of their time in collaboration with their co-workers and it is therefore important that higher education institutions have the capacity to promote this entire collaborative environment. Students must have the opportunity to work in groups in order to practice the behavioral and managerial processes displayed, such as performing tasks; roles and status of members; Group cohesion; standards; conflict resolution; negotiation; teamwork and communication (Humphreys et al., 1997).

Similarly, Rae (1997) adds that “while students still need to develop their business skills and understanding, more attention needs to be paid to the development of their entrepreneurial skills, attributes and behaviors, introducing modules and courses specifically designed to develop the awareness and characteristics of the entrepreneur”.

The development of transversal competences in higher education should not only happen through the improvement of educational models. Youth organizations are the main incubators of competences in higher education. (Patterson, 2012)

In the next chapter, we intend to study the importance and relevance of youth organizations in the development of transversal competences.

A study was conducted by Califórnia (2013) to evaluate the development of transversal competences in higher education. To this end, the author conducted a survey for a population of her educational institution, where it is possible to verify the perception of the graduates interviewed, about which transversal skills they consider the most developed by the higher education model. Of the 27 crosscutting competencies proposed to respondents, all were rated above average; however, the most prominent were “teamwork”, “planning and organization” and “interpersonal relationships”. In contrast, the lowest-ranking crosscutting competencies were “negotiation”, “leadership” and “conflict management” competencies. It is evident, and the author herself points out, that less developed skills are those that are most susceptible to development in a professional context.

## **Students Organizations**

Student organizations are understood as a group of students enrolled in higher education who come together with the goal of developing activities that enrich the academic experience of the college in which they operate. They can be understood as student associations, student volunteer organization, junior companies, etc. (Ebede, 2015). They generally represent a variety of student motivations, with the aim of stimulating interest in existing course themes through recreational, educational, cultural, sporting, entrepreneurial activities etc. (Wender, 2011).

When well-managed, they are considered a great driver for development of student’s academic experience. In the academic path, students' involvement in this type of organization allows them to face very enriching challenges that will be useful in their future professional lives (Todd & Fakharzadeh, 2010).

Nowadays, it is possible to verify that the existence of one student’s organization in education establishment is essential to promote a better academic life for the students. They are voluntary out-of-class activities that play an integral role in the education process (Cox ER et al, 1998). In addition, they have an objective of providing opportunity for students to discuss and share

information related to a specific academic discipline or interest (Holzweiss & Wickline, 2007). According the Portuguese law number 23/2006, of June 23, which establish the legal regime of young associations, “students unions are the ones that represent the students of their establishment of primary, secondary, higher or vocational education”.

Astin (1984), a pioneer in student involvement research, defines student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience”. It is evident that this energy deposited in youth organizations will have an effect on the personal and professional growth of the student involved.

## **Participation in Student Organizations**

The importance of student organizations in academia is not only valued for the students who integrate them, but also for the group of students who participate in the activities that are organized by such organizations.

It has been reported by some authors that participation in any activities that complement classroom training is certainly associated with the development of other skills, knowledge and interactions that are highly valued by the labor market. (Hood, 1984; Martin, 2000).

There are some literature that studies the development of a student's skills through involvement in co-curricular activities during his academic career.

1. McCluskey-Titus (2003), refers that “participation in student organizations and clubs is a useful tool for personal development in students”, giving them the opportunity to develop non-classroom skills such as time management, task management, planning, critical thinking and communication.
2. Hall (2012), sees student organizations as a driver to stimulate learning experience beyond the classroom curriculum, saying that the students can develop relationships with other individuals with similar professional interests and improve planning, critical thinking, organization and decision making skills, faster than the other students without any participation in such organizations.

3. Flowers (2014), sees involvement in student organizations as an important element in their socialization and academic determination, providing students with essential resources to excel in academic settings. (Flowers, 2004).
4. Kuk & Banning (2010), highlight the importance of these types of organizations as social opportunities for students to engage in campus life at colleges or universities.
5. Bryant (2007), sees as an important opportunity for interaction between students in order to build relationships and shape their social relationship skills in different cultures and habits.

Through different points of view by various authors on this subject, it allows us to realize that the importance of student organizations are a means of development of two categories of transversal competences:

**Personal and Behavioral Skills** - Skills related to the ability to adapt behaviors in various situations (Cheetham & Chivers 1998). Flowers, Kuk & Banning and Bryant's views seem to be in line with this category of competencies, forcing the importance of student organizations as the drivers of personal competency development and integration.

**Functional and Operational Skills** - Ability to perform a set of tasks effectively to achieve desired results (Cheetham & Chivers 1998). Task management, planning, critical thinking, communication, decision making, and organization are some of the competencies that McCluskey-Titus and Hall mentioned, and at the same time fall into this category because they are directly related to how tasks are effectively performed in a timely manner.

### **Student organizations in the eyes of Cyrus Fakharzadeh and Mark Todd**

As a reinforcement of the existing literature on the subject, Cyrus Fakharzadeh and Mark Todd in 2010 conducted a guide for the management of student organizations, with the aim of supporting the network of students who are part of these organizations in their decision-making and especially in addressing the major challenges that they face. Regarding the development of transversal skills that higher education models cannot answer, Cyrus Fakharzadeh and Mark Todd have outlined the advantages of active participation in student organizations.

For them, being part of a student organization is the ideal setting for the faster growth and development of extremely important skills that will be useful for a more professional future. As a result, they have captured the main advantages of engaging in this type of organizations:

**Leadership Training:** Opportunity to develop leadership skills in a scenario where learning is possible without jeopardizing the risk of losing work and income.

**Improving Knowledge:** Organizations are a great knowledge development tool through on-job training, as it is a place where you can put into practice the knowledge acquired in the courses and also get new knowledge in areas outside the comfort zone.

**Improving Communication Skills:** Communication skills will be easily developed, taking into account that through team meetings, organized events, lectures and many other projects, students are required to make various types of presentations, from internal to public presentations. Written communication is also one of the most developed tools, through exchanging emails between partners, clients or even writing documents. All of this represents an advantage over other students, as it is a type of skill that is sought by recruiters, given that both verbal and written communication are essential for the performance of any job.

**Networking:** By engaging in such organizations, networking is one of the great advantages given the relationships that are built with other students, partners, teachers, college administrators, vendors and more. All networking acquired may result in recommendations or referrals to employers.

Despite the advantages presented above, Cyrus Fakharzadeh and Mark Todd, point out that at the same time, there are some challenges students have to face in engaging in such organizations:

**Less Free Time:** Involvement in student organizations means less free time. Socializing with friends and spending time for more personal things is difficult to reconcile, given the high number of meetings, training, events, phone calls that take up most of these students' time. However, time management and multitasking skills will be highly developed and useful skills for each student's professional future. When entering the labor market, the ability to manage time will be a much sought after feature, as it is the reality of most occupations.

**Excess Work:** Dealing with the high number of tasks and responsibilities, so much of the time things can go wrong, plans can change, and money for projects may be insufficient. However, by engaging in all of these tasks, resilience, time and task management skills and problem solving are easily developed skills. Additionally, the tasks they face in a student organization will take time away from their dedication to their studies, each having a responsibility to be able to reconcile everything at the same time and to manage their tasks even better. In addition, they develop ability to handle with complicated and boring situations, leading to the development of the ability to work under pressure. In addition, each person's responsibilities lead to cooperation with hard-working people who can lead to personal disengagement. However, overcoming these challenges will make the student more capable of performing any task in the job market.

