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Transition Skills Profile Developed in A Concerted Effort of Youth, Educators And Employers Based on Delphi Hybrid Method*

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Abstract

The paper refers to successful management of transitions in the whole life span. The framework of transition skills and the process of supporting them is the focal issue of the research. The motive of the research presented in the paper is the framework of skills that are of importance for successful transition from education to work. It also refers to a scope of collaborative ways of supporting the development of these skills. The literature refers mostly to either future skills or career management skills whereas transition skills are rarely addressed. The most significant void though is that there is no reference in the literature to tripartite process of identifying and developing transition skills that includes youth's input in a collaborative, concerted effort with participation of educators and employers. The researcher applied the Hybrid Delphi methodology that integrated focus group interviews, nominal groups, and Delphi techniques. The methodology of the research consisted of three Delphi rounds that took place in three locations with the participation of youth, employers and educators – all playing the roles of experts. The most important findings of the research covered the identification of transition skills accompanied by the ways of supporting these skills. The final list of 111 skills lead to identification of 5 categories and 20 subcategories. A separate finding is the list of methods that are perceived supportive for the development of the above skills and are recommended to be agreed upon and applied by both educators and employers.

Keywords: Employability, Skills, Transition, Youth Work, Support.

Main text introduction: Transition and transition skills

Transition is an inevitable and an invisible companion in our lifetime. The case of the first transition from education to work is of particular importance, it is also a major challenge. To successfully cope with this challenge, one needs to be well equipped with skills that facilitate smooth transition and that help in effective decision making that allows best possible choice of further steps leading to adulthood. A young individual needs to consider various alternatives, develop various scenarios, foresee possible impacts and finally make decisions to choose the best option.

Transition may be the consequence of natural stages of life (primary school, secondary school, university studies or the first workplace). Transition may also be caused by unexpected or unplanned factors like mobility, business expansion, new position or career shift, sickness, loss of job, divorce etc. Working lives have always involved transitions: gaining the first

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employment, becoming parents, changing jobs, moving into retirement (Global Commission on the Future of Work, 2019, p. 32; Schmid, 1998; Anxo, Bosch, Rubery, 2008).

Transition metamorphosis of a young person is related to questions: Who am I going to be? How shall I live? What educational path would I like to choose? What are my goals? What shall I do? What matters for me? What would work for me? Decision-making requires both self-awareness and a wider perspective with respect to future challenges. To make proper decisions a young person needs to be self-confident, to be aware of her or his capabilities. Also, a young person needs to know or understand the world – its rules, its chances and traps or mechanisms – well enough to properly deal with the first transition, including the uncertainty, complexity and the growing pace of changes that we may expect in the future (Gidley, 2017, p. 3). Otherwise, she or he is apt to follow any external advice available without relevant introspection on whether it may work for her or his future goals.

The first transition happens probably between 15 and 19 years of age and is usually the final stage of obligatory education. The transition from school to work is a pivotal moment for young people, but one in which many of them are left behind. Failure to navigate this transition successfully leaves long-lasting scars on their lives (Global Commission on the Future of Work, 2019, p. 32; Schmillen, Umkehrer, 2017, p. 465–494). Young people need strong support through this transition so that they are integrated into labour markets and become active members of our societies (Global Commission on the Future of Work, 2019, p. 32; Schmid, 1998; Anxo, Bosch, Rubery, 2008). They also need guidance to be able to get ready for self-management, managing their education and career, not to mention managing life in general, managing "the self". But even more than this they need skills as well the awareness of their values, goals or capacities.

Various organizations who address the situation of young people emphasize the need to develop the skills and to collaborate in assisting in transitions from education to work. AEGEE (*Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe*) encourages the educational centres to develop a set of extracurricular activities so that every student could get ready to proper planning of her or his own career path. The recommended catalogue of expected learning outcomes should refer to social skills as well as skills that would maximize opportunities for young people to be hired in the future. AEGEE recommends that direct involvement of students in identification of their need and ensuring adaptation to their preferences may be rather useful. Also, in its recommendations for companies, AEGEE-Europe is of the opinion that companies have the responsibility to set training programs in order to equip their workers with the skills they may need in their future job (Rodríguez, 2016, p.7).

Successful transition is strongly related to the ability to apply various skills that a young person managed to acquire, whether in formal education or in any other type of experience. Transition skills may also have been acquired through non-work or leisure activities or through participation in education or training. In particular, it is learning by doing that allows transformative learning and supports the capacity to cause change. It represents the entrepreneurial attitude of a young person which is of importance in view of transition related decision making process (Ratto-Nielsen, 2015, p. 137-138).

