The link between cognitive abilities and the main soft skills for the 21st Century workplace: A literature review

Abdel Halim, L’ and Payoux, M’

*Laboratoire de Psychologie des Pays de la Loire, Université de Nantes, Nantes, France

Abstract

Today’s employees need to operate in ambiguous and highly dynamic environments, with higher information loads and shorter time frames for decision-making and action. Therefore, to predict job performance, cognitive and soft skills often referred to as “21st century skills” are now central to recruitment, talent development and career management. Despite the acknowledged theoretical connection between cognitive skills and soft skills, such relationships have rarely been investigated and need to be examined because of its practical uses by HR professionals. So, the aim of this proposal is to examine the theoretical relationship between IDEAc’s softs skills (Influence, Decision, Efficiency, Agility and Collaboration; cf. Trenvouez, Didry, Juhel, & Grasset, 2019) and seven cognitive abilities such as: memory, problem solving, attention, verbal and numerical reasoning, abstract reasoning, flexibility and learning potential. To identify previous studies, we searched the online databases PsycINFO (2009–2019) using combinations of the keywords of each soft skill of IDEAc with each of the seven cognitive abilities previously mentioned. We identified 22209 articles in our initial search. Preliminary results show that the link between IDEAc’s softs skills and cognitive skills could be made. More precisely, IDEAc’s soft skills are covered with respectively those proportions: Decision (64,74%), Collaboration (27,44%), Influence (5,83%), Agility (1,97%) and Efficiency (0%). It is, however, important to remain that we do not have a well-developed understanding of the causal direction, or the mechanisms underlying these relationships. This suggestion can be useful in guiding future research design and analysis to these ends.

Keywords: Psychology, Human Resources, Cognition, Individual Resources.