According to Gassman (2014) Student Organizations greatly promote for the development of capabilities and soft skills which facilitates the entry of students into the job market.

Dungan and Komives (2007) argue that the participation in such organizations is always significant, regardless of the degree of student involvement, as they enable students to develop their spirit of collaboration, determination and citizenship.

Through such organizations, students participate in activities that enable them to develop their leadership spirit and other skills that enhance their curriculum and which help them to find their vocation. It follows that Student Organizations provide great tools for improving students' knowledge and boosting their entry into the job market. (Hall, 2012).

## **Chapter III- Methodology**



## **Objectives and Analysis Models**

As noted in the previous chapter, higher education has not been able to respond to current labor market demands. More and more companies are looking for young graduates with cognitive adaptability to any circumstance, who are proactive in solving complex problems and especially able to perform tasks that are totally different from each other. This study focuses on the capacity and importance that student organizations have had over the last few years in developing soft skills that are valued and required by companies.

As such, this research has a very specific target and is only intended for individuals who are or have been involved in Student Organizations during their academic career. The reason for seeking only from the point of view of individuals with these characteristics was due to the fact that they are the best target that can evaluate the development of transversal competences while participating in Student Organizations. In addition, it was crucial for the analysis to gather students' opinion on the ability of the higher education model to respond to the demands of the labor market over the past few years, developing not only technical but also transversal skills.

The starting point of this analysis was to identify, through literature review, which social skills are most sought after by the labor market. Thus, the following soft skills have emerged from a study by the World Economic Forum that will serve as the basis for research.

- 1) Cognitive Flexibility
- 2) Communication
- 3) Complex Problem Solving
- 4) Coordinating with others
- 5) Creativity
- 6) Critical Thinking
- 7) Emotional Intelligence
- 8) Judgment and Decision Making
- 9) Negotiation
- 10) People Management
- 11) Stress and Conflict Management
- 12) Time Management

Then, it was intended to analyze the perception of the individuals who are or were involved in Student Organizations, regarding the following points:

1. Understand if during the academic course the teaching model of Higher Education is sufficient for the development of soft skills required over the last years by the labor market;
2. Realize if during involvement in student organizations, the participant felt or not, that soft skills were faster and more strongly developed than by the Higher Education Teaching model.

## **Methodology**

This research was carried out in two stages, the first stage related to the search for information worked by different authors on the same theme, seeking to reinforce the understanding of the same and identifying possible opportunities for study improvement. The second step was to investigate the understanding of the theme by individuals who are or were closer to the reality studied.

In order to carry out the second part of the research an online survey was conducted. The design and implementation of a survey is a process whose objective is the collection of valid and reliable thematic information, obtained from the individual answers given to a set of questions by a representative group of respondents, around which conclusions can be drawn to be generalized to the universe of the study population (Thayer-Hart et al., 2010).

The questionnaire was made available through the Google Forms tool, through student groups from various student organizations in Portugal, through email, private messaging and word of mouth. The data treatment was performed through the construction of pivot tables in order to provide the desired correlations and the appropriate graphs for the analysis.

The questionnaire was made available within 14 days and was launched on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and taken off the online platform on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019, as it has reached the desired number of responses - around 200.

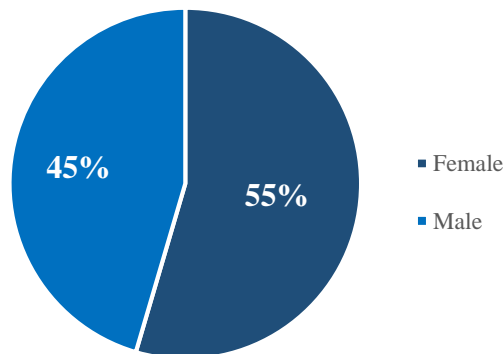
Regarding the structure of the questionnaire, it was divided into two parts, the first part concerning the identification of the characteristics of the respondents, and 9 questions were asked, and the second concerning questions about the Higher Education Model and Students Organizations, with 6 questions.

## Characterization of respondents

In order to provide an easier interpretation of the results, a characterization of respondents based on different variables, is presented below.

A total of 198 (n = 198) individuals were surveyed, and all of them are or were part of a student organization, as the survey was exclusively targeted for this type of individuals.

**Figure 2 - Gender Distribution**



As shown in Figure 2, 55% of the individuals surveyed are female and 45% are male. Regarding age, from the table below, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents are aged between 18-24 years old, and only 13% are between 25 and 30 years old.

**Table 1 - Age Group Distribution**

<b>Age</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
18 – 24	173	87%
25 - 30	25	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100%</b>

Regarding the nationalities of the respondents, the results were very homogeneous, as 192 of the respondents have Portuguese as their nationality and only 6 respondents represent other nationalities. By identifying the educational institutions of each respondent, it was possible to draw conclusions about the region where they study, as shown in the table below. This allows us to add value to the study since we have the perspective of different student organizations across different regions.

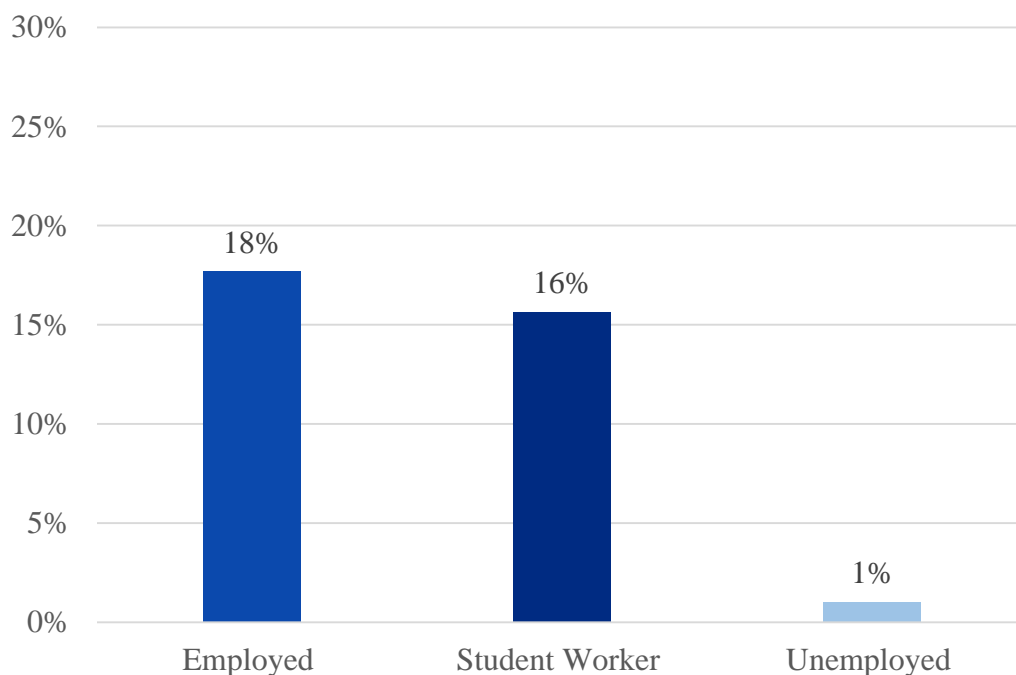
**Table 2 - Distribution by Region and Nationality**