The author focuses on the description of research findings with respect to profiling transition skills of 18-28 years old students (referred to in research studies and literature as "Z generation"). The research was based on hybrid Delphi composed of Delphi rounds, nominal group works and focus group interviews. Delphi rounds led to the identification of the scope of transition skills and the development of the framework of transition skills (skills profile). Nominal groups workshops allowed the identification of methods of support of transition skills and recommendations with respect to collaboration of educators and employers. Focus group interviews concentrated on the final approval of the skills profile, the support measures and the collaboration.

Materials and methods: Steps of the research

The assumption of the researcher was that profiling transition skills needs expertise and commitment of three main stakeholders: individuals who face transition from education to work (school or university students at the age of 18-28); educators (including headmasters, teachers, counsellors or instructors, who work at school or at the university) and finally – employers representing mostly local or regional businesses. There were 47 participants representing the above groups who gave their input to the research.

The participating experts focused on three main questions:

What skills are useful for transition?
How are they or can they be supported?
What are the roles of stakeholders in supporting transition skills?

Youth, educators and employers worked independently in three locations (in Poland) with three working groups in each location. Each working group of 4-6 people worked on their own developments (i.e. the list of transition skills, the structure

of the skills profile, the measures of support of transition skills, the ways of collaboration in supporting transition skills). There were three rounds of elaboration of the profile of competencies and the supporting measures. Three various profiles and three various supporting schemes were developed in three locations. Finally the participating experts developed a consensus based final version of the profile and the collaborative support scheme.

The researcher decided to apply hybrid Delphi by combining nominal group technique with Delphi rounds in which experts could get acquainted with the developments of other expert groups and continue their work until consensus was achieved. Finally, the focus groups interviews were carried out that led to recommendations with respect to supporting measures and to conducive environment for transition skills development.

The Delphi Technique is described as a "...succession of iterative brainstorming rounds..." (Mitchell,1991, p. 81). The following steps constitute the Delphi approach: problem identification, identification and selection of the sample, data collection and analysis, the discovery of opinions, process of determining issues, data analysis, reporting results, interpretation of findings. Linstone and Turoff (2002) professed that there is a need for employing Delphi method when it is not possible to apply analytical techniques and subjective judgments based on a collective basis can lead to the research findings. What matters is the heterogeneity of the participants which must be preserved to assure validity of the results, such as avoiding domination by strength of personality (p. 4). In a review of literature, Murry and Hammons (1995) found that "a Delphi is a reliable qualitative research method with potential for use in problem solving, decision making, and group consensus reaching in a wide variety of areas" (p. 425).

A Hybrid Delphi method is based on integrating various elements that may include focus group interviews, nominal groups, and Delphi techniques. An adequate order of tools should be complementary and respect chronology (Landeta, Barrutia, and Lertxundi, 2011, p. 5). The Delphi steps need to be tailored to the specific research topic, its objectives and the context.

The research process consisted of two steps: 1) profiling competencies; 2) programming of support. Two subsequent steps aimed at testing of the recommended support methods and scanning the skills acquired by the participants. The follow-up – four focus group interviews (one with each group of experts and one with heterogeneous participants) – allowed to finally approve and share reflections on how transition skills are understood and how the experience of being a part of the research changed the perspective of understanding the transition from education to work. Several recommendations were also expressed that may be the guidelines for implementation and the proper use of the profile. The following steps of the research process were implemented:

Problem identification

> The research was focused on the identification of a set of competencies that are of importance in view of transition process, identified and defined by expert stakeholders: youth, educators and employers. The expected result of the research included also the recommended supporting measures leading to effective transition skills. Specific understanding of the competencies as such and the transition process helped in addressing the problem in the subsequent steps of the research.

Identification and selection of the sample

> Purposeful sampling was applied in the research project. Representatives of youth, educators and employers with various backgrounds participated in the research, both in iterations leading to an integrated, consensus based profile of competencies and in developing support measures that include approaches and methods.