<b>Region</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>% Global</b>
<b>Lisboa</b>	ISCTE-IUL	121	61,1%	<b>76,3%</b>
	FMUL	8	4,0%	
	FCT NOVA	4	2,0%	
	Católica Lisbon	3	1,5%	
	FFUL	3	1,5%	
	ESEL	3	1,5%	
	FAUL	2	1,0%	
	IGOT-UL	1	0,5%	
	ISEG	1	0,5%	
	IST	3	1,5%	
	NOVA IMS	1	0,5%	
UCP-CRP	1	0,5%		
<b>Porto</b>	FEUP	14	7,1%	<b>10,6%</b>
	UCP	3	1,5%	
	FBAUP	2	1,0%	
	ESEP	1	0,5%	
	FMUP	1	0,5%	
<b>Coimbra</b>	FCTUC	7	3,5%	<b>6,6%</b>
	UC-FCTUC	4	2,0%	
	CBS   ISCAC	1	0,5%	
	DEMUC	1	0,5%	
<b>Algarve</b>	ESGHT	6	3,0%	<b>3,5%</b>
	UALG	1	0,5%	
<b>Itália</b>	LICEO XXV APRILE PONTEDERA	1	0,5%	<b>1,5%</b>
	Politecnico di Torino	1	0,5%	
	University of Padua	1	0,5%	
<b>França</b>	ISIT	1	0,5%	<b>1,0%</b>
	TOULOUSE BUSINESS SCHOOL	1	0,5%	
<b>Alemanha</b>	JGU MAINZ	1	0,5%	<b>0,5%</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>198</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

From the table it's possible to concluded that the educational institutions most represented by the respondents were ISCTE-IUL (61.1%), FMUL (8%) and FCT NOVA (4%), from region of Lisbon; FEUP (14%) from Region of Porto, FCTUC (3.5%) from Region of Coimbra and ESGHT (3%) from the Region of Algarve.

Regarding the state of employment of respondents, from Figure 3 it is possible to conclude that over half of the respondents are students (66%), about 16% are student workers, 18% are already in the labor market and only a small percentage are currently unemployed (1%).

**Figure 3 - Occupational Status**



Regarding the educational level of respondents, the bachelor degree is the one that clearly stand out since there is 62% of the respondents with this level. After that, follows the Master Degree level with 32% of respondents. The remaining respondents, 5% are postgraduate and 1% have the 12th grade.

Through the survey, we can conclude which type of student organizations are represented in the study. Thus, according to the table below, 146 respondents indicate that they are or have been in a

Student Union. On the other hand, is possible to observe that Student Volunteer Organizations are under represented, with only 37 respondents.

**Table 3 - Type of Student Organization Status**

<b>Students Organization</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Junior Enterprise	41	18%
Student Union	146	65%
Student Volunteer Organization	37	17%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100%</b>

Analyzing the time of participation of each respondent in the student organizations, it can be concluded from Table 4, that 42% answered between the period of 1 and 2 years, 48% over 2 years and only 10% less than one year.

**Table 4 - Distribution of Participation Time**

<b>Duration</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Between 1 and 2 years	83	42%
Less than 1 year	19	10%
More than 2 years	96	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100%</b>

In order to understand the value of the opinion given by each respondent, they were asked about their level of responsibility in the Student Organizations, taking into account that the longer the involvement, the better the perception of soft skill development. Therefore, through Figure 5 it is possible to verify that the “High Level Responsibility” has a weight of 36% of the answers, “Many” has 33%, “Some” has 27% and “Few” has 3%.

**Table 5 - Distribution by Responsibility Level**

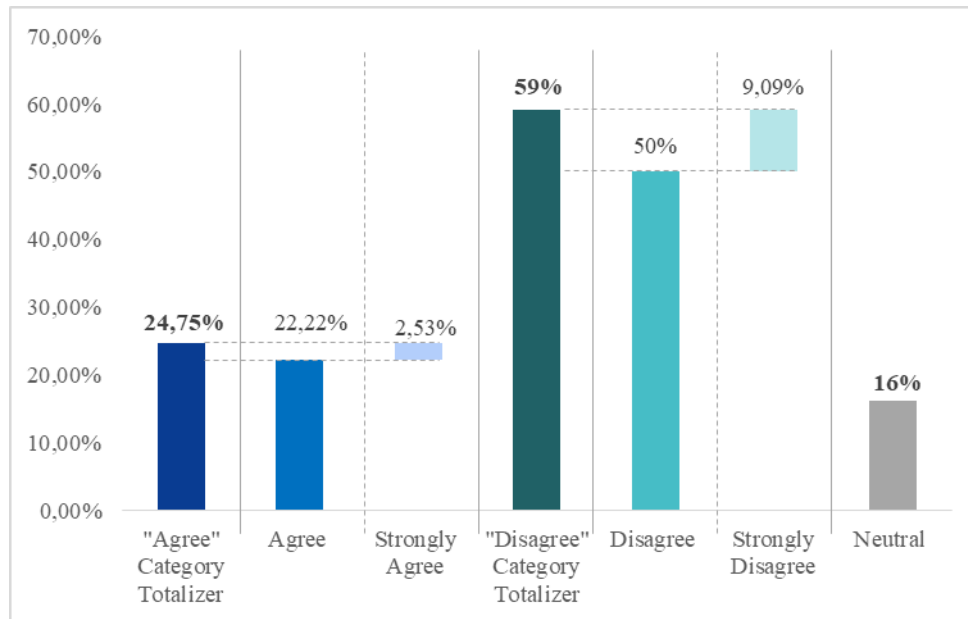
<b>Responsibility Level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Few	6	3%
High Level Responsibility	72	36%
Many	66	33%
Some	54	27%
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **Chapter IV- Results Analysis**

## Skills Development Analysis by the Higher Education Teaching Model

Firstly, the aim was to understand what is the contribution of development of soft skills by the current model of the Higher Education, taking into account the requirements of the labor market, studied in previous points. Thus, it is going to start by analyzing the level of agreement of respondents, taking into account the following statement: “The Higher Education model is adequate to the requirements of the labor market”. As can be seen from the chart below, about 60% of respondents disagree with the statement, 50% totally disagree and 9,09% only disagree. It can also be seen that around 16% of respondents abstain and the remaining 25% agree with the statement.

**Figure 4 - How do you rate the following statement: “Higher education teaching models are adequate to the demands of the labor market?”**



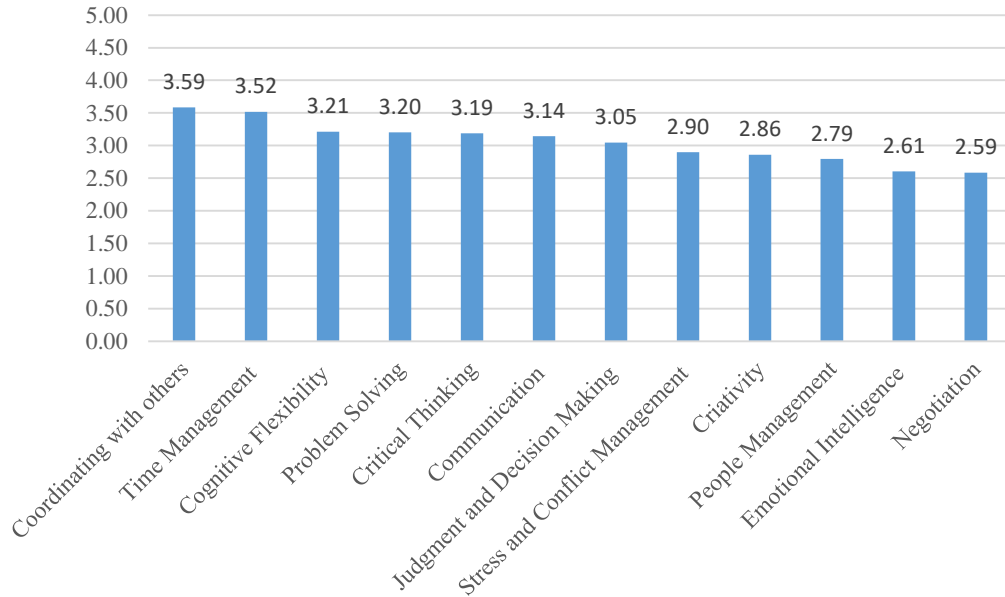
To complement this analysis, it was intended to understand how much the higher education teaching model has contributed to the development of the soft skills raised in the present study.

Thus, the respondents were asked about the level of contribution, by assigning a score of 1 to 5, where 1 is "nothing" and 5 "extremely". The results were submitted in a bar graph, in order to



obtain, on average, the perspective on the level of contribution that the higher education model has to the development of each soft skill.

**Figure 5 -Contribution of Higher Education teaching model to the development of Soft Skills**



From the graph above it can be concluded that each of the soft skills was rated above average (greater than 2.5), having been rated between 2.51 and 3.59.

The skills that stood out with the highest level of contribution were “Coordinating with others”, “Time Management” and “Cognitive Flexibility” with 3.59, 3.52 and 3.21, respectively. In contrast, it is possible to conclude that the competences that stand out, as the least developed by the higher education model, are the “People Management”, “Negotiation” and “Emotional Intelligence” competences with 2.70, 2.59 and 2.61, respectively.

Interestingly, the skills that respondents consider the least developed by the higher education model are in line with the study mentioned in the California literature review (2013). These are skills that are more subject to development through professional contexts than the classroom itself. The skills that respondents consider the most developed are, of course, those that are most related

to an educational environment: “Coordinating with others” is related to the group work required by teachers, which in turn leads to a more rigid “Time Management”.

Taking into account the assessment given to the development of each soft skills can be concluded that respondents rate the higher education model on average at 3.05 (see Annex 2, Table 7).

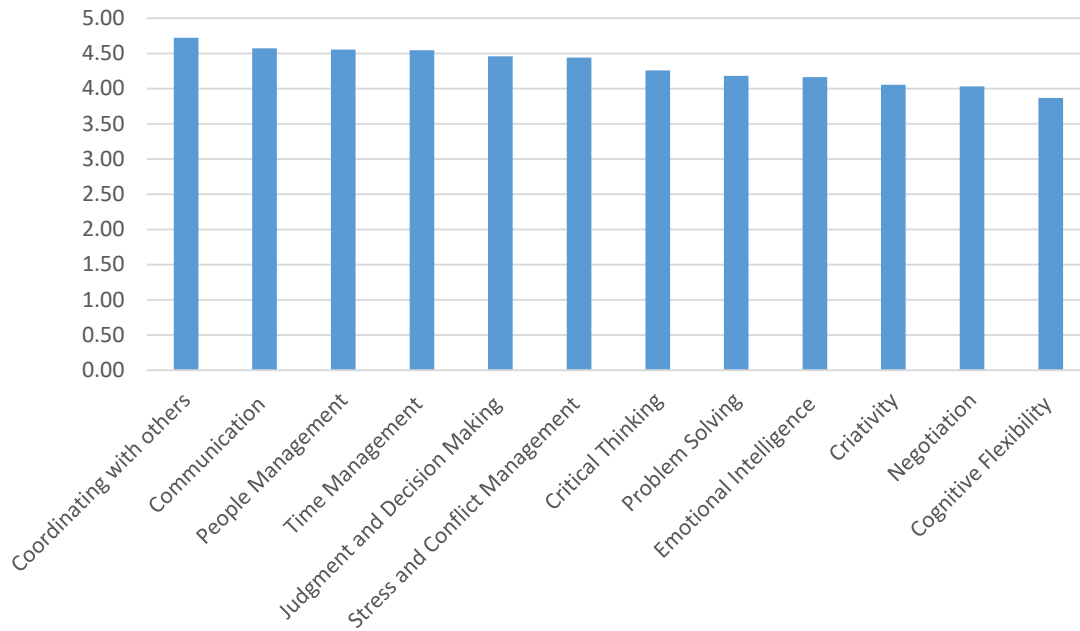
### **Analysis of soft skill Development by student organizations**

In a second analysis, it was intended to understand, through the respondents, how the involvement in Student Organizations is evaluated, taking into account the development of soft skills. In this sense, a relationship will be made between the competences raised by the present study, with the participation of each respondent in a student organization, through a statistical analysis that relates the different indicators. Overall, the results obtained hope to be able to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of development of the skills under study, taking into account the participation of respondents in Student Organizations?
2. Which activities contribute most to the development of the same skills?
3. What is the respondent's feeling of correspondence with labor market requirements regarding participation in Student Organizations?

To answer the first question, it was asked to the respondents to assign a score from 1 to 5, with 1 representing “nothing ”and the 5“ Extremely ”, in order to understand the level of contribution made by student organizations to the development of soft skills. The obtained results were submitted in a bar graph (Figure 6), in order to obtain, on average, the perspective on the level of contribution of the Student Organizations, in the development of soft skills on students, who participate in them.

**Figure 6 - Contribution of Participation in Students Organization for the development of Soft Skills**



From the graph above it can be seen that the Student Organizations have a high contribution to the development of each of the competences under analysis. The most developed competencies are “Coordinating with others”, “Communication” and “People Management” with 4.72, 4.57 and 4.56, respectively. It is also possible to realize that each of the soft skills was rated above average (greater than 2.5), having been rated between 3.87 and 4.72.

Since the structure of a student organization is similar to a business organization, it is evident that the most developed skills are those which in professional environments are easier to improve. As it can be seen teamwork, communication and people management are, of course, associated with work environment related skills. At the same time, it is possible to conclude that through student organization environments, all competencies are quite developed, taking into account the results, since all of them were rated above 3.80, the equivalent of “Very Much” developed.

Given the assessment given to the development of each of the soft skills, it can be concluded that respondents rate the Student Organizations on average at 4.32. (see Annex 2, Table 9).

As Hood (1984) and Martin (2000) argue, participation in any activities that complement classroom training is certainly associated with the development of other skills, knowledge and interactions that are highly valued by the labor market. As such, it is important to understand which activities have contributed most to the development of the competencies under analysis.