Data collection and analysis, the discovery of opinions, process of determining issues, data analysis, reporting results,
There were three rounds that took place in each of the three locations with the participation of youth, employers and educators as experts. Data and the experts' developments were collected by two moderators after each round, independently in each location. The outputs were elaborated before the next round and presented to experts, both in form of text or graphs. The elaboration by moderators was limited to introducing semantic order and presenting data in an orderly manner. Experts revised elaborated data during the next round and finally developed a framework of skills – the profile of transition skills. Each round brought a new or revised input that was incorporated in the final shape of the list of skills and the structure of the skills profile. Two last rounds combined revision of skills and development of support measures. Once the profile was developed in a given location (on paper), it was elaborated technically and presented during the third round. That was a crucial phase leading to the final shape of the profile that was based on previously developed list of skills, the skills framework and the developments of all three locations. Nominal groups participating in the research identified the methods of support that had been applied so far with the assistance of a mentor in each location. The identified methods of support were the starting point for educators and employers to jointly develop recommendations for the support scheme that leads to the learning outcomes important for successful transition. The support scheme covered three components (modules) leading to self-awareness, planning self-development, future education and career and selected social competencies.The process of elaboration of the final version as a consequence of iterative experts' rounds is presented in figure 1.

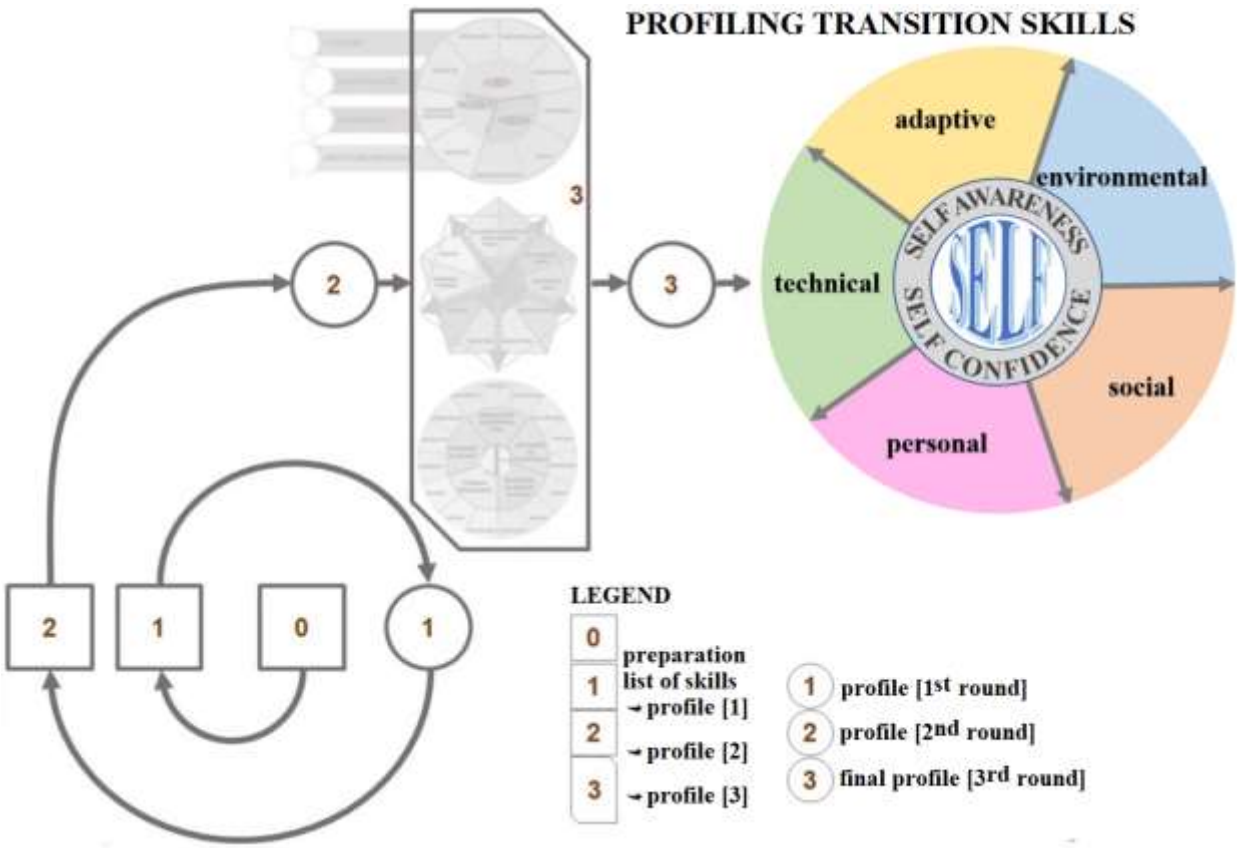


Fig 1. Delphi round and the profile of transition skills

Young participants attended classes aimed at the development of transition skills in accordance to the recommended extracurricular support scheme. The assessment of developed or enhanced individual transitions skills was the result of these classes. The experts also discussed the recommendations with regard to the collaboration between educators and employers leading to the development of transition skills.

Results: Transition skills identified

The main research outcomes covered the identification of transition competencies accompanied by the ways of supporting these competencies. The final list of skills was the basis for identification of categories and subcategories. All names of both skills and categories had been carefully consulted with participants and reflected by participants.

The participating experts developed a list of competencies which they considered important or useful in the process of transition from education to work. Competencies identified by experts were classified by them in Delphi rounds in five groups (categories) and twenty sub-categories. The profile of competencies is person-centred and emphasizes the approach in which a person is expected to take care of the self, to demonstrate self-awareness and self-confidence. The skills profile consists of 5 categories of skills: personal, social, environmental, adaptive and technical. 20 sub-categories serve as a framework rather than a pre-defined set of competencies. They cover the following groups of competencies (skills): can-do approach, collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, decision taking, digital skills, educational skills, skills that help to use facilities, flexibility, goal-setting, informational skills, intercultural skills, learning skills, legal literacy, linguistic skills, marketing skills, participation, skills that help to manage relationships, self-management skills. The structure and the content of the profile developed in collaborative process is shown in the figure 2.

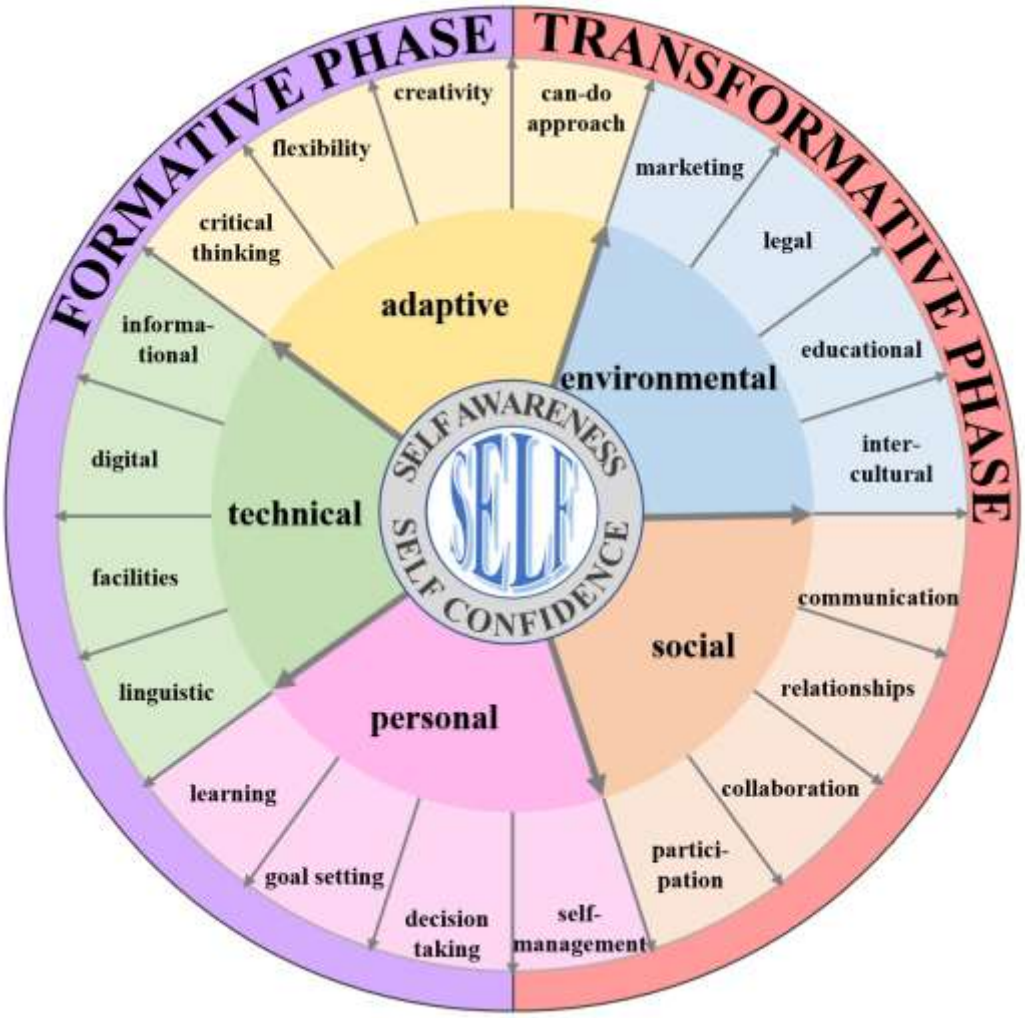


Fig 2. Transition skills profile and phases

There are two phases which emerge from the elaborated skills profile. The first one is formative and it precedes the transformative phase. The formative phase is understood as shaping an individual and her or his competencies and it is not dependent on the external environment in other sense than learning *per se*. The transformative phase is understood as a follow-up that requires application of the acquired competencies. It is interdependent in nature and is related to self-directed interactions with the external environment. The skills profile may be an inspiration for further development in accordance to the needs and to constantly changing social or labour market environment as well as various factors which result from public policies. The skills as well as categories and sub-categories are shown in the table 1.