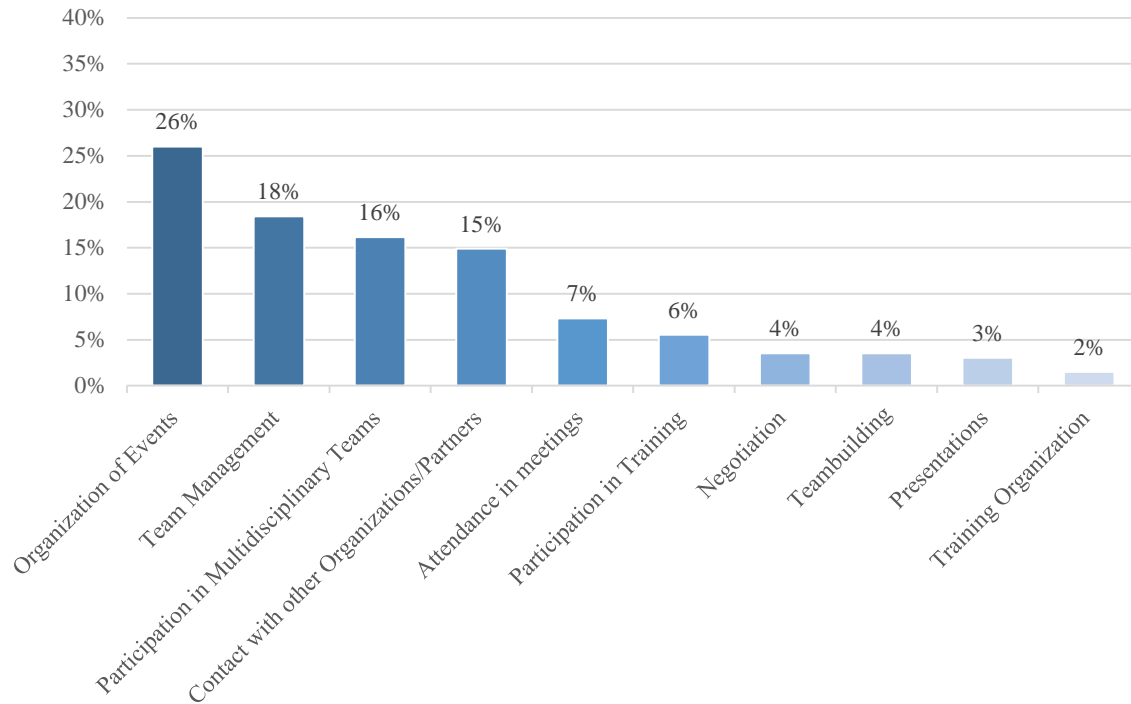
Based on the literature review, the core activities of any organization were surveyed to question respondents as to which ones contributed most effectively to the development of soft skills. The activities in question are the following:

- Attendance in meetings
- Organization of Events
- Participation in Training
- Training Organization
- Contact with other Organizations/Partners
- Teambuilding
- Presentations
- Team Management
- Negotiation
- Participation in Multidisciplinary Teams

As such, in the survey it is required to the respondents to choose from the ten activities, two of which they feel that have been the activities that contributed most to the development of the soft skills under analysis.

Through the graph below it is possible to obtain the desired results, concluding that the activities that most contributed to the development of soft skills are the activities related to Event Organization, Team Management and Participation in Multidisciplinary Teams, with a representation of 26%. (103 votes), 18% (73 votes) and 16% (64 votes), respectively.

**Figure 7 - Type of activities that influences soft skills development**



It is also important to highlight that the least voted activities were the “Training Organization”, “Presentations” and “Teambuilding” activities, with 2% (6 votes), 3% (12 votes) and 4% (14 votes) votes, respectively.

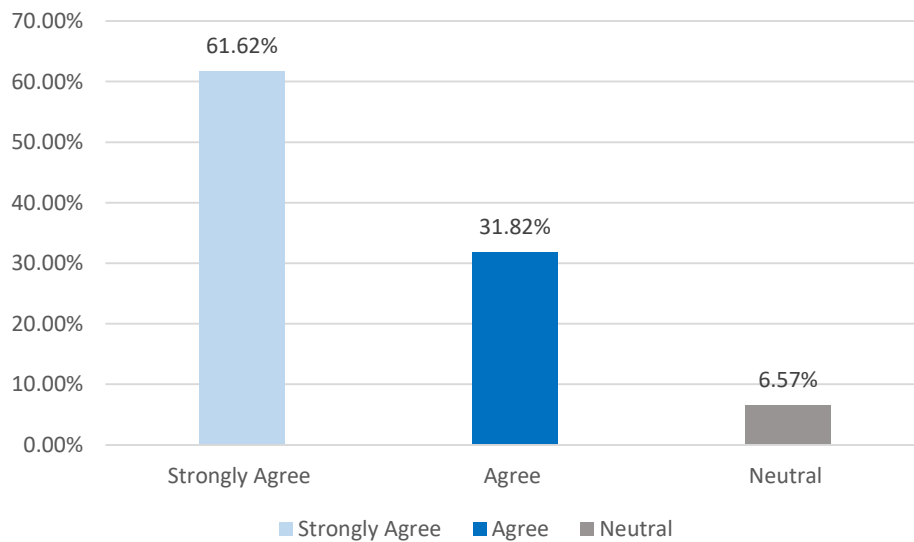
From these results it can be concluded that the activities of Event Organization, Team Management and Participation in Multidisciplinary Teams contribute the most to the development of the soft skills “Coordinating with others”, “Communication” and “People Management”, taking into account these are what respondents consider to be the most developed by participating in student organizations.

At the same time it is possible to draw the conclusion that the more involvement in professional environments in the academic path the more developed are the transversal competences. Event organization (also considered as project organization), People Management, Participation in

multidisciplinary teams and contact with other organizations/partners are clearly functions that business organizations increasingly expect their recent graduates to perform.

To finalize the analysis of the importance of student organizations, the respondents' perception of the following statement was questioned: "My participation in student organization (s) has facilitated my adaptation to the skills required by the labor market." Through this analysis, it is intended to understand, if with the involvement in student organizations, the respondents feel more apt to correspond with the demands of the labor market. Thus, the circular chart below was constructed to demonstrate the results obtained.

**Figure 8 - What is your degree of agreement with the following statement: "My participation in student organization(s) has facilitated my adaptation to the skills required by the labor market."**



From the graph in Figure 8, it can be concluded that about 60% of respondents consider that their participation in Student Organizations contributes greatly to meeting the demands of the labor market. From another perspective it can be concluded that none of the respondents considers that there was no influence on the part of the student organizations in matching labor market demands.

From the results obtained in the analyzes shown above, it is generally concluded that respondents consider that the skills of "Coordinating with others", "Communication" and "People

Management” are/were the most developed skills during participation in Student Organizations, which are largely developed through Event Organization, Team Management and Participation in Multidisciplinary Teams activities. At the same time, 90% feel that all this involvement has contributed greatly to meeting current labor market demands.

## **Student Organizations Vs Higher Education Teaching Model**

Given the results of the analyzes shown above, it is important to carry out an analysis that correlates them to further support the study.

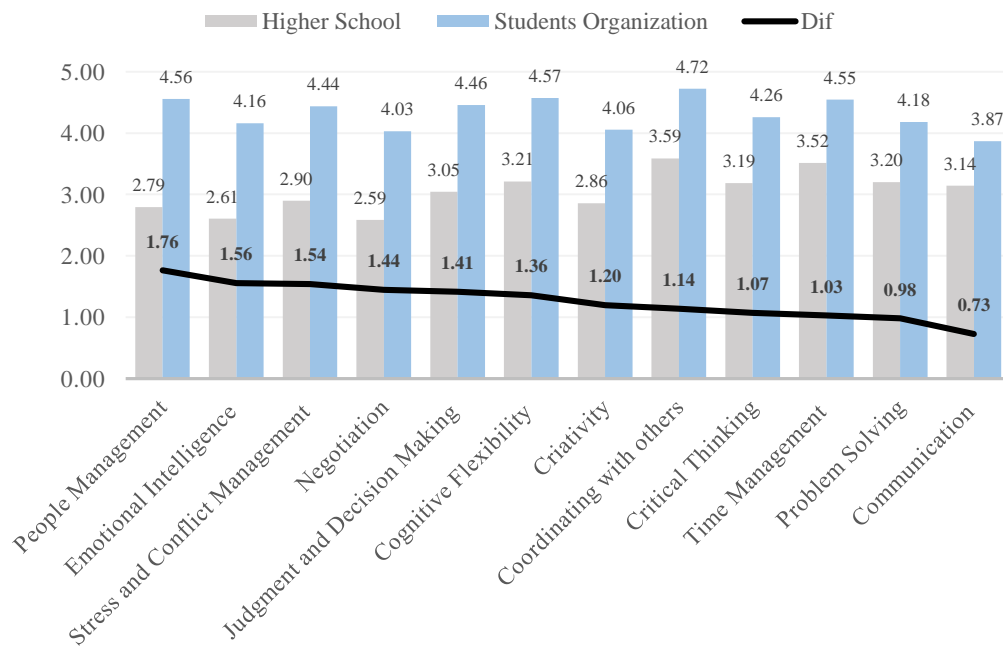
In this part, the correlations between the perception of respondents regarding the contribution of the higher education teaching model and the contribution of Student Organizations in the development of Soft Skills required by the Labor Market will be analyzed.

As such, the results were obtained by two analyzes:

1. Contribution Evaluation of the Higher Education vs Student Organization Model
2. Correlation of the level of agreement of the adequacy of the teaching model of Higher Education with the evaluation given to the Student Organizations contribution to the development of Soft Skills.
3. Contribution of the Higher Education Teaching Model vs Contribution of Participation Student Organizations in the development of soft skills

Through the results obtained in the analyzes performed above, it was possible to construct the graph of figure 9, in order to compare the results obtained between the higher education teaching model and the student organizations, regarding the contribution made in the development of competences.

**Figure 9 - Contribution of Higher Education teaching model vs Participation in Students Organizations for the development of soft skills**



Analyzing the graph above, it can be concluded that the level of contribution felt by the Student Organizations regarding the development of soft skills is higher in all variables. Where the level of contribution felt differs most is in the development of People Management competency with a difference of 1.76 values, “Emotional Intelligence” with a difference of 1.56 values and “Stress and Conflic Management” with a difference of 1,54 values. In contrast, where the level of contribution felt has the closest values are in the competencies of “Time Management”, “Problem” Solving and “Communication”, with 1.03, 0.98, and 0.73 difference values, respectively.

The coordination with others competence was considered the most developed by both the Higher Education model and the Student Organizations, with 3.59 and 4.72 values, respectively. For this competency, student organizations come with 1.14 values higher than the teaching model of Higher Education, which allows us to conclude that even if it has a high contribution, Student organizations allow, through their activities and functions, to develop even more that competence. This point arises in agreement with the literature review by Hood (1984) and Martin (2000) who argue that the participation in any activities that complement classroom training is certainly



associated with the development of other skills, knowledge and interactions that are highly valued by the labor market. Likewise Cyrus Fakharzadeh and Mark Todd (2010) states that participation in student organizations allows interaction with other individuals in the workplace, developing relationship skills with others and coordinating teamwork.

In order to reinforce the results, the same analysis was performed above, adding the variables of the level of agreement with the adequacy of the higher education model to the demands of the labor market. Therefore, based on the correlation made of the results, the following table was constructed.

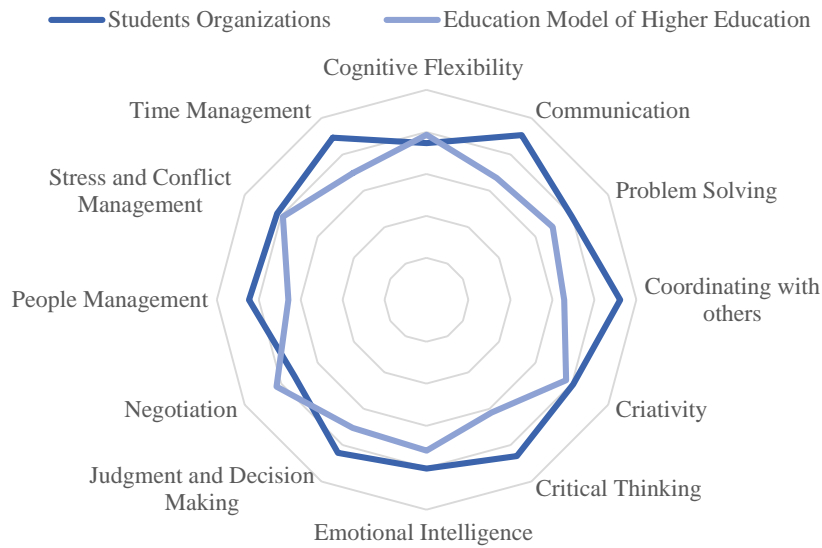
**Table 6 - Correlation between the level of agreement with the adequacy of higher education teaching model to the demands of the labor market and the soft skills**

Soft Skills	Agree (N= 49)		Disagree (N= 117)	
	Students Organizations	Education Model of Higher Education	Students Organizations	Education Model of Higher Education
Cognitive Flexibility	3,73	3,93	3,84	3,39
Communication	4,53	3,35	4,61	2,83
Problem Solving	3,99	3,47	4,14	2,67
Coordinating with others	4,62	3,28	4,70	2,38
Criativity	4,03	3,84	4,16	2,86
Critical Thinking	4,30	3,10	4,38	2,28
Emotional Intelligence	4,02	3,60	4,24	2,92
Judgment and Decision Making	4,22	3,53	4,51	2,56
Negotiation	3,63	4,13	4,01	3,34
People Management	4,23	3,29	4,61	2,94
Stress and Conflict Management	4,11	3,95	4,47	2,64
Time Management	4,46	3,49	4,56	3,04
<b>Average</b>	<b>4,16</b>	<b>3,58</b>	<b>4,35</b>	<b>2,82</b>

In order to obtain the values from the table above, the average of the results between “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” was calculated for the “Agree” category and the average of the results “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” for the category Disagree.

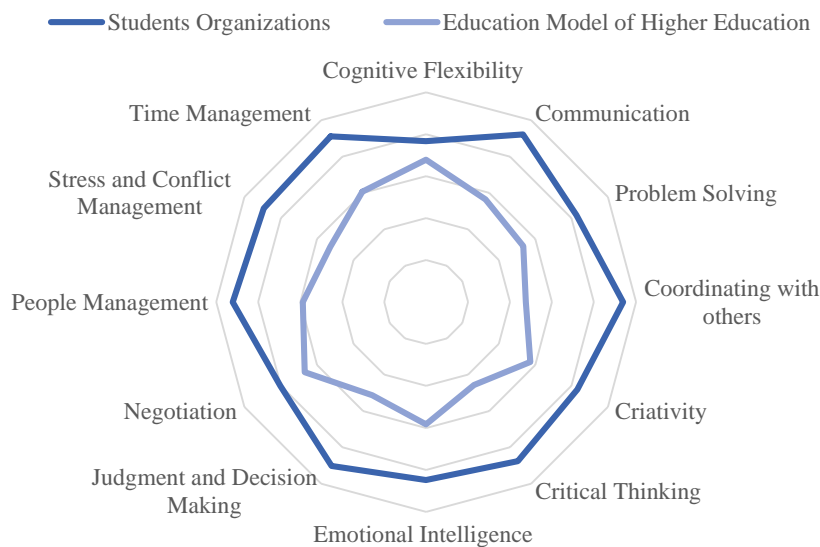
In order to improve the perception of data in Table 6, the following graphs were constructed.