Table 1: Skills, categories and sub-categories of competencies

CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES	SKILLS: LEARNING OUTCOMES
personal	**learning**	curiosity
		open mind
		fast learning capability
		cognitive capability
		ability to implement individual learning strategies
		learning from one's own experience
	goal setting	ambition
		persistence
		self-management

		work-life balance
		tidiness
		goal setting
		ability to set limits
	decision taking	self-control
		solution-oriented
		ability to make choices
		ability to choose one's own way
		ability to drop the matter
		self-reliance
	self-management	caring
		self-respect
		distance (to the world)
		openness (to the world)
		consistence
		organisation
personal	**self-management**	organisation of one's own work
		time management
		driven by own goals
		ability to manage stress
social	**communication**	ability to demonstrate one's own capabilities
		ability to give speeches
		ability to set up a dialogue
		listening skills
		diplomacy
		giving and responding to feedback
		ability to address various topics in conversation
	relationships	kindness
		ability to set up relationships
		punctuality
		sincerity
		companionship
		assertiveness
		trust
		ability to build relationships
		openness to others
	collaboration	collaboration skills
		teamwork skills
		ability to work in groups
		ability to delegate tasks and responsibilities
		mediations skills
		openness to new ideas
		conflict resolution skills
	participation	readiness to respect principles
		commitment
		ability to apply social rules
technical	**informational**	ability to identify sources of information
		insight to websites
		ability to search for offers
	digital	ability to make us of ICT programmes
		ability to make us of ICT apps
		new-media literacy
	facilities	basic technical skills
		ability to make use of tools
		driving skills

	linguistic	reading skills
		ability to match proper words
		command of foreign languages
adaptive	**critical thinking**	reason
		feet on the ground
		understanding one's own mistakes
		ability to draw conclusions
		risk assessment skills
		ability assess one's own potential
	flexibility	openness to change
		readiness to change
		adaptability
		labour market mobility
		creativity in searching for work
		versatility
	creativity	creative problem solving
		ability to apply alternative actions
		inventiveness
		entrepreneurship
	can-do approach	go-aheadness
		self-reliance
		pro-activeness
		success-oriented
		ability to face new challenges
		ability to do the right thing in the right moment
environmental	**legal**	knowledge of law
		understanding of legal system
		respect to law
	marketing	elementary knowledge
		understanding economic circumstances
		understanding market rules
		positive attitude to employer
		recognition of employers' needs
		understanding labour market
		recognition labour market needs
		career planning skills
		ability for identification with the workplace
		interest in job
	educational	ability to manage one's own education
		interest in non-formal education
		recognition of educational market
	intercultural	loving the world
		openness
		openness to other cultures
		openness to the world
		knowledge of how to behave
		acceptance for distinctness

Results: Supporting transition skills in collaborative effort

Having identified the set of transition skills in three subsequent Delphi rounds the researcher focused on the next step which concentrated on the development of supporting measures. Nominal groups with the participation educators and employers identified the content and the methods of supporting the development of transition skills.

The methodology of the support of transition skills developed in a collaborative effort of educators and employers consists of the following: provoking to discover; setting a stage for practising; stimulating creativity; tracking achievements;

brainstorming; learning by experiencing; challenging and guidance. The metaphor that combines core competencies and main methods of support is presented on the figure 3.

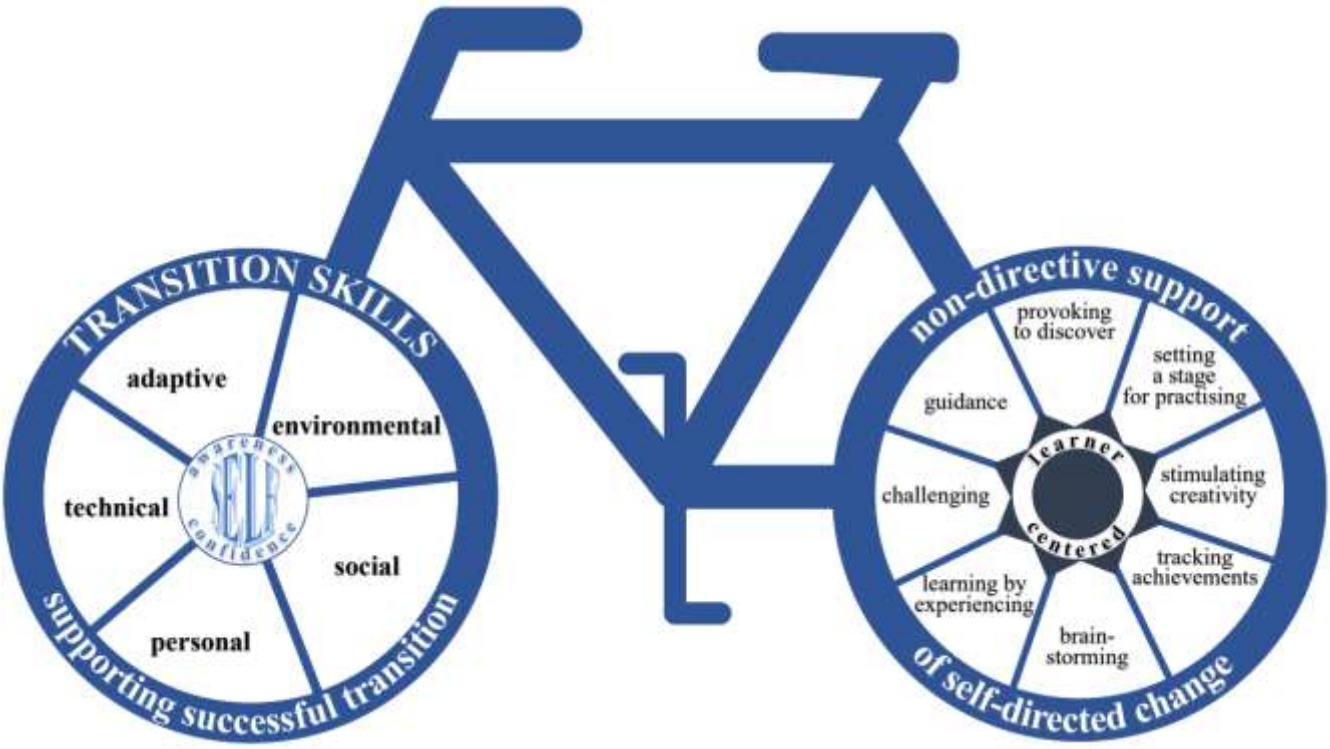


Fig 3. Supporting transition skills – integrated approach

The front wheel symbolises the person (SELF) and the main groups of skills. It is accompanied by methods presented in the back wheel. The experts indicated the need of providing non-directive support so that the person could manage self-directed change leading to the desired change.

Three focus groups interviews (FGI) were carried out by the researcher with the youth, the educators and the employers independently and finally all three circles met at the final interview. The aim of the FGIs was to revisit the identified research findings (skills, the profile, the methods and approaches of support) and to approve the final versions of the research results. Specific recommendations with respect to the collaboration in the extracurricular support were the added value. The recommendations address supportive relationship in education, inclusive culture that allows new employees to smoothly adapt to their new roles and finally synergic collaboration of all parties involved. It is presented in the figure 4 (where Z stands for Z generation).