**Figure 10 - Evaluation of soft skills, given by individuals who agree on the suitability of higher education to the demands of the labor market.**



**Figure 11 –**

**Figure 11 - Evaluation of soft skills, given by individuals who disagree on the suitability of higher education to the demands of the labor market.**



According to Ron Basu (2004), the application of radar graphs provides insight into the performance metrics of any variable under analysis. Thus, the above radar charts show the respondents' perspectives on the student organizations' performance level and the higher education model in the development of soft skills, by the degree of agreement on the adequacy of the higher education model to labor market requirements.

On average, as Figure 10 shows, individuals who are in agreement, rate it as a “very much” contribution to the development of soft skills, both by the higher education teaching model and the Student Organizations at 4.16 and 3, 58 values, respectively. At the same time, individuals who are in disagreement also evaluate as “very much” contribution, however only by student organizations, and by the higher education teaching model, they evaluate with 2.82 values, equivalent to “Reasonable” Contribution.

As a result, it is quickly concluded that even individuals in the “Agree” category feel that their participation in student organizations has enabled a better development of the skills required by the labor market than by the higher education model.

## **Chapter V- Conclusion**

## **Summary**

The final chapter aims to summarize the findings of the present study, based on the literature review and the results obtained. Thus, it was organized by 4 subchapters, the first of which focuses on answering the 3 main questions on which this study is based. The others intend to portray not only the limitations that arose in its development, but also to portray their contribution and recommendations for future studies.

### **Question 1: What are the new demands of the job market?**

In order to answer this question, the topics related to the Labor Market were analyzed, taking into account their evolution and requirements demanded by current employers. This question is only supported by the literature review, given that the online questionnaire is not intended to obtain the opinion of respondents about the current requirements of employers, but feel that through involvement in student organizations, they are able to correspond, even better, the skills with which they were addressed.

As such, it is evident from the literature review that the labor market over the years has undergone numerous changes that have led companies to adapt to their structures and ways of working. The skills required today are not at all those required 10 years ago, nor will they be required 10 years from now. An increasingly globalized market has brought a reality of constant change over the way the world we live in, making workers increasingly able to keep up with this fast pace.

Hard skills continue to be an important factor in the profile of each employee, however soft skills are increasingly gaining weight when choosing from various candidates. And it is on the basis of these soft skills that this study answers the first question, where flexibility and adaptability are the orderly skills of today's employers.

## **Question 2: Is the higher education model adapted to the new demands of the labor market?**

This issue arises following the first, given that higher education is the basis of competence development. The teaching model over the years has shown some shortcomings regarding the development of soft skills. This issue is reinforced by both the literary review and the results obtained from the online survey.

Many authors argue that the Higher Education model, as a knowledge development tool, must be able to keep up with all the changes in the labor market, referred to above. Students, being the future of any economy, must be able to match the jobs required of them at the entrance of the labor market and may at first be involved in more technical tasks and in another phase more transversal tasks. .

Through the results obtained, it was possible to prove that the teaching model of Higher Education is felt by most respondents as insufficient in the development of skills, capable of meeting those required by the labor market.

## **Question 3: Are Student organizations important in developing the required skills?**

In order to finalize the study, it is intended to answer the main question if effectively, student organizations are felt as an alternative means for the development of skills required by the labor market. As such, both the authors and the survey results show that participation in Student Organizations has gained greater recognition regarding the personal and professional development of each student.

The development of soft skills only by Higher Education is insufficient and surveyed individuals are able to demonstrate this idea by better assessing their development through their participation in student organizations than by the higher education model only.

The possibility for students to participate in activities that resemble the activities of a business organization, the possibility of having to deal with different people, with totally different

backgrounds and early on being able to contact the labor market (depending on each role) enables them to develop cross-cutting skills faster than the higher education model itself.

The competences that Student Organizations ultimately contribute most to their development are those related to the ability to work in different teams, to communicate with others and also to the leadership capacity, being developed mainly through activities such as the organization of events, participation in multidisciplinary teams and team management.

## **Limitations**

This being a study with a very specific target, the main limitation was to obtain a high number of responses to the online survey. At the same time, another major limitation has been demonstrated in trying to obtain an unbiased bias, given that all respondents are individuals with experience in student organizations. In addition, the fact that the data were collected through an online questionnaire made it difficult to delve into some questions with respondents, and there may be some that would certainly be interesting to explore.

Finally, there were some difficulties in the literary investigation of the subject, considering that it is a very current and little explored theme, in the student organizations. At the same time, although not crucial to meeting the main objectives of the study, it was expected to find more literary evidence about the contribution that the higher education model has had over the years in the development of soft skills.

## **Contribution to the Education and Professional Sector**

With the results obtained from the study, it is expected that Students Organizations will gain more importance within the higher education spectrum, alerting the educational institutions that they are part, for an increased support of their activities, because besides enriching the academic path of all the students of the institution, they are helping the students who are part of them to develop skills, which are today the most demanded by the labor market. In addition, it is expected to support the

reflection by the bodies responsible for the development of educational models on the importance of higher education in responding to the constantly changing of the labor market. However, an effort should be made to balance the role that student organizations play with the role of the teaching model, so that in the near future students out of their academic path will be more empowered and developed, achieving respond to the constant demands and changes of the labor market.

## **Recommendation**

Initially it was foreseen that one of the objectives of the investigation was to collect also information from representatives of employers, in order to analyze their perception of the level of skills with which recent graduates come to the job market. However, the research was restricted only to the presence of students with experience in student organizations, so the following future research is recommended:

1. Comparison of the level of skills development between the perception of students participating in student organizations and the employers responsible for the recruitment processes of a sample of companies.

Another important point to be considered within this theme would be the importance of a leader in these organizations in order to further maintain or enhance soft skills.

Last but not least, it would also be interesting to broaden the study on the development of competences by student organizations, but this time with regard to the importance of students participating in activities organized by them. It would be important to analyze as the importance of student organizations in academia is not only valued for the students who integrate them, but also for the group of students who participate in the activities that are organized by such organizations.



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# Appendix

## Appendix 1

Age (Idade) \*

- 18 – 24
- 25 - 30
- 31 – 35
- More than 35 (Mais de 35)

Gender (Género)

\*

- Female (Feminino)
- Male (Masculino)

Nationality (Nacionalidade)

\*

Please Write With the First 4 Letters and in Capital Letters. Ex: PORT (Por favor escreva as primeiras 4 letras e em Maiúsculas. Ex: PORT)

Texto de resposta curta

---

Education Level (Grau de Educação) \*

- Bachelor's Degree (Licenciatura)
- Postgraduate (Pós-Graduação)
- Master's Degree (Mestrado)
- Doctorate Degree (Doutorado)
- Outra opção...