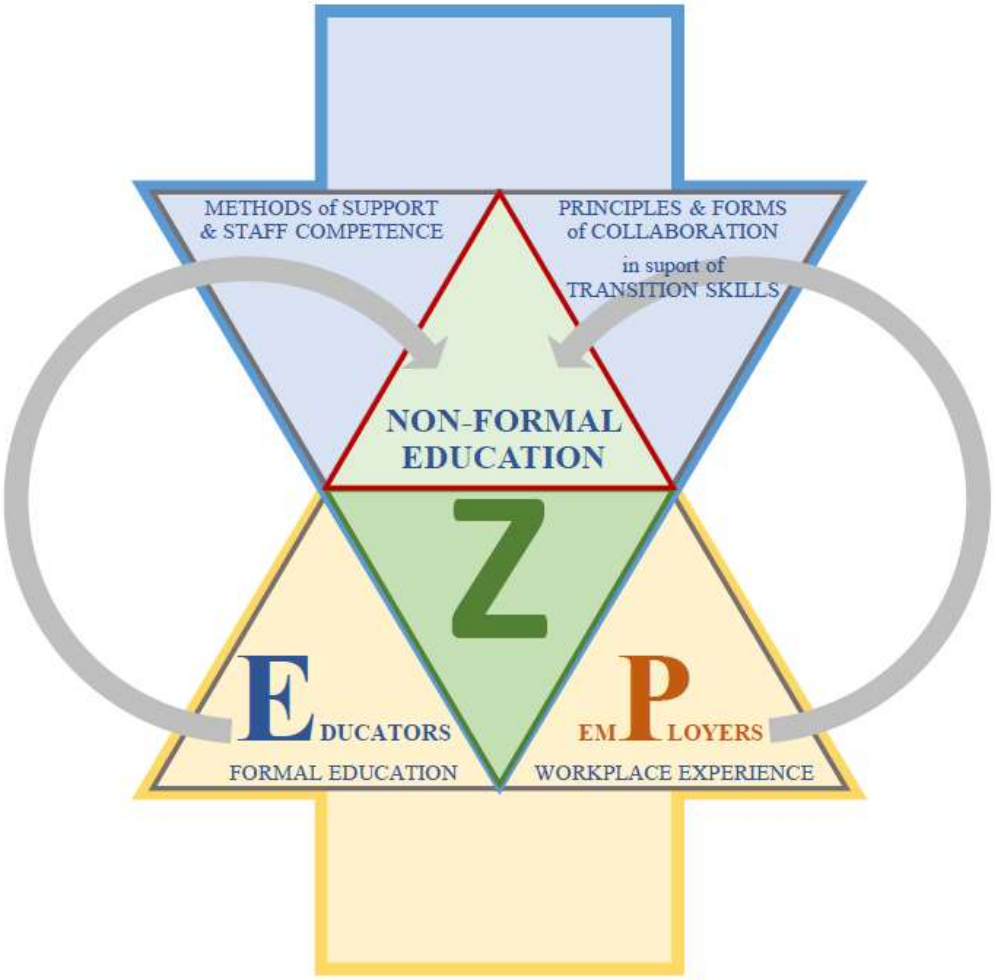


Fig 4. Characteristics of collaborative support of transition skills

Educators and employers recommended that non-formal education is the right way to provide support for the development of transition skills. One of the reasons is that non-formal education can be applied independently from formal curriculum. At the same time non-formal support can be properly adapted to the local needs and local context. This concept is presented in the figure 5.