## Higher Education Institution (Instituição de Ensino Superior) \*

Please Write in Capital Letters and Acronyms. Ex: ISCTE-IUL. (Por favor escreva em Maiúsculas e em Siglas. Ex: ISCTE-IUL)

Texto de resposta curta

---

## Occupation (Ocupação) \*

- Student (Estudante)
- Employed (Empregado)
- Student Worker (Trabalhador Estudante)
- Unemployed (Desempregado)

How long did/do you work in a Student Organization(s)? (Duração da participação na(s) Organização(ões) Estudantil(s)) \*

- Less than 1 year (Menos de 1 ano)
- Between 1 and 2 years (Entre 1 a 2 anos)
- More than 2 years (Mais de 2 anos)

How do you classify the degree of your responsibilities in this type of organizations? (Como classificas o grau das tuas responsabilidades neste tipo de organizações?) \*

- Minimums (Minimas)
- Few (Poucas)
- Some (Algumas)
- Many (Muitas)
- High Level Responsibility (Elevadas)

How do you rate the following statement: "Higher education models are adequate to the demands of the labor market." (De que forma classifica a seguinte afirmação: "Os modelos de ensino do Ensino Superior estão adequados às exigências do mercado de trabalho".) \*

- Strongly Disagree (Discordo Totalmente)
- Disagree (Discordo Parcialmente)
- Neutral (Não Concordo, Nem Discordo)
- Agree (Concordo Parcialmente)
- Strongly Agree (Concordo Totalmente)

How do you evaluate the contribution of current higher education models to the development of the following competences: (Como avalia o contributo dos atuais modelos de ensino do Ensino Superior para o desenvolvimento das seguintes competências:)

1- Nothing; 2- Little; 3- Reasonable; 4- Very much; 5- Extremely (1- Nada; 2- Pouco; 3- Razoável; 4- Muito; 5- Extremamente)

	1	2	3	4	5
Cognitive Flexibili...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication (...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complex Problem...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coordinating with...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity (Criativi...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical Thinking (...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional Intellig...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Judgment and De...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Negotiation (Neg...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People Managem...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stress and Confl...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time Manageme...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please indicate how much your involvement in a Student Organization contributes to the development of the following skills: (Indique quanto contribui, ou contribuiu, o seu envolvimento numa Organização Estudantil para desenvolvimento das seguintes competências:)

\*

1- Nothing; 2- Little; 3- Reasonable; 4- Very much; 5- Extremely (1- Nada; 2- Pouco; 3- Razoável; 4- Muito; 5- Extremamente)

	1	2	3	4	5
Cognitive Flexibili...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication (...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complex Problem...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coordinating with...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity (Criativi...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical Thinking (...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional Intellig...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Judgment and De...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Negotiation (Neg...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People Managem...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stress and Confl...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time Manageme...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your degree of agreement with the following statement: "My participation in student organization(s) has facilitated my adaptation to the skills required by the labor market." (Qual o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "A minha participação em organização(ões) estudantil(s) facilitou a minha adequação às competências exigidas pelo mercado de trabalho".) \*

- Strongly Disagree (Discordo Totalmente)
- Disagree (Discordo Parcialmente)
- Neutral (Não Concordo, Nem Discordo)
- Agree (Concordo Parcialmente)
- Strongly Agree (Concordo Totalmente)

fvvfrbt

What is your degree of agreement with the following statement: "Participation in Student Organizations promotes the development of soft skills"? (Qual o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "A participação em Organizações Estudantis promove o desenvolvimento de soft skills"?) \*

- Strongly Disagree (Discordo Totalmente)
- Disagree (Discordo Parcialmente)
- Neutral (Não Concordo, Nem Discordo)
- Agree (Concordo Parcialmente)
- Strongly Agree (Concordo Totalmente)

Choose the 2 activities that you think contribute the most to the development \*  
of soft skills. (Escolha as 2 atividades que considera que mais  
contribuem/contribuíram para o desenvolvimento de soft skills.)

- Attendance in meetings (Participação em Reuniões)
- Organization of Events (Organização de Eventos)
- Participation in Training (Participação em Formações)
- Training Organization (Organização de Formações)
- Contact with other Organizations/Partners (Contacto com outras organizações/parceiros)
- Teambuilding
- Presentations (Realização de Apresentações)
- Team Management (Gestão de Equipas)
- Negotiation (Negociação)
- Participation in Multidisciplinary Teams (Participação em equipas Multidisciplinares)
- Outra opção...

## Appendix 2 - Support tables for the graphs presented in chapter III and I

**Table 7 - Support Table for the graph presented in Figure 5**

<b>Soft Skills</b>	<b>Average</b>
Coordinating with others	3,59
Time Management	3,52
Cognitive Flexibility	3,21
Problem Solving	3,20
Critical Thinking	3,19
Communication	3,14
Judgment and Decision Making	3,05
Stress and Conflict Management	2,90
Criativity	2,86
People Management	2,79
Emotional Intelligence	2,61
Negotiation	2,59

**Table 8 - Support Table for the graph presented in Figure 4**

<b>Level</b>	<b>"Agree" Category Totalizer</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>"Disagree" Category Totalizer</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
<b>"Agree" Category Totalizer</b>	<b>24,75%</b>						
Agree		22,22%	22,22%				
Strongly Agree		2,53%	2,53%				
<b>"Disagree" Category Totalizer</b>				<b>59%</b>			
Disagree					50%	50%	
Strongly Disagree					9,09%	9,09%	
<b>Neutral</b>							<b>16%</b>

**Table 9 - Support Table for the graph presented in Figure 6**

<b>Soft Skills</b>	<b>Average</b>
Coordinating with others	4,72
Communication	4,57
People Management	4,56
Time Management	4,55
Judgment and Decision Making	4,46
Stress and Conflict Management	4,44
Critical Thinking	4,26
Problem Solving	4,18
Emotional Intelligence	4,16
Criativity	4,06
Negotiation	4,03
Cognitive Flexibility	3,87

**Table 10 - Support Table for the graph presented in Figure 7**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Organization of Events	103	26%
Team Management	73	18%
Participation in Multidisciplinary Teams	64	16%
Contact with other Organizations/Partners	59	15%
Attendance in meetings	29	7%
Participation in Training	22	6%
Negotiation	14	4%
Teambuilding	14	4%
Presentations	12	3%
Training Organization	6	2%

**Table 11 - Support Table for the graph presented in Figure 8**

<b>Agreement Level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Agree	122	<b>61,62%</b>
Agree	63	<b>31,82%</b>
Neutral	13	<b>6,57%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 12 - Support Table for the graph presented in Figure 9**

<b>Soft Skills</b>	<b>Higher School</b>	<b>Students Organization</b>	<b>Dif</b>
<b>People Management</b>	2,79	4,56	<b>1,76</b>
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>	2,61	4,16	<b>1,56</b>
<b>Stress and Conflict Management</b>	2,90	4,44	<b>1,54</b>
<b>Negotiation</b>	2,59	4,03	<b>1,44</b>
<b>Judgment and Decision Making</b>	3,05	4,46	<b>1,41</b>
<b>Cognitive Flexibility</b>	3,21	4,57	<b>1,36</b>
<b>Criativity</b>	2,86	4,06	<b>1,20</b>
<b>Coordinating with others</b>	3,59	4,72	<b>1,14</b>
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	3,19	4,26	<b>1,07</b>
<b>Time Management</b>	3,52	4,55	<b>1,03</b>
<b>Problem Solving</b>	3,20	4,18	<b>0,98</b>
<b>Communication</b>	3,14	3,87	<b>0,73</b>