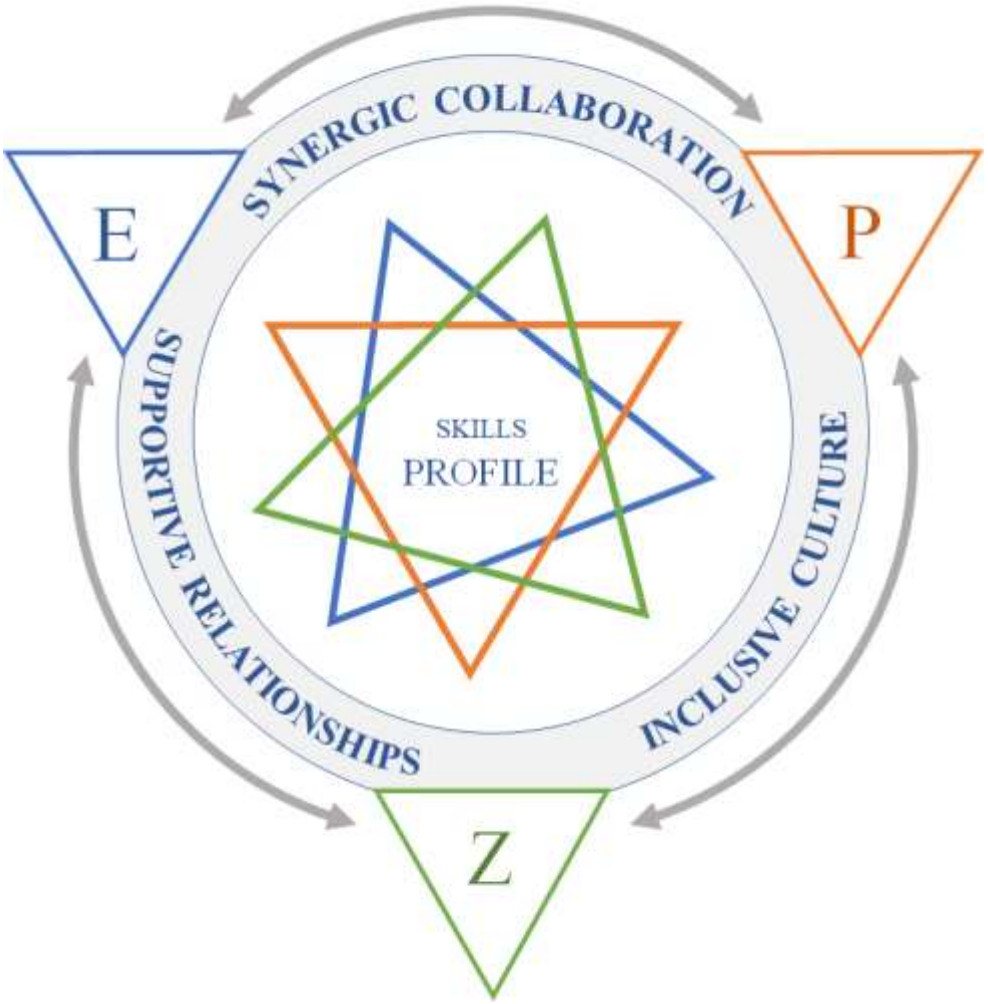


Fig 5. Forms and contributors of support of transition skills

The above concept corresponds with the *Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance: A Reference Framework for the EU and for the Commission* that includes:

- combining career education programmes within the curriculum, experience-based learning, out-of-school/workplace learning using community and alumni resources;
- development of a comprehensive strategy for the teaching and learning of career management and entrepreneurial skills from primary school through secondary school and in vocational streams;
- promoting career learning outcomes as a means of monitoring the quality and effectiveness of guidance programmes for school pupils;
- support that is sensitive and responsive to pupil diversity and gender;
- promoting consistency in the quality of lifelong guidance provision across schools and regions where responsibility and funding for this is devolved to schools, municipalities and regions (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015, p. 30-31).

Non-formal education requires the application of relevant methods of support as well as specific competencies of the staff. Also, there are principles and standards of non-formal education developed in Europe by practitioners and recommended by the European Union educational policies with regard to youth work. In view of the research findings the sustainable collaboration between educators and employers that is in line with the above standards was strongly recommended by the participants of the focus group interviews. Educators and employers expressed their wish to develop various forms of collaboration, including regular meetings with participation of educators and employers, supporting practice enterprises (simulation businesses) in schools, employers participating in practical exams, extracurricular measures developed based on joint effort of employers and educators, practical classes run with the participation of the employers' staff. Promoting partnership projects, facilitating local coalitions supporting education and the acquisition of transition skills, describing the

learning outcomes acquired by students in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework guidelines (see: The Council of The European Union, 2017) may also be considered, according to the experts' recommendations.

Discussion, conclusion, recommendations

The paper outlines inevitable metamorphoses in the life span and the need to acquire and apply skills to successfully cope with these changes. The author presents stages of the research with participation of youth, educators and employers who all were actively involved in profiling transition skills and in elaboration of main approaches, measures and methods of skills support. The main research focus was profiling transition skills. The paper also refers to the ways of support to be considered in view of transition skills.

Understanding the relations between self, learning and work skills sets the framework for the development of transition skills. Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2015, p. 13) explains, that "examples of career management include sourcing, evaluating and analysing information about learning and work opportunities and their requirements, relating this information to one's self-knowledge, making career decisions, and making successful transitions. The knowledge, skills and attitudes develop over time with different expectations of competence mastery at different stages of life. Some of these skills are generic across life situations; others are specific to learning and work identity formation and decision-making". The above help in career identity formation of a young person. The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network emphasizes, that "career identity formation is a continuous process of development from the early years of life. In a formal education and training context, the teaching and acquisition of career management skills contribute to participation in and engagement with learning, to learning performance and progression, to progression to work, to progression through working life and further learning, and to enhancing one's employability" (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015, p. 14).

The benefits of transition skills are of both individual and socio-economic character. Research evidence (Hooley, 2014) suggests that guidance and the systemic development of career management skills impacts on educational, economic, employment and social outcomes. In the education system it engages individuals with learning and clarifies pathways through learning and work. In the employment system it supports individuals to make the transition to employment, increases the flexibility of the labour market, helps to ensure that skills are used effectively, supports individuals to be resilient when facing change (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015 b, p. 14).

Although the research presented in the paper is not directly related to career guidance, its results indicate the need for more systematic, planned and coordinated efforts of educators and employers as well as self-directed efforts of young people who have a substantial level of awareness of the self and the skills which help in transitions. The message that emerges form the research may also bring attention to the need of systematic collaboration in a local environment. If educators, learners and employers work together they may find the most relevant solution that is a local response to theoretical recommendations with respect to ease the transition from education to work.

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